

EUROPEAN MOVEMENT – SUSSEX BRANCH

Chairman's Report for 2008-9

We had two “presidency” lunches during the year. Just before our Czech presidency lunch in March our speaker, the Political Counsellor at the Czech Embassy, had to cancel. We appealed to all our friends far and wide but found the perfect speaker at Sussex University, Zdeněk Kavan, who is an expert on the transition of the central and east European accession countries to capitalism and democracy. Our speaker for the Swedish lunch in October at Haywards Heath, Per Augustsson was much more discreet! Both lunches were splendidly organised by Kate Evans with punctilious attention to detail as always. We did not realise that the Swedish one would prove to be our last “presidency” lunch.

Following that we put our backs into developing the plans for the seminar and hustings in May. We decided to have both our members' seminar and the public meeting with MEP candidates on the same day. In some ways this worked well but the venue was really not suitable for the members' meeting. Our guest speakers were Lucia Quaglia and Graham Bishop, who gave an expert and interesting talk on the seminar theme: *The Global Financial Crisis and the EU response*. After that we had the award of the François Duchêne bursaries for 2009 and reports from last year's bursars which were a great pleasure to hear. The Question Time event was successful - we had five MEP candidates, three of whom subsequently got elected. We were a bit disappointed in the turnout, after the huge effort and considerable expenditure we had had to generate the audience, but we felt 140 people for a political meeting on a fine Saturday summer afternoon in Brighton was fairly good. I was very grateful to Chris' Jones help in organising the event at Dorothy Skinner School.

During the run up to the Question Time event we had had two stalls to publicise it, one in the foyer to the Library and one in the Old Steine during the Children's Parade. Both were very successful. We had discovered that the Europe Direct function at the Library was no longer operating and in fact that there was nowhere in Sussex where people could browse publications from the EU. We decided to propose to the Library that we should run a monthly stall there and this we have done since September. Martin Toomey has developed a distribution site in his garage for all the material which used to be all over the floor of my garage.

Work on the new website, Europe in Schools, has been progressing well. Stephen Quigley, Christopher Jones and Margaret Tuccori have been working very hard on it all year.

Rosemary Baker and I have been trying to progress our plans to take teachers from East Sussex and Brighton & Hove to Brussels next summer but have had some difficulties which we will tell you about later.

Our own website, Sussex in Europe, continues to be a marvellous resource both in relation to the EU and our own affairs and in its coverage of central and eastern Europe. Chris Jones works tirelessly on this and all our activities up to September 09 were chronicled in the annual printed newsletter which Chris produced from the website.

The croquet afternoon and cream tea in Alfriston in September, organised by Grace Blaker and Rosemary Baker was very successful and very enjoyable even to those who can hardly play at all and we definitely want to repeat it next year. We hope a lot more members of the branch will come to this purely social affair and enjoy playing this very nasty game.

I'd like to thank all the committee for their help and support during the year, and other members of the Branch for their support during the election campaign - in particular Michael Rider, Margaret Tuccori and Grace Blaker.

Sarah Leigh
4 December 09