



MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY OF ARMENIA

CODE OF ETHICS OF ARMENIAN MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

We, representatives of mass communication media,

- ✓ Emphasizing the right of the public to be informed and the duty of the media to inform,
- ✓ Recognizing the necessity of following the rules of professional and ethical standards and the need for consolidation around them, at the same time acknowledging journalists' right of moral choice,
- ✓ Pointing out the necessity of safeguarding editorial independence and not restraining journalists by any private interests, contradicting public interests,
- ✓ Recognizing that the media and journalists are accountable to their audience and to each other,
- ✓ Stating that a single set of rules cannot be defined for all cases, but common standards of professional journalism can be respected,

have adopted the following principles and obligations arising from them.

1. Accuracy and Impartiality

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

1.1. Prior to publishing, to check the accuracy of information from any source, not to conceal or distort facts, and not to publish obviously false information;

1.2. Clearly notify the audience about the cases when the editorial office received information of public significance, but has been unable to verify the facts after employing all the reasonable measures;

1.3. To demonstrate a responsible approach to the dissemination of information taken from social networks or new media, to be sure to mention whether it is verified, reliable, or subject to further verification;

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1.4. To clearly distinguish facts and information from opinion, comment and analysis;

1.5. To rely on accurate facts and trustworthy information when making analysis and comments;

1.6. To ensure that the reports, photo, video and audio materials correspond to the reality, the headlines derive from the content of the material, citations are not used outside of context, and correspondence of the personal data of ordinary citizens with public figures is not abused;

1.7. Not to distort the content of photo or video materials, to mention about technical tricks in photos and video materials if any.

2. Integrity in Relations with Sources of Information

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

2.1. To the extent possible, specify the sources of information;

2.2. To the extent possible, avoid using confidential sources of information and, before promising to keep the source of information confidential, always justify that decision. However, if the provision of information is conditioned upon keeping the source confidential, never to disclose the source;

2.3. To avoid the use of covert and secret methods of obtaining information, except when traditional open methods do not ensure receipt of information of public interest. The need for such methods must be explained and justified in the actual publication;

2.4. To respect the copyright, to preclude plagiarism, and to mention the sources whenever quoting or reprinting;

2.5. Not to abuse the credulity of persons who do not have experience of interaction with media and journalists;

2.6. To respect rights of interviewee in regard to the text of the interview, as its coauthor.

3. Editorial Independence

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

3.1. To draw a clear line between journalistic materials and advertisement: each publication which has been paid for must have a relevant notice about it; appropriate labeling should be given to materials from PR services and organizations;

3.2. To give no advantage to advertisers and sponsors in editorial pieces;

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3.3. To resist pressure by advertisers, sponsors, and media owners aimed at influencing the coverage of events. Whenever this sort of pressure threatens to become a public challenge, inform the public about the situation, calling for the support of journalists and the community;

3.4. To refuse payments, gifts, awards, compensations, free holidays and other benefits promised in return to publishing or not publishing information, contradicting professional independence, compromising journalist's reputation and resulting in a loss of trust towards the media;

3.5. Set rules of conduct in social networks for the editorial staff and follow the compliance with thereof. These rules, in particular, should contain at least the following:

3.5.1. Not to disseminate statements or write posts on social networks that may be perceived as manifestations of racial, gender, religious, political or other discrimination. This also refers to posting photos and videos;

3.5.2. If a post on a social network may call into question the professional objectivity or integrity, it is advisable to refrain from publishing it;

3.5.3. If a journalist covers an area, he/she should not be a member of a public initiative or a group that defends the specific interests of this area. The engagement in a group can only be justified by the purpose of being aware of what is happening;

3.5.4. It must always be kept in mind that the participation in social media campaigns can lead to a conflict of interest;

3.5.5. To use personally identifiable information on social media;

3.5.6. To moderate comments on publications on social network pages of media, if possible deleting entries of an openly offensive nature containing hate speech, calls to violence or other actions prohibited by law;

3.5.7. If the media has not noticed in the comments entries of an openly offensive nature containing hate speech or calls for violence, but the person to whom such entries were addressed notified the editorial staff about that, then upon notification it is necessary to delete or close such entries within a reasonable time.

4. Respect for Privacy and Other Human Rights

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

4.1. To respect and protect the human right to private life, including respect to personal and family life, residence, property, health condition, correspondence. Only public interest or protection thereof can justify publication of information regarding the privacy of high rank officials, public figures, and individuals aspiring to power or public attention;

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4.2. In case of a conflict between the freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights, the media independently decides what to give preference to, and bears responsibility for its decision;

4.3. To be especially tactful when the sources of information or the heroes of publications are children or minors. Be careful when disclosing the identity of juvenile detainees, defendants, convicts and victims of sexual crimes;

4.4. When preparing materials concerning/involving children follow the Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Reporting on Children, developed by UNICEF media group;

4.5. Obtain permission from the child and his/her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. During the interview do not harm to any child, do not reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events. Do not make him/her saying or doing things merely aimed at getting a strong image or impressive reportage;

4.6. To be tactful when collecting information, broadcasting video or audio materials, publishing interviews or photos of people with severe health issues, persons who committed/attempted suicide or suffered tragedy and sorrow;

4.7. To respect the presumption of innocence: when publishing the names of crime suspects before the trial, to consider the public need for doing so - strike a balance between the presumption of innocence, the right of crime suspects to fair trial, and the right of the public to be informed.

5. Respect for Representatives of Different Groups and for Universal Values

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

5.1. To avoid prejudice against people on the ground of their race, sex, age, religion, nationality, geographic origin, sexual orientation, physical handicap, external look or social status;

5.2. Not to promote in any way ethnic or religious hatred and intolerance, or any discrimination on political, social, sexual, and language grounds, exclude hate speech;

5.3. Not to advocate pornography, violence, war, in any form; not to deny genocide and crimes against humanity;

5.4. To be careful when disseminating information about terrorist acts, to rule out content and reports that may instill sympathy towards terrorists, to treat witnesses of

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events as sources of information delicately, and avoid disclosing the identity of relatives or friends of hostages and possible victims without their consent.

6. Integrity in Relations with the Public

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

- 6.1.** To encourage free exchange of opinions, regardless of any differences between those opinions and the editorial views;
- 6.2.** To be ready to meet with persons or representatives of organizations who feel offended or defamed by a certain publication, and provide an opportunity of response for all those against who criticism and accusations have been made in the publications;
- 6.3.** To admit mistakes and to be ready to correct them;
- 6.4.** To encourage the public to express critical opinions about media and to be ready for a public discourse on matters of journalistic ethics.
- 6.5** When creating content using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, to clearly indicate the AI models, specifying the nature of algorithms they employ and their potential shortcomings.
- 6.6.** To scrutinize the final media content and fix any errors or ethical violations caused by AI usage before it is published.
- 6.7.** When using artificial intelligence tools, to exclude the disclosure of anonymous sources and sensitive personal data.
- 6.8.** To follow as much as possible international practices of ethical regulations in the AI sector and novelties, and apply them when creating media content.

7. Integrity in Covering Elections and Referendums

This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:

- 7.1.** To be tolerant in respect of all parties and candidates;
- 7.2.** Not to insult the candidate personally and not to ridicule a candidate's views and opinions;
- 7.3.** Not to publish materials containing defamation, blackmail, and threats aimed at candidates;

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7.4. To give all candidates equal possibilities for presenting their platforms and views in the media, and to apply single tariffs when allocating paid space or air time in media;

7.5. Not to publish materials containing hidden political advertising, and to separate materials presented for (free or paid) publication by groups supporting any party or candidate or produced at their request from other materials, or to make mention about it;

7.6. Broadcast media must refrain from supporting any specific candidate or party, and the print and online media must provide clear advance announcement of their intent to do so.

We, the representatives of mass communication media that have signed this Code of Ethics, hereby acknowledge the authority of the Media Ethics Observatory elected by us to examine the conformity of our actions and publications to the provisions of this Code. We declare our willingness to publish in our media the specific parts extracted from the Media Ethics Observatory judgments that relate to violations of the Code, without adding any editorial remarks. We also commit to notifying MEO by providing a link to the particular publication.

Adopted on March 10, 2007 at the meeting of the heads of media that joined the self-regulation initiative and representatives of journalistic associations.

The current edition of the Code was adopted on June 25, 2023 at the meeting of representatives of the media that signed the Code.