**IAMCR Conference Closing Session Celebrating IAMCR 60th Anniversary Cartagena (Colombia), 20 July 2017**

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Good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to be here today to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the IAMCR. Good to be part of this fantastic and vibrant organization...

Before I address the challenges of the field, I would like to take this opportunity to pay my tribute to Professor Denis McQuail who passed away so recently. Denis McQuail was an outstanding scholar and his importance in our field cannot be overstated. But for many of us in this room, he was the most kind and generous friend. He will be profoundly missed.

So, what are the biggest challenges of the media and communication field in Europe today? It is obviously very difficult to generalize as Europe integrates different traditions and realities, and Europe itself faces a number of crises at the moment. But I will try to address five overarching challenges and concerns:

First one is academic freedom. Academic freedom is probably the most pressing challenge we must deal with. Despite the national and international legal frames and promises of autonomy in university documents, academic freedom is a difficult ongoing struggle. In some European countries the absence of academic freedom is visible and the consequences are too obvious (threats, loss of jobs, etc.). In other countries, more subtle mechanisms are in place: academic freedom is constrained by funding mechanisms which tend to fund short-term instrumental research and by the power of companies who play a growing role in university decisions.

So, it is up to us to make sure that the fundamental values of academic freedom are high in our agenda...it should remain a major concern for all of us.

A second challenge I would like to put forward is the lack of clarity of the media and communication field within the wider context of other study areas and disciplines. Media and communication studies have expanded enormously in Europe over the last decades, but this is a field without a core identity.

The multiple identities express the richness of the field but – at the same time – raise problems too. Without a clearer set of research domains, theories and methods, this vast field is permanently under pressure from other disciplines in many countries.

Obviously I am not arguing for the narrowing down of our research area but I am defending a continuous clarification of what we are about.

I believe that communication sciences must collaborate, side by side, with other sciences but we should not be competing for the same funds or status. Compartmentalized science is not a solution but we need to address the frontiers of our subject area and expand a constructive and reciprocal dialogue with other disciplines.

The third challenge: Face and fight the European Union research policy that prioritises 'hard sciences' and the economic potential they might bring. Most universities in Europe are under-funded and massive regional R&D programmes such as Horizon 2020 are not responding to European fundamental challenges such as social inequalities, migration, xenophobia....

Social sciences in general and media and communication in particular were not properly inscribed in the design of Horizon 2020 and its implementation shows that our research is marginal. There are a few exceptions (big data, security, personalization of information) but, in general, the work developed by communication scholars is not in line with the European Union logics and it has not been recognized for financing.

This is bound to have consequences for the affirmation of the field.

I think that national subject associations, regional associations, and the IAMCR, of course, should be more involved in the setting up of future research programmes.

In one word: we need more efficient lobbying...

The fourth challenge I would like to put forward is the critical relation between research and teaching. This articulation is fundamental but not enough attention has been paid to it. Teaching has actually been devalued as universities became more and more competitive. Universities are now focused on research because it is mostly research that brings reputation and success in the evaluation processes and rankings (the 'metrics').

Universities have become places of fierce competition and students are no longer 'the primary' reason for their existence. I see this as a major problem as we, academics, must ensure that the next generations get the very best possible training so they develop their own research and work for the common good with the best possible tools.

Last but certainly not least, the fifth point I would like to make is the ethical challenge. All research should, in different ways, promote (not just defend but promote) fundamental human values, solidarity and participation. This doesn't mean that all research must be fundamental or critical.

Applied and administrative research must also inscribe these fundamental human values. This is possible, even if not easy. In times of ferocious individualism and institutional competition, it takes courage to step back and reflect about the reasons why we are actually developing a particular project. However, if we develop the systematic capacity to interrogate our options, ethical choices will be made…

Research is not just about papers, products, services and jobs. Meaningful research is also about empowering our communities to live fulfilling lives.

Just a final note to congratulate all IAMCR members for this 60th anniversary: May we celebrate many more!

Thank you all for making this a truly special moment. Thank you.