No smoke, no mirrors

No smoke, no mirrors; White breathes life into IFJâ€™s Code of Conduct

by John Chapman

Speaking at the â€œEU Actors: How to get Media Visibility?â€• event in Brussels, IFJ General Secretary Aidan White defined a simple objective - he wanted to help journalists do a decent job.

That was the reason for the Code of Conduct, launched by the IFJ in 2004, along with the NUJ Brussels branch and API among others. White highlighted a basic conflict of interest â€" organisations wanted journalists to deliver good stories while the hacks respected openness and honesty. The problems arrived when organisations tried to con journalists into writing those good news pieces.

White also defined â€œprotection of sourcesâ€• as being of vital importance to effective journalism and reminded his audience of the need for a clear distinction between editorial and advertising content in all publications. With a nod to freelancers, White suggested they should be able to officially request financial assistance in order to follow the European stories â€" but all he saw there was â€œsmoke and mirrorsâ€• that encouraged secretive activity.

The Euractiv poll showed that 84% of journalists wanted to get involved in in-depth and investigative journalism. White saw very little of that and he was backed by APIâ€™s Michael Stabenow. The AEJâ€™s David Haworth went further, saying that a defining trait of the Brussels media was a complete lack of such activities.

Earlier CEFICâ€™s Daniel Verbist had called for all accredited journalists in Brussels to be publicly listed. White backed that call, as it was impossible for journalists to demand transparency if they were not willing to be named.

The event was organised by Euractiv and held in Scotland House, Brussels, on October 24 2006.