

AEMI CHAIRMANS REPORT 2007-2008

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In opening this report on the events of the past year I would like to begin by recalling our Annual Meeting last year which took place in Turku, Finland, at the Institute of Migration whose Director, Professor Olavi Koivukangas, is a founding member of the Association. 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 Olavi and his colleagues for welcoming us so warmly back to Finland, having hosted the Association there previously in 1993.

We also thank Silvia Martini and Fabio Capocaccia and their colleagues at the International Centre of Italian Emigration Studies (CISEI) for welcoming us this year to Genoa in Italy. I would also like to express my appreciation of the understanding and patience shown by Simone Eick and her colleagues in Bremerhaven, who were also very keen to host this year's Annual Meeting.

As usual, 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 Silvia and Fabio for their generosity in hosting not only a visit by Henning Bender on behalf of the Association in October 2007, as agreed at our meeting in Turku, but also a meeting of the Board in Genoa in April 2008 – both indications of the commitment of CISEI in bringing AEMI to their new institution.

For this third and final year of its term of office, your Board has been Henning Bender (Denmark) as general secretary and treasurer, Hans Storhaug (Norway) as editor of the Association's Journal, Olavi Koivukangas (Finland) as representative of last year's host institution, Silvia Martini as representative of the this year's host institution, and myself as chairman (Northern Ireland).

Some of you may not be aware that Hans was quite seriously ill recently. This means I am afraid that he is not able to be with us in Genoa and that there has been some delay to the production of the next volume of our Journal, as will be explained in his report. However, his health is now improving and I am glad to say that he has indicated his willingness to continue serving as Editor. I am sure you will want to join me in wishing him a speedy recovery. We also thank Hans for representing the Association at the ceremony in Luxembourg on 6 October 2007, just after our meeting in Turku, at which the charter was presented for the European Migration Heritage Route, within the programme of the European Institute for Cultural Routes.

I have also to report that Henning Bender has indicated his intention to resign as Secretary and Treasurer, in which post he has served faithfully since the establishment of the Association in 1989. This year Henning retired as Director of the Danish Emigration Archives in Aalborg Denmark. I regret that has not proved possible to persuade him to attend this year's meeting to give his final report in person and receive the richly deserved thanks. In modest Danish fashion, having served for such a long time, he was anxious that his successor in the Emigration Archives in Aalborg, Jens Topholm, should be able to attend with a view to sustaining their institution's commitment to the development of the Association. I hope that members will join with me in both welcoming Jens and in expressing our heartfelt thanks for the work that Henning has done over the years, not least in managing our website and ensuring, in the nicest possible way, that we all, or very nearly all, pay our annual subscriptions on time. We may look forward to the continuing company of Henning as an individual member and I hope that he will be able to join us next year, after a well deserved break as he and Birgit settle into their new home on the island of Bornholm.

As I have mentioned, the Board held one face-to-face meeting this year on 21 April in Genoa, thanks to the hospitality of CISEI. This meeting was particularly valuable because we were able to bring Carine Rouah from Rome to meet with us and continue the very important discussion that we had begun in Turku in 2007 about possible cooperation between AEMI and the newly-formed International Network of Migration Museums of which Carine is the volunteer Project Manager. As an initiative of UNESCO, originating in a conference held in Rome in October 2006, the International Network of Migration Museums aims to offer a Web interface to assist the growth of the international network of migration institutions, to support the activities of migration museums and to facilitate the interactions among them. The main concern of the Board at our meeting in Genoa was to clarify the relationship between membership of AEMI and membership of the International Network of Migration Museums. Some but not all AEMI members are already members of this new Network. The question to be clarified was whether all AEMI members were eligible for membership of the Network. This is an important issue because AEMI includes, as its name is intended to indicate, various types of migration institutions as members: museums, libraries, archives, heritage centres and research institutions or study centres, whereas the name of International Network of Migration

Museums suggests that it has an exclusive focus on migration museums, as distinct from other types of migration institution. Carine Rouah explained that so far as membership of the Network was concerned it was intended that the term 'museum' should be interpreted inclusively rather than exclusively. Institutions which are not strictly speaking museums are already members. All members of AEMI would therefore be welcome to join the International Network of Migration Museums.

We found ourselves in agreement that the special nature of migration museums is such that they depend for their success on developing archive and library collections of migration records (especially passenger lists, letters, photographs, oral histories, published autobiographies and biographies) as well as museum collections of migration-related objects. The migration museum is a new kind of institution that should embody the idea of partnership between museums, libraries, archives and research or study centres. Your Board argued that it would be unfortunate if the name of International Network of Migration Museums were to give the impression that museums were being privileged to the detriment of libraries, archives, heritage centres and research and study centres which share the objectives of this Network. A powerful way of signalling that this Network is concerned to include all relevant institutions, we suggested, would be simply for it to change its name. I am pleased to report that the Network is in the process of changing its name to the International Network of Migration Institutions, with the explanatory strap line – 'promoting the public understanding of migration', see: (<http://www.migrationmuseums.org/web/index.php?page=home>). Members may recall how I wrote after that meeting urging all AEMI members that, given this clarification, we should all consider joining the International Network of Migration Institutions.

In Genoa we also discussed with Carine how this network might grow over the next five to ten years and it seemed likely that in expanding it would need to develop a regional structure. Institutions in different regions (such as North and South America and Australasia where there are already important groupings) may find it more practical to come together for face-to-face meetings annually - as AEMI does at present in Europe. A meeting of the global network may then be practical only every 3-5 years.

Finally, we discussed how we might mitigate the clash in dates of the AEMI Annual Conference in Genoa and the International Conference organized by Museo de Historia de la Inmigración de Cataluña that will gather members of the International Network of Migration Museums in October 2008 in Barcelona, Spain, and how best to promote European Migration Heritage Week 2008. Unfortunately it has not proved practicable to arrange a video link-up for the programmes of our two conferences but I trust that there will have been some communication between Genoa and Barcelona during these days to our mutual benefit.

What we have managed to agree in principle is that instead of having two separate conferences next year, the International Network will co-operate with AEMI in its Annual Meeting in 2009. It remains to be determined by our Annual Meeting where exactly our meeting will take place. As last year in Turku we are in the happy position of having received firm offers from two member institutions to host our next meeting in 2008, both in Germany: the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven and BallinStadt in Hamburg. I have been involved in discussions with both institutions to see if it may be practicable to combine in some way in the organisation of the programme so that we may have an opportunity to visit the splendid new facilities of both.

In closing, I would also like to draw particular attention to three other developments during the year, each of which I believe indicates the value of our Association to its members and the wider community.

The first concerns Antoinette Reuter and the meeting in Brussels on 16 May which she kindly invited me to attend in order to discuss the development of the European Migration Heritage Route. I look forward to Antoinette, who remains the main driving force behind this project, reporting on how the discussion has progressed since, but here I would just like to point out an example, coming out of that meeting, of how the Association grows. Present at the meeting was Luc Verheyen, representing the Red Star Line project in Antwerp, which has ambitious plans for opening a new migration museum there in three or four years time. Subsequently, Luc sent his colleague Torsten Feys on a fact-finding mission to various other AEMI institutions, including our own in Northern Ireland, and I am glad to say that Torsten will be with us in Genoa on behalf of his institution with a view to joining the Association.

The second development was initially less happy. Members will recall the urgent appeal to the scientific community and general public made in July by colleagues in the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies in Zagreb, Croatia, who kindly hosted our Annual Meeting in 2006. This concerned the manner of the appointment of their new Director and I believe it is a case that illustrates the importance of the Association. Were our own institutions to be faced with a similar situation, to whom could we turn? The fact that the Institute now intends to send our old friend Ruzica Cicak-Chand to attend our meeting in Genoa as its representative I take to be a good sign that things there are on the mend. I am sure you will want to join me in wishing all our colleagues in Zagreb well for the future.

The third development was altogether a happy one. I was delighted to be contacted in August by another old friend of the Association Jürgen Rudloff in Bremerhaven. As a result of his long-time dedication to the initiative of building an international emigration museum in Bremerhaven, he has been awarded a medal by the Federal President, Horst Köhler. This was presented to him at a ceremony on 5 September, hosted by the Chief Magistrate of the senate of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen. Again I am sure that you will want to join me in congratulating Jürgen on his richly deserved award and wish him well in his continuing good work, promoting the public understanding of migration.

The signs generally are that there is a growing interest in the work of institutions such as ours and their relevance to the whole question of social integration. A number of major conferences bear witness to this. These include the symposium on Intercultural Dialogue in March 2007 at the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, which hosted our Annual Meeting in 2005. We congratulate colleagues on their successful opening on 10 October 2007. The launch of the splendid Youth and Migration website, which many members will recall having seen demonstrated by Hans Storhaug in previous years in its pilot stage of development, was launched in Norway on 25 September as part of a youth conference that brought together in a 'Global Village' over sixty young people from nine different countries, within the Stavanger 2008 programme as European Capital of Culture along with Liverpool. I have already referred to the conference on 'Museums, Migration and Interculturality' taking place in Barcelona at the same time as our own in Genoa. Coming up later in October we have major conferences in Berlin and Bonn that are both addressing the issue of migration museums. No doubt there are other things happening that members will be keen to share information about.

So as we approach our twentieth anniversary next year, there is little doubt about the continuing need for an Association such as ours. As this Board concludes its term of office, and as I conclude my second term as Chairman, we need to think carefully in electing a new Board for the next three-year term. In almost twenty years, from the Scandinavian nucleus of our founder institutions, we have grown from a small organization to the medium-sized organization that we are today, spanning most but not yet all of Europe. By reaching out to new institutions, as here in Genoa, and by engaging with new initiatives such as the International Migration Museums Network, we have 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. In electing your new Board I would ask that you bear this consideration in mind. The situation regarding nominations for the new Board is at the time of writing is as follows. Following the resignation of Henning Bender, we have two nominations for the previously combined posts of Secretary and Treasurer: Eva Meyer (Aaland Islands Emigrant Institute) and Jens Topholm (Danish Emigration Archives). Hans Storhaug has indicated his willingness to continue serving as Editor of the Association's Journal and I have been asked to consider serving a final, third term. However nominations may still be made from the floor at our Annual Meeting on Saturday 4 October and I would 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 Board members will serve no more than one three-year term.

Be that as it may, I would commend to you the hard work done by of your outgoing Board over the last three years on behalf of the Association and in particular that done by Henning Bender as Secretary and Treasurer since that first formal meeting of the Association in Aalborg, Denmark in 1989. Finally, I would like to thank again Olavi Koivukangas and his colleagues for hosting the Annual Meeting in Finland in 2007. And we also thank Silvia Martini and Fabio Capocaccia and their colleagues for undertaking the task of preparing to host us as a new institution in 2009. May our deliberations in Genoa prove fruitful in the year ahead.

Brian Lambkin
Chairman
AEMI