



MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY OF ARMENIA

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JUDGMENT OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the complaint of the Commission on Television and Radio against a number of remarks made by host Gnel Sargsyan during “FreeNews” TV Company’s March 25, 2025 issue of “Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan” program

A. FACTS

1. On March 28, 2025, Media Ethics Observatory was approached by the Commission on Television and Radio (CTR). Referring to the transcript of “FreeNews” TV Company’s “Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan” broadcast on March 25, 2025 (between 18:19:11 and 18:27:21), the CTR requested MEO to provide its position on the matter. The complainant pointed out the fact that the program had been broadcast during the pre-election campaign period for the Gyumri Council of Elders elections, set to be held on March 30, 2025.

2. Upon reviewing the submitted transcript, MEO identified a number of remarks and formulations that may have caught the complainant’s attention and could be considered problematic from the perspective of journalistic ethics. These include, for example, the following:

“The whole crowd of criminal forces has surfaced, pushing their criminal subcultures. And that guy? He dares to say that whoever votes for him is a Turk, whoever votes for him is... Who do you think you are? You don't care about the Constitution: I'm saying that because, according to the Constitution, every citizen has the right to their own opinion—just open and read it.”

“...Your whole political team - from top to bottom - from Serzh and Kocharyan all the way down to your myrmidons... If you had bothered to read the Constitution at least once or had the slightest bit of respect for the Constitution, you wouldn't be addressing citizens this way. What does that even mean – ‘Whoever votes for this one or that one is a Turk.’ Should we start saying ‘Whoever votes for you is a Turk’? And believe me, we’ve got plenty of evidence that there are Turks among you, and Sarik was saying that... By the way, let me say something to Sarik too: “When you’ve started saying something, say the whole thing. What’s the point of saying ‘the lead candidate of one of the political forces holds a Turkish residence card, but I won’t mention names for now.’ Explain this to me—if that can impact the elections, how can you just not say it? Why mislead people like this? People might go and vote for that person blindly. What are they supposed to do? They’ve got no clue.”

B. ETHICAL NORMS

I. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

... editors and journalists are obligated:

- 1.4. to clearly distinguish facts and information from opinion, comment and analysis;
- 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;
- 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;
- 7.6. 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.

II. MEO Regulations

4.6. In relation to ethical issues concerning the activities of audiovisual media service providers, the Commission on Television and Radio (according to the RA Law "On Audiovisual Media") shall be recognized as an appropriate applicant, being the state body regulating the sphere, which is also authorized to monitor the observance of professional ethics norms by these media. The applications received from the CTR shall be reviewed in accordance with the existing procedure. In cases where the dispute concerns a TV or radio company that signed the Code, MEO shall issue a judgment, whereas in other cases an expert opinion or a statement shall be provided.

5.6. Members of the self-regulation initiative, in accordance with their obligation under the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, shall publish the specific parts extracted from the Media Ethics Observatory judgments that relate to violations of the Code, without adding any editorial remarks. They also commit to notifying MEO by providing a link to the particular publication.

C. MEO JUDGMENT

Media Ethics Observatory,

- after reviewing the complaint of the Commission on Television and Radio regarding the problematic parts of the March 25, 2025 issue of "Freenews" TV Company's "Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan" program,
- taking into consideration MEO's May 18, 2024 Judgment regarding a similar complaint submitted by the same complainant concerning the same program aired by the same television company,

states the following:

- In the issue of "Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan" program, the host used sharp and critical language—consistent with the genre of the program—explicitly demonstrating a positive attitude towards one of the candidates running in the March 30 Gyumri local elections, while, in contrast, expressing a negative (critical) attitude towards representatives of other forces. Paragraph 7.6 of the Code of Ethics

of Armenian Media and Journalists mandates that all signatory **broadcast** media refrain from supporting any specific candidate or party during the pre-election period. “FreeNews” TV Company thus violated this requirement. Additionally, the broadcaster violated the provisions regarding tolerance towards candidates.

- Following its previous [Judgment](#) on a similar complaint regarding the same media program, MEO notes a certain change in the host's conduct: in particular, the level of aggressive tone and content bordering on hate speech has noticeably decreased, although in some cases, the use of harsh language directed at “opponents” still persists.

In light of the above, MEO urges “Freenews”:

- to refrain - especially during the pre-election period - from expressing positive or negative attitudes towards any of the candidates running in elections. In cases where preferences do exist, MEO calls on the media to properly communicate them to its audience and not to try to present a politically biased position as an impartial analysis.
- to ensure the absence of any manifestation of discrimination on ethnic or other grounds or the exploitation of stereotypes—even when reacting to the statements of others (*e.g.*, “...*Should we start saying ‘Whoever votes for you is a Turk?’ etc.*”). MEO also urges “Freenews” to refrain from increasing the amount of intolerance even when remotely expressing disagreement with political opponents during a political debate.

Media Ethics Observatory reminds that members of the Self-Regulation Initiative (with “FreeNews” TV Company among them), have committed to publishing the specific parts extracted from the Media Ethics Observatory judgments that relate to violations of the Code, without adding any editorial remarks. They have also agreed to notify MEO by providing a link to the particular publication.

***Adopted on May 13, 2025
by the following MEO composition:***

Gnel NALBANDYAN, Chief Editor of “Newmag” Publishing House

Boris NAVASARDIAN, Honorary President of Yerevan Press Club

Davit ALAVERDYAN, Chief Editor of “Mediamax” news agency

Vigen SARGSYAN, Chairman of the Commission on Professional Ethics of
Yerevan Press Club

Ruben BABAYAN, Director, Professor at Yerevan State Institute of Theatre
and Cinematography

Narineh AVETISYAN, Executive Director of Vanadzor “Lori” TV Company

Nouneh SARKISSIAN, Managing Director of Media Initiatives Center

Ashot MELIKYAN, Chairman of Committee to Protect Freedom of
Expression

[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 91 as of today. In its judgments MEO is guided by the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, adopted on March 10, 2007 and revised at the May 18, 2024 general meeting of the media that joined the self-regulation initiative.