

Chairmans Report 2005-2006

AEMI

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

In reflecting on the past year I would like to begin by recalling our Annual Meeting last year which took place in France in the splendid setting of the House of Europe in Paris, thanks to the generous hospitality of Driss El Yazami and his colleagues at Génériques. 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 thank Silva Meznaric and her colleagues at the Institute for Ethnic and Migration Research, Zagreb, for welcoming us to Trogir in Croatia.

In Paris last year we welcomed several new members, launched the third issue of our AEMI Journal, heard many interesting papers on the theme of 'Cinema, Literature and Migration' and engaged in discussion. Highlights were the visits which our hosts organised for us. We remember particularly our guided tour round the Palais de la Porte Doré, which is to be the site of the new national museum of immigration history, Cité de l'histoire de l'immigration, which is due to open in April 2007; our visit to the Belleville district which was to feature so prominently in the news a few weeks later; and the fascinating tour of Paris by bus, designed by the staff of Génériques, based on the theme of migration.

The programme for the Association remains that adopted in Lisbon in 2003, which is comprised of four main project activities, in addition to the establishment of the Association's Journal:

1. Establishment of a new, annual 'European Migration Heritage Week'
2. Development of a new on-line 'European Migration Heritage Resources Portal'
3. Establishment of a the 'European Migration Heritage Route' as new Cultural Route
4. Enlargement of the network of the Association of European Migration Institutions to include at least one member institution in each European state

So how much progress then have we managed to make against these objectives over the course of the last year? Your Board, for the first year of this current three-year cycle, has been Henning Bender (Denmark) as general secretary, Hans Storhaug (Norway) as editor of the Association's Journal, Driss El Yazami (France) as representative of last year's host institution, Silva Meznaric (Croatia) as representative of the host institution of 2006, and myself as chairman (Northern Ireland).

It did not prove possible for us all to meet face-to-face this year. We have held a Board meeting immediately before the Annual Meeting here in Trogir, and, thanks again to the generous good offices of Antoinette Reuter and her colleagues in Luxembourg, Henning Bender and I were able to meet in May in Luxembourg, outside the seminar organised by the Documentation Centre for Human Migration, Dudelange.

In order to carry forward European Migration Heritage Week 2006 Antoinette Reuter kindly agreed to continue acting as co-ordinator and members will already have appreciated the digital poster especially designed and circulated by her and her colleagues for use by us this year. It is true that we still have some way to go before the idea of this 'Week' becomes established but at least momentum being maintained and is still there for us to build on.

So far as the idea of a 'European Migration History Search Database' is concerned, the Colloquium on 'Les archives des migrations: un état des lieux européen', organized by Antoinette and her colleagues in Luxembourg, 26-27 May 2006, included a series of papers on Migration Databases. Evidently, there is a large range of interesting projects underway. For example, Henning Bender spoke about 'Search databases on migration history on the Internet in Scandinavia', Per Nordahl spoke about 'Digitizing Emigrant Letters', and Piero Domenico Galloro of the Université Paul Verlaine, Metz, spoke about the 'BAMI' Database, which is a huge database concerned with miners of the Bassin region. What is still eluding us is a critical mass of institutions with an interest in taking forward the idea of a European Migration History Search Database and the drive to seek the necessary project funding. Perhaps we may have succeeded in making further progress in this direction at this year's meeting.

So far as progressing the idea of the 'European Migration Heritage Route' as a Cultural Route is concerned, we are indebted once again to Antoinette Reuter and her colleagues for their efforts in maintaining good relations between the Association and the European Institute of Cultural Routes. We are delighted that the Director of the Institute,

Michel Thomas-Penette, is able to be with us once again this year. As with developing a 'European Migration History Search Database, the challenge remains to establish a critical mass of institutions with an interest in taking forward the idea, especially in terms of publishing an associated book, leaflet and website that will highlight as much of the migration heritage of Europe as possible, and once again with the drive to seek the necessary project funding.

Finally I turn to the aim of the Association to enlarge its membership to include at least one institution in each European state. We were delighted last year to welcome as new members the Museum of Emigration and Communities in Fafe, Portugal, represented by Miguel Monteiro, and the Kinship Center, Karlstad, Sweden, represented by Erik Gustavson. We were pleased to welcome intentions to apply for membership from representatives of the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris and the Association pour la Maison de la Memoire de l'emigration des Pyrenees at du Sud-Ouest de la France, and also to receive an application for associate membership from the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York. It is pleasing again this year to be welcoming new institutions to membership. As in the past the Association continues to grow mainly by word of mouth as existing members encourage new institutions with whom they have personal contact to join. I should say here that it is a special pleasure to welcome Benan Oregi from the government of the Basque country who visited several member institutions, including my own, this summer. Such work by existing members is much appreciated and this has been the pattern of growth of the Association since its inception in 1989, making the transition from a small organization to a middle-sized organization. The transition to becoming a large organization is still the challenge before us. We are in no doubt that there are more migration-related institutions in Europe than are currently members of the Association and with the recent enlargement of the European Union, including Romania and Bulgaria next year, our aim is still to be as inclusive an organization as possible. In this context the initiative taken by the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris in June this year to undertake a survey of existing migration-related institutions world-wide and to establish a database of information to which there will be public access is to be welcomed. Questionnaires were sent to all AEMI members and I would encourage members again, if they have not already done so, to support this initiative.

The opening of a national museum concerned with migration in France in April 2007 will be a major development, as was the opening of the German Emigrant Museum in August 2005. This represents substantial investment of new resources in our field and we hope that it may be an encouragement to others. All the indications are that migration will remain an issue at the top of the political agenda for all the countries of Europe for the foreseeable future, whether as mainly receiving countries or sending countries, and the force of the argument for more investment in migration studies of all kinds is increasingly apparent. The better we understand our migration heritage, the more likely we are to make good decisions about current migration policy and respond well as citizens to the challenges that current migration brings.

The specific challenge for our Association is to try and ensure that it responds to growth in the field by becoming as inclusive as possible. The value of belonging to an international network of similar institutions is self-evident, particularly to new institutions seeking to establish their position in their own country. If AEMI did not exist now it would have to be invented. However, a main obstacle in the way of our more rapid expansion is one of resources. The time that present members of your Board are able to devote to development activities, including recruitment of new members, is more limited than we would wish. For this reason it is we should be open to new initiatives and proposals from whatever direction they come, bearing in mind the strategic objectives that we have set ourselves.

As ever we are grateful to Henning Bender for his work as treasurer, for maintaining and updating our website which provides such an indispensable service for us and for responding to the enquiries of members and prospective new members. Hans Storhaug deserves our special appreciation for continuing the onerous job of founder editor of our Journal. All being well, he will be distributing copies of the fourth issue of the Journal to us before Christmas. Do help to ensure its continuing success by supporting it in whatever way you can.

We thank again Driss El Yazami and his colleagues for hosting the Annual Meeting in Paris in 2005. And we also thank Silva Meznaric and her colleagues for undertaking the task of preparing to host us in Croatia in 2006. May our deliberations here in Trogir prove fruitful in the year ahead.

Brian Lambkin
Chairman
September 2006