

# THE CODE OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

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TLAČOVO-DIGITÁLNA RADA  
SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY

# THE JOURNALIST'S CODE OF ETHICS

## PREAMBLE

The Association for the Protection of Journalistic Ethics in the Slovak Republic

- paying tribute to creators of the first Code of Ethics effective from 1990, the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists and the Slovak Press Publishers' Association,
- following the Journalist's Code of Ethics effective from 2011,
- respecting changes in the media environment,
- perceiving threat to moral and value standards of journalistic work,
- respecting the importance of the ethical rules of journalistic work and the media environment in the Slovak Republic,

accepts the Journalist's Code of Ethics ("the Code of Ethics") based on the agreement and consent of the Slovak Press Publishers' Association, the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists and Interactive Advertising Bureau Slovakia (IAB Slovakia) (the representative of internet media) as an expression of binding the ethical standards for journalistic work.

## I. THE PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this Code of Ethics is:
  - a) to establish the binding rules of conduct for natural persons and legal entities which issue periodic or non-periodic press in print or digital version intended for dissemination in the Slovak Republic ("media"), editorial board of periodic or non-periodic press in print or digital version intended for dissemination in the Slovak Republic ("the editorial board") and natural persons who carry out the profession or an activity of the journalist in the Slovak Republic ("the journalist"), news agencies operating in the Slovak Republic, providers of information services, internet portals, editorial boards or individuals who accede to it,
  - b) to serve as the guidelines for natural persons and legal entities, such as redactors, commentators, editors, cameramen, photographers, graphic designers and bloggers which are involved in the creation of media content distributed to the public regardless of the technology platform used.
  - c) to inform the public about the ethical rules of journalistic work.
2. Acceding to the Code of Ethics does not prevent media or editorial board from applying own ethical rules that do not contradict the Code of Ethics.

## II. THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALIST'S WORK

1. Primary values of journalist's work are values of personal freedom, justice and decency. In their work, they promote these values in society.
2. The main principles governing the journalist in his or her work are impartiality, balance, objectivity, honesty, truthfulness, accountability and consistent verification of facts.
3. The journalist takes care that all of his or her public statements do not contradict the basic principles of journalism laid down in the paragraph 1 and 2 of this Article.
4. The journalist publishing his or her work on the internet is also bound by the IAB Slovakia Code of Conduct for Content Copyright, which was approved by General Assembly of IAB Slovakia Association of the Internet Media on 21 January 2015.



### III. THE JOURNALIST AND THE PUBLIC

1. The journalist is obliged to verify an every piece of information that he or she publishes. The information must be verified at least in two independent sources.
2. If the information is not generally known or is not widely known in the sector the journalist is writing about, the journalist is always required to provide a source of his or her information. The journalist is not obliged to provide a source if the source is confidential or secret. The journalist can use such a source in compliance with the provisions of this Code of Ethics about the special source utilization.
3. The journalist or media do not publish any information they know to be untrue. True information is based on facts and its objective interpretation taking into account the real context of the story without distorting objective reality and negating part of existing facts and contexts.
4. Agencies are responsible for the truthfulness and accuracy of their text, audio, image and audiovisual information; and journalists are under no obligation to verify it. In case of doubt about the accuracy of data from the agency service, the journalist is obliged to verify the information in another independent source.
5. The journalist never distort the content of text, image, audio or audiovisual recordings or photographs. They may enhance it only for technical clarity and quality. Collages, mountings, reconstructions, or visualizations must be clearly labelled.
6. The journalist and media are obliged to refuse publishing untrue, distorted or incomplete information.
7. Titles of articles or programs shall not be untrue in relation to the content of the text. The same applies to trailers and ads which promote articles and programs.
8. Comments and opinions must be clearly labelled and distinguished from news and facts. Opinions and assessments made in the commentary must be based on and logically inferred from a sufficient factual basis.
9. Advertisements and paid notifications must be clearly labelled. In the case of commercial text, the article must not give the impression that it is an independent work of the journalist. The journalist and media have a right and duty to refuse publishing a hidden advertisement.
10. The journalist must not issue his or her old work as new.
11. The journalist must not accept gifts or other benefits that can jeopardize his or her impartiality and objectivity that may be perceived as an attempt to influence his or her work. An exception to this rule is usually the provision of small advertising items and refreshments at press conferences and other events addressed to the public and media representatives.
12. If someone other than the journalist, media or editorial board covers the costs of the journalist's trips, other expenses or part of his or her expenses, the journalist alerts readers, listeners or viewers accordingly.
13. The journalist has a right to personal integrity. If he or she finds himself or herself in a conflict of interest, especially when he or she is working on a topic that concerns or may concern the journalist himself or herself, his or her close persons (§ 116 of the Civil Code) or his or her economic interests, the journalist informs his or her editorial board about this fact. The journalist must not continue to work on the topic with conflict of interest unless the editorial board gives him permission to do so and the journalist informs adequately the public about the possible conflict of interest.
14. If the editorial board finds itself in a conflict of interest, in particular when it informs about media activities or about persons connected directly or indirectly to media, the journalist informs the public about it in an appropriate manner. The journalist must not use the information he or she has gained during his or her work for own benefit as long it has not been published.
15. The journalist does not use the privileges of his or her profession for his or her private benefit; the journalist does not show his or her journalistic license or indicate an affiliation with media in situations unrelated to the direct exercise of his or her profession.

16. The journalist is not politically active if his or her political activity could lead to a conflict of interest and his or her impartiality or objectivity can be questioned.
17. If the journalist finds out that he or she has published incorrect information, the journalist is required to do everything for his or her immediate correction without waiting to be admonished by editorial boards or concerned parties.

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### IV. THE JOURNALIST AND THE OBJECT OF HIS OR HER INTERESTS

1. The journalist must not publish the information or records about the privacy of an individual without the consent of the individual concerned, except in the case of a matter of public interest. The journalist must not lower the reputation, honour or dignity of the individual not even when publishing the information and records in relation to a public interest, except the case where the individual raises suspicion of unlawfully acting or causing offense by his or her actions.
2. The journalist respects the presumption of innocence including persons suspected of committing a crime, accused of committing a crime or charged with a crime. The names of people suspected of criminal activity are disclosed only if releasing their names is an important public interest.
3. The journalist does not directly or indirectly provoke any hatred, intolerance or discrimination based primarily on race, worldview, religion, ethnic origin, age, social status, gender or sexual orientation. The journalist informs about someone's belonging to a minority only if the information is relevant in the context of the contribution.
4. The journalist respects the basic principles of the democratic and legal state, the Constitutional Order of the Slovak Republic as well as the applicable Law and generally accepted moral principles.
5. The journalist respects other states, nations, their traditions, culture, religion or other beliefs.
6. The journalist does not directly or indirectly support violations of human rights, violence or environmental damage.
7. The journalist always uses adequate means of expression.

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### V. THE JOURNALIST AND THE INFORMATION SOURCE

1. The journalist acquires text, audio, audiovisual and image recordings and backgrounds for articles and other works in a way that it is clear that he or she is a journalist and does not hide his or her full name or belonging to a specific medium. The journalist notices the respondent before recording the phone call if this is not the situation described in Article V, point 9.
2. The journalist adheres to the promise of protecting the identity of the informant until the informant exempts the journalist from this duty.
3. At public appearances and events, the journalist is authorised to make text, audio, audiovisual and image records without explicit consent of the performers only if the copyrights and laws are not violated. The journalist can act equally while collecting records and gathering information in public spaces.
4. People who are not experienced in communication with journalists, are unaware of the consequences of their actions or find themselves in a particularly difficult life situation, especially victims or witnesses of crimes, accidents or other events that may cause to a person emotional stress, the journalist approaches them with increased sensitivity and responsibility.
5. The journalist uses children and adolescents as a source of information only in exceptional cases with particular regard to their moral and emotional development.
6. If it is not ruled out for communication of public interest issues, the journalist is obliged to protect the privacy and legitimate interests of the persons referred to in paragraphs 4 and 5 and the journalist must not misuse their trust.

7. The journalist is not obliged to accede to a request from the respondent for additional correction, non-disclosure or non-broadcast of information obtained in accordance with this Code of Ethics as long as the respondent has previously agreed to the disclosure. In justified cases, the journalist may accept an agreement on its subsequent authorization before the interview starts. If the respondent requests an authorization, the journalist is required to inform him or her that it is possible to edit only the respondent's direct citations, and it is not possible to change meanings of the answers or remove the answers which have been mentioned in the original interview. The authorization of a record or text shall be limited solely to the statements made by the respondent himself or herself. The journalist shall not accept an agreement that would allow the respondent to agree to use his or her statement only in the context of the entire program or article.
8. Under the circumstances listed below, the journalist may also use exceptional means in his work. These are:
  - a) using secret ways of collecting information, including a hidden camera or microphone,
  - b) using concealed and confidential sources,
  - c) disclosing unverified information,
  - d) disclosing information from the privacy of individuals who are not publicly active and their privacy is otherwise protected.
9. Extraordinary means of journalistic work can be used only if their use is directed to the fulfilment of an important public interest and the public interest could not otherwise be achieved.
10. The use of extraordinary means of journalistic work must be approved at the highest level of the editorial board.
11. The use of extraordinary means of journalistic work must be adequately explained to recipients when publishing the text or broadcasting the program in which they were used.
12. An important public interest means an interest which brings significant benefits to a substantial part of society, contributes to the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms or to the protection of the principles of the democratic and legal state.
13. An important public interest is in particular:
  - a) prevent the abuse of a public authority,
  - b) proper functioning of the political system and public institutions,
  - c) protection of life, health, safety and property of citizens,
  - d) protection of morals and fundamental social values,
- e) protection of the environment, cultural heritage or cultural monuments.

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## VI. THE JOURNALIST AND THE EDITORIAL BOARD

1. The journalist in the managing position actively supports compliance with this Code of Conduct.
2. Editorial boards and journalists in the managing positions protect the journalist's freedom of expression and, where appropriate, provide him or her with an adequate legal protection.
3. The journalist must not be forced to do activities or make viewpoints that are against his or her convictions; for the exercise of this right, the other rights shall not be denied to the journalist.
4. A post intended to be published which content has been edited by editorial board in such a way that its original meaning has changed; it may only be published with the consent of the author.
5. Such consent is also required if the post is to be published under a brand name, pseudonym or anonymously.
6. The journalist is obliged to provide co-operation in legal and administrative proceedings against his or her colleagues or media if such proceedings are related to the activity of the journalist.
7. Editorial boards and journalists in managing positions respect diversity of opinion and equal opportunities regardless of gender, age, race, nationality, ethnic origin, social status, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, political, social and cultural affiliation of the journalist.

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## VII. THE JOURNALIST AND HIS OR HER COLLEAGUES

1. The journalist must not publish someone's else text, part of a text, photograph or other work or records as its own.
2. If the journalist wants to publish the same or similar article in multiple media, he or she must alert all media. This also applies to cases where two journalists from two different media work on an interview together and they publish it in own media under own name without mentioning the colleague's name.
3. The journalist has an obligation to discover and publish the unethical and unlawful actions of his or her colleagues.

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## VIII. THE CENSORSHIP

1. The censorship means a restriction, deliberate misrepresentation or non-disclosure of information, audio, audiovisual or image recordings if it occurred for political, economic or personal reasons.
2. The censorship is incompatible with the ethical rules of journalistic work and it is forbidden.
3. The management of each editorial board has the right to decide on the issues to be addressed by journalists and other contributors, to determine the way they are processed and to decide not to publish the work. Editing and redacting text, audio, audiovisual or image recording is not considered to be the censorship.
4. Editing means a text, audio, audiovisual and image modification in terms of semantic structure, dramaturgical construction, real and factual accuracy, grammatical accuracy and clarity.
5. Editing means managing the entire process of acquiring and processing information intended for publication or broadcast, deciding whether to publish or broadcast, choosing the length, genre and order in which they are published or broadcast or selecting the context in which it is published.

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## IX. THE ACCESSION TO THE CODE

1. Any professional organization, media, press agency, information service provider, website, editorial board or individual may accede to this Code of Ethics if they send an announcement of their accession to the Code of Ethics to AONE. By the same way, they may cancel their accession to the Code of Ethics.
2. The list of organizations and persons who have acceded the Code of Ethics is published by AONE on its website, where is also published the current version of the Code of Ethics.

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## X. THE TRANSITIONAL AND FINAL PROVISIONS

1. The Representative Body of the Association for the Protection of Journalistic Ethics (ZZ AONE), which members are representatives of SSN, AVT and IAB Slovakia, approved this Code of Ethics in its meeting on 17 June 2017 with effect from the day following its approval.
2. Approving an amendment of the Code of Ethics by SSN Board of Directors on 8 June 2017 is considered to be an accession to the current Code of Ethics.
3. The Code of Ethics approved by 9th Assembly of SSN on 5 November 2010 effective from 1 January 2011 expires with the approval of SSN and with the new wording of the Code of Ethics.
4. Organizations and individuals who have acceded to the previous Code of Ethics remain adhering to the current Code of Ethics.

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