

AVA-BERLIN, ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

DECEMBER 5, 2024 - HIGHLIGHTS

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

1. Our last Annual Business Meeting was held on December 17, 2023 via Zoom.
2. The following Executive Committee officers were re-elected: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair); PAM SELWYN (vice chair); ALAN BENSON (treasurer); JANE HARTMANN (assistant treasurer); ISABEL COLE, JON WOLFE, and CAROLYN PRESCOTT (associates).
3. ANN WERTHEIMER continued as mailing list administrator and PAM SELWYN as mailing list administrator backup.
4. JON WOLFE continued as our web master.
5. CAROLYN PRESCOTT took care of our web site at avaberlin.org.
6. ANN WERTHEIMER continued as liaison to the United for Peace and Justice coalition, which we joined in 2006. As a local group with no employees, AVA-Berlin pays \$50 dues a year to UfPJ. See <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/member-groups/> and scroll down to UfPJ International Member Groups.
7. The dues for full membership with voting rights in AVA-Berlin are still €30 per year, or a self-assessed smaller amount. See www.avaberlin.org and then click on MEMBERSHIP for details. ALAN BENSON, with JANE HARTMANN as backup, kept dues records, answered questions, and wrote reminders.

But for the new year: We decided that because we had sufficient money in the bank and, at the same time, had few expenses, everyone who paid AVA dues for 2023 WILL NOT have to pay dues for 2024. But if you didn't pay dues for 2023, you need to catch up.

Annual dues for membership in American Voices Abroad Berlin is €30. Actually, you can be on our mailing list without paying anything, ever. But if you want to show your appreciation for what our group does here in Berlin, please pay your 30 euros or a self-assessed smaller amount. All members-in-good-standing will have the right to vote at the December business meeting in December 2024. (See item 7 above.)

8. We decided that our Stammtische would usually be in person but that we would try to have 2 or 3 via Zoom this year. We have kept to the two Stammtisch guidelines recommended by DOUG HILLMER: First we go around the “room” and give everyone 1-2 minutes just to say what's on their minds. This can be about the political or social issues of the day, or someone can just mention something personal. This precedes the actual Stammtisch discussion and gives everyone a chance to be heard early on. We just listen to each other to see what people are interested in or concerned about. Of course, during this first part of the meeting a topic may emerge. Then, during the Stammtisch discussion itself, if there is a back and forth conversation between two people, they should “self-regulate” their discussion after three or four exchanges by one or both saying that it is time to “yield the floor” to others. If nobody wants the floor, then the back-and-forth can continue. PAM SELWYN moderates when necessary.

9. On November 7, two days after the elections, AVA held its regular first Thursday Stammtisch via Zoom. We had a big crowd, including AVAers from Michigan, Maryland, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Texas, as well as from Stuttgart, Heidelberg, and Hamburg. Of course, most of us were here in Berlin. We discussed what happened, why, and what now. Although no one seemed really surprised, as in 2016, most of us were still shocked.

OUR AVA-BERLIN ACTIVITIES

1. In January, American Voices Abroad Berlin signed on to the list of civil society groups that planned to join the Hand-in-Hand demonstration on

Saturday, February 3, 13:00, at the Bundestag (Reichtagsgebäude). We joined the firewall against the radical right! (See directly below.)

*Für Solidarität und Respekt, gegen Hass und Hetze
Für Gerechtigkeit und Toleranz, gegen Spaltung
Für eine Gesellschaft, die niemanden zurücklässt,
für Menschenwürde, gegen Ausgrenzung*

*Für Selbstbestimmung und Humanität, Menschenrechte für Alle, gegen
Rassismus, Antisemitismus und andere Formen gruppenbezogener
Menschenfeindlichkeit*

2. In February, we advertised the global Democratic primary in Berlin, which took place on March 5th and 10th at CIEE in Kreuzberg.
3. On June 8, AVA joined the demonstration at the Siegessäule against the German radical right. That was a Saturday, the day before the European elections. Because this was a very big demonstration, we made no attempt to meet at a central point. *Auch in der Hauptstadt sagen wir laut und deutlich: Rechtsextremismus stoppen – Demokratie verteidigen!*
4. In September, AVA signed this We Act petition (<https://weact.campact.de/petitions/rechtsstaatlichkeit-und-menschenrechte-verteidigen>) directed to Bundesinnenministerin Nancy Faeser, Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz, and all democratic parties in the Bundestag: “Rechtsstaatlichkeit und Menschenrechte verteidigen.” Then click on Erstunterzeichner*innen to see our name.
5. We bought get-out-the-vote ads in The Berliner magazine (formerly the Ex-Berliner and/or Exberliner). As they say, they finally ditched their toxic ex!
6. Also in September, AVA was asked by Democrats Abroad Hamburg/Northern Germany to send a speaker to their upcoming Defend Democracy rally. So on Sunday, September 22, ANN WERTHEIMER went to Hamburg to deliver a short speech at the Rathausmarkt, the large plaza in front of the Hamburg city hall. You can read the speech on the avaberlin.org web site.

The organizers wanted the speech to include a description of AVA plus a bit in German, just in case. Also, because it was sponsored by the Democrats, no one was allowed to talk about democracy in Germany. Such references are

prohibited by the Democratic Party because it is seen as interference in the politics of the host country.

By the way, the Democrats from Hamburg/Northern Germany, which includes Lübeck and Bremen, did not hear about us from the Democrats in Berlin, but had met some AVAers at a Berlin rally against the radical right.

7. AVA was asked to speak about the U.S. elections at the Zonta club in Dahlem <https://www.zonta.org/>. Since we always say yes, we accepted. KARA KRULL and ANN WERTHEIMER went to their dinner, scheduled coincidentally on Election Day, to explain what they wanted to know and to answer questions. It was educational for them and us.

OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Although AVA-Berlin has no affiliation with any political party in the U.S. or in Germany, we are always happy to explore our common interests with the Berlin chapter of Democrats Abroad as well as with German groups like Campact.
2. We are always pleased to publicize your own films, exhibitions, publications, and performances. Just send the information to wertheim@zedat.fu-berlin.de.
3. AVA is always happy to announce political events around town, especially if they are in English and/or are not widely publicized.
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