

AEJ UK Secretary's Report for 2024

For the AGM on February 17 2025

In 2024 the UK Section had 37 full members; and 3 Hon members: Kevin D'Arcy and Llewellyn King and his wife Linda of the White House Chronicle

Change of Venue for AEJ Meetings

Towards the end of last year, we learnt that despite the best efforts of our very helpful leading contacts amongst the staff, Elif Toker and Leslie Viney, we would no longer be able to continue to use Regent's University for our professional meetings. We have therefore had to focus, with helpful suggestions from several members including Martyn Bond, Claudia Hamill, Andy Pye and Nick Hopkinson, on finding a new venue or venues, starting with the long planned special event to be held on March 19 with Baroness Amos, head of University College, Oxford, former Labour International Development minister and senior UN figure. The topic will be The Rise of the Global South.

Of various approaches the most successful has been with the UK Liaison Office of the European Parliament at Europe House in Smith Square, our venue for many years up to 2018. William and I met their public relations and press officer, Ms Typhaine Morillon, on January 13. She has agreed to renew our cooperation on a fresh basis, and we will be able to meet in the Churchill Room, which accommodates 40 or so people, for Baroness Amos. We may wish to experiment with AEJ events at Europe House in the early evening; or special events organised jointly with the EP and possibly also with the European Commission. Our access on future occasions will depend on the availability of a suitable meeting space, which may not always be one of the two larger rooms, the Churchill and Monnet. To provide a back-up for this eventuality we are also looking at other possible venues.

The European Parliament Office will itself provide coffee and tea, and we expect to make our own arrangements with a recommended caterer for catering at lunchtime meetings, as in the past. However, the March 19 meeting will be only one hour (12.30 – 13.30), and lunch will not be provided.

Meetings in 2024

Our meetings last covered a wide range of topical international issues.

The first in February looked forward to a year in which about half the world's population would be voting, analysing how they might be influenced by new AI technologies. The speaker was Ciaran Martin, who in 2014 established and became first chief executive of the UK Cyber Security Agency.

Our second meeting in March was with Professor Mark Galeotti, author of Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine, on the political position of the Putin regime after two years of war with Ukraine and following the assassination of the leading opponent of the regime and of the war, Alexei Navalny.

Our April meeting with Helen Thompson, professor of political economy at Cambridge University, discussed the economic and political consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for EU countries. She argued that, although major policy adjustments had been made, they were insufficient.

Our meeting in June was devoted to the war in Gaza. There were two presentations, the first by Julie Norman, associate professor at University College, London, researcher on conflict zones and currently writing a political history of Gaza, who analysed the history and nature of Hamas.

The second speaker was Chris Paterson, author of War Reporters under Threat, the US and Media Freedom (2014). He argued that journalists are often targeted in war to deter them from reporting argued that the same had been happening in Gaza where over 100 journalists had been killed.

Our October speaker, Katja Hoyer, journalist for Berliner Zeitung and author of Beyond the Wall: East Germany 1949-90, analysed the political challenge to Germany presented by the recent increased support for the far right Alternative fur Deutschland.

The speaker for our last meeting of the year on November 28, was Olena Sotnyk, a ministerial adviser and senior Rasmussen Global representative based in Kyiv, who gave a cogent strategic review of the war, its impact on the people of Ukraine and the quest for a just peace.

Topics for future meetings this year are open to suggestion. We are considering themes including new forms of EU foreign and defence cooperation including with the UK; Russia's growing influence, destabilisation and sabotage efforts directed especially at central and eastern Europe; issues around online regulation and AI; and aspects of era-defining developments in and around Ukraine, and arising from the re-election of Donald Trump to the US presidency.

Charles Jenkins