LETTER FROM BARCELONA…

…FOR PROMOTING A FUTURE WITH A TRUTHFUL AND TRACEABLE EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEM

Europe faces a historic inflexion: it can either lose its international prominence or lead the way towards a fairer communication system. In an era of exponential changes where technological progress rapidly transforms society, we must consider future actions.

From Barcelona, led by the *Chair in Futures of Communication* at Pompeu Fabra University, this letter is addressed to the citizens, authorities, business, and academic fabric of Europe, appealing for a collective commitment. We not only aspire to anticipate the future of communication, but to actively define it. This call to action seeks to achieve a truthful, human, and high-quality communicative system, aligned with the interests and plurality of the citizenry.

Europe must have a significant role in the global field of communication and technology. The communication system, in its broadest sense, including its actors (media, creators, legislators), different themes (entertainment, information, dissemination, advertising), and platforms (videogames, networks, broadcasting…), is already one of the major global economic drivers worldwide. Europe must maintain its foundational values in this evolving communicative scenario.

Three emerging technological trends mark the current evolution of communication:

- Generative and predictive artificial intelligence
- Immersive and spatial computing technologies
- Blockchain for traceability and verification.

These technologies impact the three levels of the communication process: content creation and manipulation; content production and quality; and content consumption and its interaction with people. The scope of this technological transition goes beyond mere automation or efficiency; it becomes an actively shaping agent of social and cultural dynamics.

The attitude towards this situation should be open, questioning, and proactive, distanced from fear-mongering discourses and excessive techno-optimism. Regulation must be founded on ethical and democratic principles, but regulation alone is insufficient. Europe, its companies, its universities must be active in creating, producing, and distributing technology, services, and content for new platforms.

We need a rigorous and ongoing ethical dialogue that reconciles innovation with human rights and social justice. This technology should only consider the interests and expectations of people.

Therefore, we call for:

1. **A proactive Europe**. European authorities should designate the field of communication and its technology as a strategic sector of the economy and make it central to the actions of institutions. It must be done from a sustainable perspective and in line with the objectives of sustainable development.
2. **Promote a future mindset in the institutions**. Institutions and decision-making agents should apply a future mindset to direct themselves to the future through the establishment of scenarios.
3. **A reduction of the digital divide**. An acceleration of scientific and technological literacy is needed across society, irrespective of age, to reduce the digital divide and precarity.
4. **A new social contract**. Measures should be considered to redistribute the benefits generated by new technologies in order to reduce economic, social, and digital inequalities.
5. **Authorship verification**. To study the implementation of mechanisms to verify the origin, ownership, and rights of texts, sounds, and still and moving images, guaranteed by independent public authorities.
6. **Promote responsibility and accountability in the digital sphere.** To limit anonymity in the digital space, making everyone, especially major players, accountable for what they say, write, and distribute.
7. **Citizen ownership of data**. To ensure that citizens own their data and their privacy.
8. **Moving towards technological sovereignty**. Europe should initiate ambitious research and technological development plans in the strategic field of communication and promote the formation of hubs and laboratories.
9. **Transparency in data use**. To facilitate access to data used for training artificial intelligence models and allow their auditing and monitoring, while ensuring the quality of this data to achieve fair and safe models.
10. **Algorithmic Transparency**. There should be awareness of biases throughout the technological development process and avoidance of discriminatory or anti-democratic impact in predictive and language generation algorithms. To combat the use of algorithms that exploit human cognitive biases, foster polarization, and hinder informed decision making by citizens.
11. **A more intensified study of psychological impacts on children and young people and promote mental health prevention**. To analyze the psychological effects that the technological transition may have on the population, with a focus on children and youth. Establish mechanisms for prevention and care.
12. **The creation of libraries of quality content**. European institutions should ensure the creation and updating of reserves of high-quality digital content and facilitate access to educational and training resources across all levels.
13. **Mechanisms to restore trust**. To establish mechanisms that safeguard the role of journalism and the media as truthful guarantors of content and holders of public trust.

14. **Business promotion**. To facilitate financial and institutional support to companies that aim to contribute to strengthening the strategic field of communication.
15. **Nurturing of all languages and dialectal variants**. Despite the potential of new communication tools to perform automatic text and sound translation and simplify universal communication, this advance should not detract from the heritage represented by different languages and dialectal variants spoken in the world.

Finally, to effectively realize these aspirations, we PROPOSE that the European community institutions create a "European Institute for the Futures in Communication". A laboratory of ideas and experimentation that would function as a bridge between industry, academia, and institutions, making Europe a beacon of the 21st-century communication ecosystem.

This center should become a space for technological experimentation in communication; a hub for professional residencies involving people across Europe, fostering research on topics that directly impact their daily experiences; a forum for training media and sector company leaders building on cutting-edge science; an entity for consultation to recommend regulatory policies and actions to be undertaken at the continental level. With European intelligence that nourishes the entire ecosystem.

The tasks to be undertaken by this Institute include:

- Promoting research on the best use of technological innovation in the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of communication services.
- Responding with guarantees to the concerns of professionals and companies about the transformations occurring in the sector.
- Stimulating applied research to anticipate the economic models that will sustain communicative services in the future.
- Driving an educational change in universities and teaching centers with future professional models in mind.
- Identify new areas for public action that may arise as a result of technological transition and social transformation, and formulate the most suitable proposals for regulation, co-regulation, or self-regulation.

The *Letter from Barcelona* is not just a declaration but a call to action. It is time for Europe to reclaim its place in the global panorama of communication and technology, balancing innovation with humanism, and discovering how artificial intelligence, immersive technologies and blockchain can best empower human intelligence.

Barcelona wants to play a role in this change, serving the people. We have a lot at stake as a society.

The time to act is now.

Barcelona, 24th November 2023