

EUROPEAN MOVEMENT SUSSEX BRANCH

Chairman's report 2010-11

Over the last year we have focussed on regular monthly activities rather than big complex ones. We have had five committee meetings during the year. The Branch has again held two major events for members - a lunch in April and major seminar in July.

The lunch was addressed by Jonathan Scheele, head of the European Commission's representation in the UK, and gave us a lot of interesting insights into life in one of the EU's main institutions.

The seminar on 3 July was again at Wiston and the subject was what we were then calling the "Arab Spring". Roger Moore who had just retired a few days before from the European External Action service came to talk to us about the EU's evolving policy towards its Southern Neighbours and Turkey. We had two excellent speakers from Egypt, Dr Sameh Aboul-Enein who is a disarmament expert and Ahmed Naguib, who is himself actively involved in events in Egypt. Dr Claire Spencer who is head of the Middle East Programme at Chatham House came to give us a whistle-stop tour round the region, and the Turkish Ambassador came to talk about Turkey's role. The seminar was fairly well attended, we got a lot of compliments for it and I think we all ended up feeling much closer to events in North Africa.

We certainly couldn't have recruited such speakers without the involvement of Nick Hopkinson, who knew most of the speakers personally and did a lot of the work of preparing the seminar. Organising a seminar for absolutely no money at all to spend on speakers' expenses is really difficult - all the speakers kindly agreed to come at their own expense. Nick and Suzanne Hopkinson fetched two of them from Heathrow and put at least one of them up and I had Roger Moore and his wife to stay - they had driven from Brussels for the weekend.

Again the seminar was relatively expensive; we had to charge people £45 and the cost may perhaps have put some people off.

Kate Evans organised the spring lunch and the seminar arrangements with her customary efficiency and attention to detail. Chris Jones coped nobly with the bookings.

We had our now annual croquet afternoon at Alfriston in August, organised by Grace Blaker - I was sorry to miss it but everyone else involved enjoyed it.

Our real focus however has been regular meetings at The Cricketers' in Brighton on the third Saturday of each month, organised and always brilliantly prepared by Gisela Hendriks. One of these was the inspiration for our suggested summer event next year.

We had a bit of a blip with the Jubilee Library publications stall but I am happy to report that this has now been sorted out. As I reported last year, I was told we would have to pay for our usual pitch. We couldn't afford to do that but the

alternative pitch they offered us didn't work. Martin Toomey had a meeting with them earlier this year and they gave in like lambs. We now have our pitch back but the arrangement is that we do it the same Saturday as Cricketers sessions, the third of the month, and we set it up in the morning, leave it unattended and go back to it when the Cricketers session ends. Martin and Jenny are doing too many of these sessions by themselves and we really need some volunteers to help.

Stephen, Margaret and Chris have been working on the education website, now renamed *Citizens of Europe* and Stephen will be reporting on that shortly.

Press involvement; Nick Hopkinson and I organised a seminar for the national Branches Forum on dealing with local media - we had wonderful speakers and it was a roaring success. Since then Nick has done some press work and you will hear from Petros Fassoulas what he has been doing.

Our website, managed by Chris Jones, continues to be a brilliant communication tool - you will find full reports and photographs of events on it together with arrangements for The Cricketers and forthcoming events.

You will be hearing from Michael Rider about the François Duchêne bursaries which continue to benefit graduate students; Jim Rollo, who helped us set it up and helped arrange the finance for it, has now retired, but luckily his successor is happy to continue. We owe thanks to Jim for his commitment to this.

We now need to consider our programme for the next year. The Committee proposes the same pattern of events - a spring lunch, a summer seminar, and a croquet afternoon at Alfriston, plus the monthly Cricketer discussion sessions and the Jubilee library stall. We are thinking that this year our summer seminar should perhaps be a less expensive and less labour intensive business, as I have no time to spare to organise it (I am totally occupied by other projects at present) and Nick Hopkinson no longer feels able to be involved.

I continue to have some national involvement. I have recently been appointed secretary of the Branches Forum - Christopher Denne will be its chairman and we will be meeting Petros next week to discuss how it should operate. I agreed to supervise the management of national subscription renewals and I designed the system for our new subscriptions secretary and liaise with her, Anne Were in the office and the needs of branch users of the national database. I have been working with Aidan McGuire on the slimming down of the EMMA database. I have also been helping to organise the 200 club which continues to be a success and makes a useful contribution to the finances of the Movement. Many thanks to all of you who support it.

Sarah Leigh

3 December 2011