

CODE OF ETHICS OF ALBANIAN MEDIA

SCOPE OF THE CODE

The regulations concerning conduct shall apply to all persons undertaking journalistic or editorial activities. The scope of the Code shall cover the individual and collective information supplying activity performed in the field of printed (text and and photography) and electronic media.

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN SOCIETY

Freedom of speech, freedom of information and criticism, freedom of the press and access to official documents are basic elements of a democracy.

The press recognizes and respects the diversity of opinions, opposing all discrimination based on sex, race, nationality, language, religion, ideology, culture, class or conviction, provided that the convictions thus professed are not in contradiction with the respect of fundamental human rights.

The press should recognize and defend both its rights and duties versus the public, constantly preserving the balance between them.

Journalists observe the Constitution and the positive legislation of the Republic of Albania, Statutes and documents of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Council of Europe on freedom of expression and information and on human rights.

SUPPLYING THE PUBLIC WITH RELIABLE INFORMATION

1. Accuracy and presentation of information

Journalists have the right to obtain information, to publish, and to criticize. Information should be truthful, balanced and verified.

Media should not mislead the public, and they should clearly indicate where manipulated texts, documents, images and sounds have been used.

Media should distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and facts.

Media should not distort or misuse statements made in a specific context.

In reporting on a controversy, journalists should seek to ensure that parties concerned have an opportunity to state their position.

In reporting and particularly in commentaries and polemical texts, journalists are obliged to respect the ethics of public expression and the culture of dialogue.

Media shall not publish any image, audio, or visual arrangements that distort the ideas or facts of the source, with the exception of caricatures, cartoons or comic plots.

Manipulated images can only be accepted as illustrations if it is evident that it in actual fact is a picture collage.

Anonymous text and the one signed with pseudonym are considered editorial texts.

Journalists should carefully observe the Albanian language rules and refrain from using foreign words when possible.

2. Rectification and reply

Media should publish a clear and appropriately prominent correction when it can be demonstrated that inaccurate or misleading information has been published, and provide an apology if necessary.

The criticized individual shall always have the right to justify himself/ herself and to explain.

If the reply is not fit for publication as such, changes to it should be discussed with the writer. If he cannot be contacted within a reasonable time, it is advisable to publish the reply in amended form. However, its essential contents must not be changed.

3. Relations with sources

Journalists shall make all attempts to gather information from all available sources in order to be sure information is accurate, complete, and impartial.

Journalists must be critical in the selection of sources and make sure that the information is correct.

Journalists should not divulge the name of a person who has provided information on a confidential basis, unless consent has been explicitly given by the person concerned.

The right to the anonymity may be broken only if:

- a) there is suspicion that the source consciously has distorted truth;
- b) the reference to the name of the source is the only way to avoid serious and inevitable damage to the people;
- c) the information in question relates to the planning of a criminal act.

Journalists should always indicate where information has not been confirmed.

4. Collection and presentation of information

Identification

Information shall be gathered in ethical and lawful ways.

A person being interviewed must have the right to know in which medium and in what connection his statements will be used.

In particular consideration should be shown towards people who cannot be expected to be aware of the effect that their statements may have.

If unjustly denied access to demanded information, journalist has the right to inform general public about it.

Rumors and reports of anonymous sources should not be published as news, except in the case when news is of vital importance for public and shall be presented as unverified.

- Harassment and privacy

The journalists will respect the honor and reputation of the individuals who become objects of their professional interest.

The journalist should not use pressure or offer any compensation in exchange for information to the source of information. In cases when payment is necessary in order to obtain information that the public has the right to know this should be made known in reporting.

The journalist will respect the right of individuals to privacy, unless the defense of the public interest indicates otherwise.

Journalists will only make use of subterfuge, hidden cameras, microphones or other special equipment, or obscure their professional identity, if there is no other means to obtain information exceptionally important to the public interest; they shall indicate such methods in the story.

Journalists should never draw attention to personal or private aspects if they are irrelevant.

“Sudden” use of cameras in public or institutions should respect the desire and sensitivity of the present persons.

Public officers are also justified in not disclosing their private life except for the cases when their private life may affect their public activity.

- Crime and Brutality

Any media product that propagates war, violence, outrage or injures the feelings of the whole public or parts of it is absolutely prohibited.

Violence and brutality should not be sensationalized. Reporting must take due account of the need to protect minors.

Crimes and terrorism as well as other cruel and inhuman activities must not be glorified.

Journalists will always respect presumption of innocence and will refrain from describing someone as a criminal prior to conviction.

When reporting on juvenile crime and juvenile court proceedings, the press should exercise restraint out of consideration for the future of the young people concerned. This recommendation also applies to reports on juvenile victims of crime.

Media should carefully ponderate whether to publish facts about family scandals and remind the old crimes committed by individuals who have served their sentence.

Journalists shall treat with caution the identification of victims and witnesses of crime, especially in cases involving sexual assault, unless they give consent to being identified.

- Accidents and disasters

Journalists should respect the wish of people to grieve in private and will report such matters with sympathy and constraint.

The bounds of acceptable reporting on accidents and disasters are exceeded where the suffering of victims and the feelings of their families cease to be respected.

In the case of accidents and disasters, the press shall bear in mind that rescue operations for victims and persons in jeopardy take precedence over the public's right to be informed.

Media should not overdo the pictures of catastrophes, accidents or violence that might insult the feelings of the relatives as well as sensitiveness of the public.

Victims or missing persons should not be identified if next-to-kin have not been informed.

- Children and weak people

A journalist respects all principles confirmed in the ONU Convention dated 1989 on the right of children and Albanian legislation to protect children, and particularly:

A journalist protects rights and dignity of children and people with mental or physical handicap, including their right to be heard.

As a general rule, there is no objection to the publication of photographs and names of missing young persons. These should only be published, however, with the agreement of the relevant authorities.

Journalists shall not take advantage of children's innocence and trust and will publish information or images about the private life of a child only if there is an overriding public interest.

Journalists should not interview children under 14 on personal issues in the absence of parents or responsible persons, or without their consent.

5. Editorial independence

Editorial staff should not accept any personal, political or financial inducements that may affect their accurate and impartial reporting.

Neither media owners, nor journalists shall have the right to consider that news is their own property and can be used to achieve personal gains. They shall not use professional information for their personal benefit.

Journalists should avoid covering stories where they have a direct personal interest.

Editorial content should be clearly distinguished from marketing, advertisements or sponsored materials.

Public Relations texts, which are intrinsically connected with advertising, must be labelled accordingly or laid out in a way that distinguishes them from the editorial contents of the host publication to ensure that they do not mislead the reader.

6. Plagiarism

The journalist will respect, and will make others respect the copyright in any creative area. Plagiarism is inadmissible.

Journalists abuse copyright, if they:

- a) publish or attempt to publish others' work (intellectual product) as if it was theirs (plagiarism);
- b) they quote from other persons' work in such a way that they distort the original sense of the text, publishing distortion as reality, or willfully indicate another person, as author;
- c) publish as their own a topic considered as original - researched and published by someone else - without reference to the origin;

d) hand over their work for publishing to two or more publishers at the same time - without indicating this fact - or hand over an already published work and do not draw the attention of the second publisher to this fact;

e) publish a work without the consent of the author, or put it into an unworthy surrounding (composition of pictures), or a surrounding different from the previous agreement, without the consent of the author.

7. Relations among Journalists

In their business relations journalists should maintain the balance between fair competition and professional solidarity.

The journalists should not impede their colleagues to gather information, to mislead them intentionally, or report on them to the authorities.

Neither individual journalists, nor separate editorial staffs shall settle old scores with each other via mass media.

Plagiarism shall be deemed to be one of the most serious offenses in journalist's profession.

Every time journalists will use, in any way, work done by other journalists, they will refer to the author's name.

The journalists shall keep in confidentiality the secrets of the editorial staff that are not related to violations of laws and the Code of Ethics.

Media newsrooms should respect the right of individual journalists to refuse assignments, or to be identified as the author of publications, which would break the letter and spirit of this Code.

8. The public interest

The violation of the terms of this Code may only be justified when it can be clearly shown that this serves the public interest.

Public interest is defined as follows:

- It protects public health and safety;
- It helps the finding, prevention, and disclosure of serious crimes, scandals, and abuse of power;
- It prevents the public from the danger of being seriously misled.

Legitimate public interest, however, does not justify sensationalism.

For the purposes of this Code, information ‘of public interest’ should not be confused with information that is ‘interesting to the public’.