

Dear Mrs Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’,

Dear professors and colleagues from the Faculty

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- Vilnius University

 - University of Bucharest

 - University of Saint Cyril and Methodius

 - University of Nis

 - University of Klagenfurt

 - Batumi State University

 - Daugavpils University

Dear colleagues from the Bulgarian media

Dear participants of the conference ‘Communication and Media in the 21st century: educational and professional challenges’

Dear students

(I hope I didn’t forget anybody…)

As the Director of the European Journalism Training Association, I’m very honoured to be one of the welcoming speakers at the 70th anniversary of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University and at the opening of the international jubilee conference to celebrate this.

70 years of Journalism education in Sofia University: what an achievement!!

I want to sincerely congratulate all the staff who was responsible for the teaching and coaching of many, many generations of journalists and communication experts in Bulgaria.

I can’t even start to sum up the importance and diversity of all historical events and evolutions this faculty went through during 70 years of existence.

I can imagine concretely though the numerous alumni, staff and managers on retirement, the current professors and lecturers, the current students, the projects and events your faculty participated in and organised, …

The result of this sum is certainly fabulous and you all should be very proud on this.

I wasn’t invited to do complex calculations, I’m here to represent the European Journalism Training Association and to illustrate the important international role the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University has played in this association and beyond.

The European Journalism Training Association was established in Brussels in 1990 and groups about 80 journalism centres, schools and universities from about 30 countries across Europe.

We work together to improve journalism education in Europe, enabling members to collaborate on exchanges and teaching, research and projects, and meet regularly to exchange ideas and information.

All members of the European Journalism Training Association educate their students from the principle that journalists should serve the public by:

* providing an insight into political, economic, socio-cultural conditions,
* stimulating and strengthening democracy at all levels,
* stimulating and strengthening personal and institutional accountability,
* stimulating and strengthening an open and respectful public conversation,
* strengthening the possibilities for citizens to make choices in societal and personal contexts.

We feel it’s very important to connect the next generation of journalists, and with all our members we hope to work together towards a strong and constructive journalistic future.

As such, it might be great for the other universities in this jubilee conference to consider membership in our important and necessary association.

Sofia University has been a loyal and supportive EJTA member since 1998 and organized the EJTA Annual General Meeting in 2009, in a very efficient and effective way.. Not coincidentally that was the time when we introduced our Mobility Catalogue project with which we hope to facilitate European Journalism students to find international exchange programmes to support their academic growth.

Students from Sofia University did do their exchange semesters in EJTA members’ programmes with great success; my university AP in Antwerp being one of them. We’re always very happy to meet your zealous and intelligent students.

Sofia University kept on being a very active member in the association. One of you professors, Mrs Manuela Manliherova, was a Board member from 2010 until 2014 and she was responsible for the follow-up of research projects and the representation of the Eastern European members.

Together with her students and colleagues, professor Manliherova also takes part in ‘big’ EJTA projects such as the pan-European fact-checking project EUfactcheck, the EC project on European cohesion policy COPE and soon in the new EJTA project on Teaching Inclusive Journalism. Apart from that, your staff and students also participate in other, smaller European projects, born in the cradle of EJTA, such as the radio project ‘Europe on Air’.

Without any doubt I can compliment your faculty and say it’s performing really well on the international level and I certainly wish for many more years of your positive involvement and cooperation. I wouldn’t go for less than another 70 years of this.

Unfortunately, even in celebration speeches, we cannot deny reality or ignore the elephant in the room. I have so often quoted the beginning lines of Charles Dickens’ ‘Tale of Two Cities’, but here and now they really seem at place…

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”*

Indeed, we’re living in an era with major global problems and challenges: difficult political balances, atrocious wars, inequality and climate disasters. And yes, it’s always easier to sum up the problems than to come up with solutions. Still, I’m convinced there is a role for future journalists and communication experts to work on solutions in a sustainable way together with society.

Even when media, journalism and communication platforms are facing huge crises:

- of low trust in mainstream media

- the threats of polarisation

- false news and propaganda

- digital wars on social media

- the news avoidance by a large part from the public

- the neoliberal me-culture

- the overwhelming capitalist economy with result the collapse of media business models

- the rise of totalitarian and extreme regimes

- the loss of press freedom in many countries,

I’m still convinced we can try to tackle these challenges if we keep on educating the future generation of journalists and media producers, helping them:

- find trustworthy sources

- find perspectives and look at facts from different, nuanced angles

- search for possible solutions and not only focus on problems

- report on and communicate about long-term evolutions in a in-depth way and not only focus on the delusion of the day and 24/7 breaking news

- gain digital media wisdom

- reach out to ALL diverse groups in society

- be audience oriented and connect WITH the public.

When I see the intriguing programme of this conference dealing with the educational and professional challenges for communication and media in the 21st century, I notice many of these subjects are being discussed, which makes me quite reassured about the future of journalists and communication experts in Bulgaria.

Journalism education will become more and more necessary in the complex years and decades to come and we should NOT go for more quantity, but for more quality and deepening.

This will be a huge but wonderful task for all of us, and I’m sure with the cross-national cooperation between EJTA members and the input form Sofia University and its international partners we’ll be able to take a big step towards a better and more constructive future, both for media producers and media consumers.

Maybe the most important challenge for journalism and journalism education in the 21st century is not to stay in business, but to stay in journalism.

I’d like to congratulate the colleagues from Sofia University once more and wish the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication all the best for the following 70 years and more, and to all of you: a constructive and inspiring conference.



Nadia Vissers Director EJTA 27 October 2022