



AEMI

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2009-2010

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In opening this report on the activities of the Association over the last year, may I begin by recalling our Annual Meeting in 2009 which, thanks to a remarkably successful effort of inter-institution co-operation, was hosted jointly in Germany by the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven and the BallinStadt Emigration Museum in Hamburg. In moving between the two institutions we in fact were modelling the idea of a European Cultural Route based on the theme of Migration that has been a central concern of the Association in recent years.

As ever, we rely on our Annual Meeting as our main means of renewing old friendships and making new ones, for reviewing progress, and for charting our direction for the coming year. We again thank Simone, Aislinn and Maja and their colleagues for welcoming us so warmly to Bremerhaven and Hamburg. We really did come away with a powerful sense of how these two centres of the European migration system operated.

This year we are delighted to be in the Basque Country in Bilbao, another iconic port city of transformation.

Apart from meeting here in Bilbao immediately before the General Meeting on Friday afternoon in the grand surroundings of the Guggenheim Museum, the Board has not met together face to face this year. As usual, however, there has been frequent communication between members of the Board, mainly by email, especially in preparation for the Annual Meeting. In this regard I would like to pay tribute in particular to the work of Benen Oregi and Andoni Martin in co-ordinating all aspects of the very ambitious and exciting programme that we have enjoyed here in Bilbao.

The Board that you elected two years ago in Genoa for a new three-year term has Jens Topholm (Denmark) as Secretary, Eva Meyer (Åland Islands, Finland) as Treasurer, Hans Storhaug (Norway) as Editor of the Association's *Journal*, Aislinn Merz and Maja Berendts (Germany) as representatives of last year's joint-host institutions, Benen Oregi as representative of the this year's host institutions, and myself as Chairman (Northern Ireland). I am particularly grateful to Jens and Eva for their continuing work in the posts of secretary and treasurer that were previously combined in the person of Henning Bender from the establishment of the Association in 1989 until his retirement in 2008. I am glad also that our Editor continues in good health and has been energetic as ever in ensuring that we have a new issue of the AEMI *Journal* to launch as you shall be hearing shortly. As reported at the beginning of our conference, our Secretary Jens Topholm was prevented by illness at the last moment from travelling to Bilbao but I am glad to say that he is making a good recovery. I am sure that we all join in wishing him well.



Your Chairman, as last year I am afraid to say, has been distracted by other business from giving as much time as he would have liked to the affairs of the Association. I am glad to know that the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Swedish-American Center, Karlstadt and the fifth anniversary celebration of the German Emigration Center, Bremerhaven, to which I was kindly invited to represent the Association, were greatly enjoyed by the members who were able to attend.

A matter of regret is that the year did not see much progress by way of closer cooperation between AEMI and the International Network of Migration Institutions (INMI). Carine Rouah, the volunteer Project Manager of INMI has not been able to attend our meeting this year. As an initiative of UNESCO, originating in a conference held in Rome in October 2006, INMI was established to offer a Web interface to assist the growth of the international network of migration institutions, to support their activities, and to facilitate the interactions among them. Nevertheless, a good sign of growing contact between migration institutions within and beyond Europe is the welcome presence here in Bilbao of our colleagues from the United States and Australia, as also are the strong connections with institutions in South America evidenced by our Basque and Portuguese colleagues.

I mentioned that between the Annual Meetings in Bremerhaven-Hamburg and Bilbao, your Board had not met face-to-face this year. While this may be economical in terms of saving on travel expenses, it is not a good policy in the long term. If your Board hopes to give strategic direction to the Association beyond the organisation of the Annual Meeting and production of the next issue of the *Journal*, it is important that they come together to reflect on progress to date and plan for further development. The value of face-to-face meeting is apparent each year at our Annual Meeting where friendships are formed and the mutual trust necessary to sustain common projects developed. Therefore I hope that your Board will meet at least once in the coming year, probably in January or February because as we approach our twentieth anniversary year, for there is much to consider.

There is little doubt that AEMI has the potential to grow into a large organization. Our association continues to welcome small, medium and large-sized institutions but the onus in expanding the Association must necessarily fall on the larger institutions, which have the resources better able to support the kind of work involved. As in previous years, I would again urge members to consider that a sign that that our Association will have made the shift from a medium-size organisation to a large one will be when the general expectation is that the Chairman of the Board will not normally serve more than one three-year term. Your present Board has one more year to run before its three-year term is complete, and also my third term as Chairman and now is the time to consider urgently how best to bring on new talent while maintaining some continuity. One way of doing this may be to extend the membership of the Board (bearing in mind the need to achieve a good gender and geographical balance) to include a vice-Chair who would in due course serve a term as Chair.



Whatever the future may hold, I would commend to you the work done by of your Board over the last past year. As ever we are grateful to the governing bodies of the institutions from which our members come who appreciate the value of the Association and support their representatives in putting additional time and energy into keeping it going for the benefit of all.

Finally, I would like to thank again our colleagues in Bremerhaven and Hamburg for hosting us so well last year our colleagues in the Basque Country who are hosting us this year. As the old Basque saying goes, *zenbat buru, hainbat aburu* (there are as many options as people). We have an Association with considerable achievements to its name in its twenty-year life, thanks largely foresight and positive spirit of its founders, which we plan to celebrated in the next issue of our Journal. As we contemplate the next twenty years, and as our deliberations here have shown, we continue to be ambitious in our aspirations for the public understanding of migration mediated through our different kinds of member institutions - museums, libraries, archives and university-based research centres. May they continue to prove fruitful next year and the years after.

Brian Lambkin
Chairman
AEMI
2/10/10