

Minutes AEJ UK AGM February 17, 2025

Members present: William Horsley, Charles Jenkins, David Worsfold, David Barker, Firdevs Robinson, Rick Thompson, Doros Partasides, Quentin Peel, Anthony Robinson, Andy Pye, Colin McIntyre, Michael Hornsby, Nevsal Hughes, Euan Grant, Alan Mackie, Colin Gordon, Diana Maxwell
Apologies: Michael Lake

Chairman's Report: William remarked that the 2nd Trump presidency in the USA looks like marking the end of an era; and the AEJ UK is experiencing its own "*Wende*". He drew attention to the last part of his written report to the AGM calling on other members to step up urgently to share the effort of organising a regular schedule of professional meetings in 2025 and beyond. The UK Section must also attract more youthful members if it is to survive and thrive in future. Those who value their membership are asked to take this plea seriously.

He thanked the Secretary and Treasurer for their consistent support and work, and applauded Pat Humphreys for his good work as international AEJ Treasurer from 2022-24, upholding the association's best interests and commitment to due process under the AEJ statutes during a difficult period. Rick Thompson was warmly thanked for preparing individual 2025 membership cards in time for the AGM.

Happily, following the end of our 5-year experience of meeting at Regent's University thanks to the consistent support of faculty members Leslie Viney and Elif Toker, the European Parliament's Liaison Office in Europe House in Smith Square SW1, has accepted our proposal to host a number of professional meetings there each year from now on. Given the high demand for access to the EP office's two main meeting rooms - the Churchill and Monnet rooms - it will be necessary to fix speakers and dates well in advance. On past evidence, members and guests also value events with two speakers on current topics, rather than just one; in future it would be our goal to arrange more meetings with more than one guest speaker. However these changes will also require more advance planning and capacity in our ways of working from now on. William and Charles welcome offers of active support to meet these challenges, as well as to keep up the flow of written reports about insights provided by each of our guest speakers, which we publish along with audio recordings.

Our meetings regularly attract a good turnout of non-member journalists and Europe specialists. However unless we recruit more early or mid-career journalists the future will not be guaranteed. We have been able to secure the regular attendance of Regent's students at our meetings there. Members are now invited to use their networks to sustain this record in the new Venue Leslie and Elif will continue to be invited to AEJ meetings.

The International AEJ, William said, is also going through a turning point. Thankfully the Rome General Assembly last October overcame friction over serious disputes about past actions by the international Board and ongoing issues of concern to members by agreeing to appoint an interim international AEJ Board for one year. The interim team is charged with coming up with long-term solutions on banking, the level of annual dues, and other matters which should be approved at the annual Congress and Assembly in October 2025, where regular elections for the 6-member Board of elected officers must take place. Currently the International AEJ bank account remains closed to withdrawals, but coherent efforts are under way to restore normal service with the expert help of the AEJ Belgian section. William has agreed to continue as AEJ Media Freedom Representative for another year, working with Irina Nedeva, who is now also an interim vice-president.

Outlook for 2025 meetings: William and Charles have made arrangements with Ms Typhaine Morillon, the London EP press officer, to host our first meeting of 2025 - from 12.30 to 13.30 on March 19 with Baroness Amos. The EP will provide tea and coffee (only) on that occasion. Charles would seek to reserve some space at the nearby Marquis of Granby pub so that members who wish to meet up for post-meeting refreshments there can do so. For future lunchtime meetings, the EP will provide details of recommended caterers who can deliver a buffet lunch in Europe House to those who have pre-paid to take it, much as in the past at Regent's.

The EP is also open to the idea of making space available for occasional early evening meetings, which are likely to be good for attracting busy working journalists. On a show of hands, the meeting was supportive of the idea.

Secretary's Report: Charles reported on the variety of highly topical meetings we held last year, on Russia, the EU response to the energy challenge of reducing dependence on Russia, the Israel/Palestine situation, the challenge of the far right in Germany, and Ukraine's strategy following the election of Trump. The first meeting

of the year looked at the likely impact of AI on the many elections across the world in 2024 with Ciaran Martin the founding head of the UK Cyber Security Agency. The massive impact of AI and new technologies on society including journalism is a theme we should return to, he said.

Planning ahead: Provisionally, William has proposed an ‘early Spring’ meeting in late April or May focused on urgent efforts by European states and the EU to ramp up their common capabilities, budgets and political decision-making to meet the prospect of taking on the lion’s share of responsibility for securing Ukraine’s long-term security, including a possible peacekeeping or ‘deterrence’ force following a ceasefire with Russia. Other pressing topics for a meeting foreseen in June or later include a closer look at the substance and impact on Europe of Trump’s ‘disruptive’ leadership; and the wider issues relating to a notional ‘reset’ of EU-UK relations following the EU-UK Summit in London scheduled for May 19th.

In the ensuing discussion members discussed a wide range of topics and ideas for speakers and themes, including The view from Ukraine; The rise of the far right in Europe; and Perspectives from elected politicians in the UK as well as MEPs and a senior EEAS official from Brussels.

AEJ Website and social media presence: The Secretary welcomed the attractive look and contents of the AEJ UK website under David Barker’s management – especially the presentation of topics and materials by or about the association and its activities which have relevance to journalists and other Europe-watchers. More original material including reports and commentaries by members and AEJ partner organisations will be welcome. Our top priority must be to attract as participants and members, both journalists in mid-career and young aspiring journalists who are students or just starting out. The important work that William does for media freedom and the safety of journalists, in collaboration with other organisations and the Council of Europe, are also of keen interest, he said, in view of the dual pressures from oppressive laws hindering free media and the distorting impact of dominant tech platforms on the media and public debate.

There was a lively discussion of our use of social media, which is managed by Firdevs Robinson. It was generally agreed that the UK Section should seek to raise its profile and encourage much wider engagement by members. The merits of focusing on LinkedIn or newer platforms like BlueSky prompted a lively exchange. Firdevs agreed to continue the dialogue with others concerned, including David Worsfold, Andy Pye and David Barker, with a view to setting clear priorities in due course.

Resolution 1: A resolution was put that AEJ UK section should quit X (formerly Twitter) because of its misuse as a propaganda platform and as a major source of mis- and disinformation; it was adopted unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report and Statement of Account: David Worsfold reported that our accounts are in good shape, helped by a reduction in catering expenses that reduced the shortfall between fees and outgoings over last year to about £100 from a peak of £600. Accordingly the UK membership fee remains £40 per year (£10 for younger members) In 2024 the section paid 12 euros per member to the International AEJ account (still frozen for withdrawals but not for payments in) which was higher than the expected 8 euros. The amount which sections should pay per member in 2025 is to be proposed by the interim Board and decided at the next Assembly.

Resolution 2: After further discussion, a Resolution was put forward confirming that the regular UK membership fee in 2025 should remain at £40 until further notice; and that the age ceiling for younger UK members to obtain membership at the discounted rate of £10 should be raised from 25 to 30. The Resolution was adopted unanimously.

AEJ’s public profile: Alan Mackie spoke about his alarm and outrage over what he saw as ongoing media censorship and entrenched anti-Palestinian biases in public policy in the UK and elsewhere. William recalled the insightful AEJ meeting with Julie Norman and Chris Paterson last year on the theme. Due to lack of time the ensuing exchange of views was brief. Alan was invited to submit a piece for the AEJ UK website citing relevant sources and the most recent cases of concern to explore the issues in depth.

Election of Officers: The three incumbents stood to re-election unopposed. Rick Thompson formally proposed their re-election and Quentin Peel seconded. Amid general acclaim, Rick congratulated William, Charles and David for giving the UK Section outstanding service and leadership.

CJ