

## **SELF-REGULATORY ETHICAL GUIDELINES**

By joining the Ethical Guidelines, we recognize and defend media freedom.

We declare that the most important tasks of the media are the following: the dissemination of information; the presentation of facts necessary for making informed voter, consumer and parental choices, among other topics; the promotion of free expression and the encouragement of a diversity of opinions; entertainment; and thereby the strengthening of society's self-awareness. To perform all these tasks, journalists need to be able to conduct their professional duty with freedom, without political or economic pressure, fear, or partiality. The signatories of these Ethical Guidelines declare that they acknowledge the obligation to disseminate accurate, fair, and factual information based on their best professional knowledge.

### **The rules of conscientious dissemination of information**

The journalist performs his or her job:

- accurately, with a conviction of the truthfulness of the content published;
- impartially, using equal standards to report on actors and cases;
- without confusing personal conviction with facts, separating opinion from news genres;
- fairly, respecting the private sphere, human dignity and rights;
- courageously, without compromise, and undeterred by adverse pressure or threats;
- free from manipulation, presenting events and processes rather than influencing them;
- honourably, without trading information, without abusing the power of the public, and avoiding conflicts of interest;
- by serving the interests of the audience, without being influenced by other interests, and acting in the pursuit of clarity.

### **The rules of obtaining information and treating sources**

The source of information must be disclosed to the audience in a form either connected to a person or an institution, or indirectly, referring to the nature of the source. One must strive to openly reveal the sources, although anonymity is possible if the information cannot be otherwise obtained (see below for detailed rules). The source reference must record all significant factors influencing the information.

Journalists must behave as journalists under all circumstances. Therefore, the journalists need to inform the source as to why they need the information, when, and in what format this information is expected to be published. It is the responsibility of the journalist to inform his or her source of these rules. The only exception can be if the journalist cannot fulfil the requirement of conscientious dissemination of information in any other way, and the importance of the case involved justifies the exception.

Journalists shall not 'do business' with information, cannot promise or accept unjust financial or other advantages, and shall not provide confidential information in exchange for information. Journalists shall not abuse the power of the public by extorting information from a person against a promise of hiding other information.

The journalist will do everything to become informed of data, decisions, and documents of public interest through official channels, complying with the provisions of effective media content laws on the obligation to inform, or the laws on the publishing of public-interest data. At the same time, if this official way fails, they are right to obtain the information through informal channels.

The journalist shall not reveal the identity of his or her source if such a promise was made, except if a court or other authority entitled by law obliges the journalist to do so. But even in such a situation the journalist must strive to avoid doing so by legal means.

The journalist and the interviewee consider the interview as a conversation for public disclosure, not as a private talk. The journalist renders the interviewee's words based on the accurate message of the interviewee, which does not necessarily mean a verbatim presentation. The journalist may only

provide an opportunity to check the accuracy of the interview, but this does not allow any substantial posterior modification.

### **Conflict of interest**

The journalist must avoid topics, contact sources, and information obtained from sources which inhibit the obtaining and processing of information in an unbiased manner (due to personal connection, bias, or interest). The journalist can undertake an assignment only if it does not raise a conflict of interest, or its semblance, working at the media outlet. The journalist cannot accept a job or other assignment, for financial compensation or not, from an organization, company, or person which might be the subject of the journalist's report. Based on editorial discretion, the nature of the relationship must be indicated to the audience when some kind of personal or institutional conflict of interest would inevitably influence the published material.

The journalist cannot accept tokens of greater value than PR gifts, gifts, or other advantages (especially not, or not exclusively, travel of a professional nature, invitations to a dinner or a lunch of disproportionate value, extraordinary administration, special office treatment, 'journalist discounts') from an organization, company, or person, which would be a subject within a report. When choosing and sponsoring the representative goals and measures emerging during the work, the journalist proceeds according to the rules of reasonableness and decency, but obeys the principles detailed above.

The journalist can accept neither a temporary, nor a permanent income, nor an active role within organizations, parties, companies, in so far as this engagement has any connection with the topics covered by the journalist. This rule is valid in the case of taking or undertaking public offices, or similar commissions.

The journalist, obtaining confidential information during his or her work (particularly financial, economic, commercial, and other pieces of information convertible to personal profit) cannot trade it to his or her personal advantage, and cannot pass the information to a third party before disclosing the information to the public.

The journalist cannot participate in competitions, contests, or be awarded prizes, which are adjudicated by persons/organizations/companies covered regularly during his or her work. It is not a reason for exclusion if the supporters, announcers of the prizes are such organizations, but an autonomous, professional jury should be responsible for evaluating the competitions, or awarding the prizes.

The journalist cannot provide or promise publicity or special evaluation, or defend anyone in exchange for information. Similarly, the journalist should accept neither financial, nor other types of advantage in exchange for publishing or withholding information.

Doing his or her job, the journalist is obliged to communicate according to the norms of social interaction.

### **Editorial independence, integrity, contact with the media organization**

An editorial board is typically a part of a media organization with legitimate business aims. As an employee of the organization, the journalist's job is to promote the achievement of the business aims of the organization, but this aim cannot confront the responsibility originating from the social role of journalism and the ethical traditions and rules reflecting it. Therefore, it is desirable that media companies recognize the editorial boards' integrity and content independence, and the editorial boards and the publishers cooperate to create a harmony between the business aims of the company and the highest standards of ethical and professional rules of journalism.

The editorial board is exclusively responsible for the content of the media outlet. The advertisers and sponsors (either directly or via the colleagues of the media organization) cannot exert pressure overtly or covertly on the editorial board, and such pressure must be rejected. Advertising revenue and advertisements as such are indispensable parts of the operation of the media, and their development seriously influences the strategies of publishers and thus the lives of the editorial boards. But it is

necessary that this influence be limited and transparent, and should never influence concrete messages, so that the press can fulfil its role and be sustainable. The media organization cannot instruct the editorial board or its colleagues to prepare or not to prepare specific content, to publish or to reject information in such a way that would breach the principles listed in this code.

Editorial content and advertisements must be separated by clear signs in the media content. In case of product placement, described by law as a form of advertisement, attention must be called to the fact that the content does contain advertising.

### **Public figures**

The journalist respects the constitutional, civil, and personal rights of those actors, with whom he or she communicates professionally. In case of public figures, the boundaries are much broader, but they qualify as public figures only if the case is connected to their roles as public figures, or if acts influence them, thus their role as public figures cannot give a reason for the press to examine every aspect of their lives. At the same time, in the case of public figures, it may be justified to publicly disclose certain details of their private life, family, financial situation, or even their health status if it affects their public duty, or if the public figure has willingly made the information public.

The journalist considers the freedom of opinions regarding public figures to be broader than in other cases. It is appropriate to allow tough, or even provocative arguments, in justified cases compliant with the law.

The journalist considers public figures as follows, based on their activities:

- a) every person holding an elected office;
- b) every person serving as public officer;
- c) every person serving public duties;
- d) every person working before the public (actors, performers of programmes, musicians, other artists, sportsmen, church leaders, businessmen, journalists, university professors, vigilantes, lawyers participating in trials of public interest, leaders of sports clubs, etc.);
- e) every officer of state-owned companies – either directly or indirectly to some extent, of companies in monopolistic positions, or of companies interested in public procurements – participating in transactions connected to taxpayers' money.

We do not consider public figures to be those who are not in the public interest, or those who have attained such an interest inadvertently. For example, accident eyewitnesses, the relatives of public figures, crime victims, lottery winners, survivors of catastrophes would not be regarded as public figures.

### **The rules of keeping contact with other media outlets**

The journalist is keenly aware of media competitors, but avoids unethical forms of gaining an advantage and respects their intellectual products. The journalist wishes to win the news competition primarily based on his or her own skills and not by impeding others in reaching information. The resource must be unambiguously indicated in cases of reporting primary sources from other editorial boards. Unauthorised ownership can apply only to new information and a proportionate part of the content.

The journalist complies with the rules of information in handling and keeping contact with public figures, before or even in case of working in collaboration with other journalists. The journalist does not reveal his or her source, and does not misuse the information. Before starting collaboration with others, the journalist clarifies rules with colleagues and observes the rules of correct referencing.

The journalist does not leak confidential or business information about his or her own media outlet, or the inner life of the editorial board.

### **The protection of personal rights**

The journalist places emphasis on not breaching the constitutional, civil, and personal rights of those covered in any capacity during his or her work. The journalist ensures that the actors' personal data, or

details of private lives are not published gratuitously (i.e. cannot be justified by public interest or reasonable private interest or is against persons' will) neither in the content nor in other ways, so long as this might affect them adversely in any ways, and the piece of information is not related to their public figure nature. Special attention must be paid to enforcing the personal and deceased rights of reputation of the victims of accidents, catastrophes, and crimes.

The journalist strictly respects the principles of presumption of innocence. Those suspected of crimes are denoted only by their first names and surname initials until a final and binding conviction. The reports do not contain other details, picture, or recordings by which the concerned could be identified. Anonymity may be lifted by the consent of the suspect or the defendant. In case of minor offenders, the complete name cannot be mentioned even after a final and binding conviction. If a public figure is accused of committing a crime, he or she is equally entitled to the presumption of innocence like anyone else, but it is justified and necessary to report his or her name and function. It must always be emphasized if there has been no final or binding conviction made on the reported case. If a media outlet reports about a case without legally binding decision, then it must report the final conviction as well, if the latter is more lenient or essentially different. The journalist proceeds by paying attention to every case when the actor is, for some reason, not in the position to represent his or her own interests fully (minors, the imprisoned, persons with disabilities, foreigners residing in Hungary, etc.).

The victims of crimes and accidents are entitled to a defence. Special proceedings must take place if the victim is a minor.

The journalist must strictly avoid publishing offensive or otherwise extreme arguments about people or groups of people. In justified cases, the journalist might give credence to actors' own opinions of such information.

### **Shocking content**

Gratuitous material designed to shock the audience is to be avoided, be it written, audio, or visual in form. If the transmission of the given information is not solvable without the publication of such contents, then the audience must be informed as to the nature of the shocking content before it is transmitted.

It must be taken into account that easily recognizable brutal or sexual content may be disturbing or shocking for young or otherwise sensitive audiences, but it also may not be easily categorized. Accordingly, the rules described above concern content which offends, humiliates, or evokes extreme fear.

### **Handling of errors and complaints**

If there is no doubt about the incorrectness of the published information (false information, or unfairly represented facts), then the error must be recognized and it must be corrected as clearly and quickly as possible. If the journalist takes information from another media outlet, then it must be accurately referenced. Opportunities for reply must be given to the person about whom the media outlet intends to publish substantive and new information, but this does not mean an obligation to cite any concerns verbatim, or to present it in its full extent.

Editorial boards will examine the complaints of readers, viewers, listeners, which question the principles listed in this document. The result will be disseminated and shared with the audience.

These principles will be regularly revised and, if necessary, amended.

Budapest, 18 January, 2012