

**Minutes of the 2019 General Assembly,
held on 20.4.2019 at I.I. Mechnikov Odesa National University**

The General Assembly started at approximately 17:40 at the same venue where the 3rd AESC Convention (aud. 202 Frantsuzskii blvs 24-26, Odessa) had been held earlier.

Members present at the time of opening the General Assembly were:

- 1) Aydin, Filiz Tutku
- 2) Ezgi Ekinchi, Berfin
- 3) Gabrichidze, Gaga
- 4) Kruessmann, Thomas
- 5) Reisner, Oliver
- 6) Türkes-Kilic, Selin

Justin Tomczyk joined at 18:02.

The participants were welcomed by AESC President Thomas Kruessmann.

1. Confirmation of orderly invitation and opportunity to add new agenda items

The General Meeting was opened by inquiring whether there were any changes to the agenda requested. This was not the case. It was confirmed that invitations to the General Assembly were sent out in due time and that the deliberations will follow the proposed agenda.

2. Confirmation of new members

The list of new members sent out in the final invitation to the General Assembly, including the membership of Ms. Seda Hanegelioğlu who had joined the Association earlier on the same day, were unanimously confirmed.

3. Report of the AESC President on the Association's activities and finances for the year 2018

The AESC President reported on the beginning of the implementation of the AESC Support to Associations grant which AESC had won in the previous year. The 3rd Annual Convention held in Odessa on 19/20 April 2019 was the first major deliverable under this grant. Its general topic was "The Experience of Inter-Regionalism in the Black Sea and Caucasus Regions: Norm Diffusion, Legal Approximation and Contestation". There were approximately 40 participants who attended the various sessions on each day. AESC was successful in establishing a cooperation with I.I. Mechnikov National University Odesa as well as with the Ukrainian European Studies Association. Both partners were warmly thanked for their efforts in supporting AESC and realising the 3rd Annual Convention as a joint project.

The second major deliverable under the current Jean Monnet Support to Associations grant is the creation of a textbook on European Studies in the Caucasus, to be translated to the main national languages of the South Caucasus and to be used primarily by bachelor students. Following the DESCnet concluding meeting in October 2018 in Tbilisi where the basic outline was discussed, a working group process was launched in which interested persons from among AESC members could join this project and contribute their ideas. As a result, a meeting was held in Tbilisi in January 2019 at Ilia University where the work plan was further discussed. The meeting was also attended by Ms. Nino Lomouri and Dr. Gvantsa Davitashwili. It was established that Anna Khvorostiankina and Oliver Reisner will take the lead on this project. Both committed to seeking further funding to enable an authors' meeting to be held in Yerevan in the course of 2019.

AESC unveiled its new website (<http://aesc-online.eu>) as a refreshed version of the website that had been hosted by the University of Tartu. Its main content has now been exported to an independent commercial server and developed further.

As an ongoing commitment and a first step to realizing the grant's obligation to publish conference proceedings based on each of the three annual conventions to be financed under the Jean Monnet grant, AESC launched a book series under the series editorship of Thomas Kruessmann and finalized volume one of this book series with the title "Europe in the Caucasus, Caucasus in Europe" with Andrey Makarychev and Thomas Kruessmann as editors. The book series and its first volume were launched without financial support from the DESCnet project and entirely due to the good cooperation with ibidem Publishers which supported AESC in this project. The publisher also offered 40 volumes to be sold at the AESC Convention in Ukraine at a 50 % discount. In addition, each author obtained a free author's copy. Unfortunately, due to the lack of funding it was not possible to make this book available in an open access regime. For the upcoming three volumes, to be financed under the Jean Monnet grant, funding for open access is provided.

AESC also launched its Working Paper Series with a contribution by Justin Tomczyk on the topic “Armenia and the Eurasian-European Digital Divide”. This working paper is available on the AESC website.

As to finances, it was reported that AESC had maintained its membership discount policy throughout 2018/19 and that therefore no funding was available outside the items budgeted in the Jean Monnet grant. Regular expenses go to the employment contract with Ms. Eka Oniani who started supporting AESC in a project officer capacity by October 2018. The number of members as per the date of the General Assembly was 111. Most of the members (approx. 95 %) are taking advantage of the AESC discount policy, but there is an increasing number of members from outside the region so that regarding to them the € 50 membership fee policy would have been needed to be applied. This was however not the case so far.

The AESC President reported on his efforts to work with the Berlin consulting team “inmedio” which specializes in post-conflict dispute resolution and mediation. The goal was to offer AESC members a chance to attend trainings as mediators / peace builders. However, the contacts did not bring any results so far. The last meeting that was scheduled in Berlin in early April had to be cancelled at short notice due to unavailability of the “inmedio” representative. In general, the AESC President reported that there was a recurring question about the benefits of AESC membership and how such benefits could be offered while having no financial basis outside the Jean Monnet budget.

4. Discussion on the report on activities and finances for the year 2018

In the discussion of the report it was noted that the members of the DESCnet consortium failed to submit a Jean Monnet application in 2019. While on the one hand, a very active core group emerged, other universities have become totally absent and did not show any initiative any more. There was also no sign that the University of Tartu as the DESCnet leader had any interest in continuing work in the AESC framework, except the very laudable effort of Andrey Makarychev to edit the first volume in the book series “European Studies in the Caucasus”.

Regarding finances, it was pointed out that AESC would most likely be able maintain its discount policy if it managed to cover the needed level of co-financing from third-party funding going to the textbook project.

5. Exoneration of the Management Board

By a vote of three in favour, with five abstentions and zero no votes, it was decided to exonerate the Management Board.

6. Co-financing issues under the current Jean Monnet Support to Associations grant and membership fees

It was discussed that one argument speaking in favour of ending the discount scheme and introducing a moderate membership fee was that under the new interpretation of the Jean Monnet co-financing requirement AESC is asked to contribute the agreed 20 % co-financing in real money. However, there was also agreement that in the current economic situation in the region it would be unrealistic to ask members to pay a membership fee. It was therefore unanimously resolved that the discount scheme will remain in force, but that for future AESC Convention participants will be asked to pay a moderate registration fee.

7. 4th AESC Convention 2020 in Baku

The plans for the 4th Annual Convention were discussed. The AESC President AESC reiterated the commitment of AESC Management Board Member Mukhtar Hajizada to find local partners for the organisation of the 2020 Convention. It was proposed to ask local professors to make a stronger effort to bring their students to the Convention.

8. Future of the Advisory Board

The ASC President informed the Board that there is visibly no interest among the partner universities of DESCnet to consider institutional membership in AESC and / or remaining in the Advisory Board. The idea of creating an advisory board of eminent persons was not further discussed.

9. Publication plans: Book series “European Studies in the Caucasus”, “Working Paper Series”

The next volume in the book series “European Studies in the Caucasus”, based on the 3rd Annual AESC Convention, will be edited by Oliver Reisner, possibly with the help of Gaga Gabrichidze to the extent that legal topics will be covered.

Publication in the Working Paper Series is a standing invitation to all AESC members. In the course of the 3rd Annual Convention a number of AESC members expressed an interest to consider this possibility.

10. Communication: new website, Facebook group, Newsletter, engaging “AESC juniors”

The General Assembly welcomed the new website. But in the discussion it was criticized that AESC was not communicating its events, particularly the Convention proceedings, via media that would be able to reach students, in particular by using Instagram stories or via Twitter. Berfin Ezgi Ekinci proposed to work along with Eka Oniani on disseminating the subject matters of the AESC deliberations. This proposal was unanimously accepted. Another proposal to be considered was using LinkedIn to have conference attendance easily integrated into individual resumes.

11. Election of the AESC Management Board

The AESC President explained that in the current version of the Statute there is no rule that defines the term of the Management Board. By general consent it had hitherto be assumed that the Management Board’s term would be one year between the general assembly meetings usually held in April. This was widely held as being too short, given the international practice of electing a management board for two years. It was therefore proposed to add the following sentence at the end of para 7.1. of the AESC Statute:

“The duration of the Management Board’s term is two years. This rule will take effect with the elections to be held in April 2020.”

At the same time the question was put to the General Assembly whether the term of the current Board shall be extended by one year until the April 2020 election. On this question, there were three votes in favour, five abstentions and zero votes against. The proposal was therefore adopted.

12. Miscellaneous

There were no items suggested for discussion under “Miscellaneous”.

The 3rd AESC General Assembly closed at 18:20.