**Code of Journalists in Serbia**

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**SERBIAN JOURNALISTS’ CODE OF ETHICS**

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**PREAMBLE**

UNS (Association of Journalists of Serbia) and NUNS (Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia) adopt this Code as an ethical standard for the professional conduct of journalists.

It is the duty of journalists to follow the professional and ethical principles contained in this Code and to resist pressures to violate these principles.

The Code encourages solidarity with colleagues in defending freedom of speech, media autonomy, and when professional standards established by this Code are threatened.

The professional and ethical standards defined in this Code aim to improve the quality and reputation of the journalistic profession, promote commitment to freedom of thought, speech, and expression, as well as the independence of the media.

Journalists who violate the principles of this Code cannot count on the support of journalistic associations and colleagues.

The media are obligated to place the public interest for complete, timely, and truthful information above all other interests. In the context of this Code, public interest implies publishing all important information that helps citizens form opinions about phenomena and events.

Journalists and editors are responsible to the public and are guided by general, not partial economic, political, and other interests.

Editors, owners, and publishers are also responsible for implementing this Code.

**I TRUTHFULNESS IN REPORTING**

**1. It is the duty of journalists to report on events of public interest accurately, impartially, completely, and in a timely manner, adhering to the journalistic standards prescribed by the Code of Journalists in Serbia.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists must carefully verify all facts, consult relevant sources, and report impartially on all important events, especially political, social, cultural, and other topics with opposing views in the public sphere.

b) Journalists are obliged to present accurate and verified information and provide it in the appropriate context.

c) Journalists must not delay the publication of important information, except for necessary fact-checking.

**2. It is the right of the media to have different editorial concepts, but it is the duty of journalists and editors to clearly distinguish between facts they report and opinions, assumptions, or speculations.**

Guidelines:

a) Media outlets that publish agency news are responsible for what they publish. If an agency is listed as the source of information, shortening or adding to that information must not alter its essential meaning and context.

b) When publishing public opinion poll results, the name of the agency that conducted the poll, the client who commissioned it, the sample size, and the period during which the poll was conducted must be provided.

c) Journalists are not required to allow an interviewed person to authorize the text or statement. If authorization is granted, the interviewee has no right to change the journalist's questions or the meaning of their answers.

d) Editorial handling of press releases must not alter the facts, the context in which they are used, or their meaning. The same standard applies to content taken from other media or websites, as well as user-generated content.

**3. Journalism is incompatible with publishing unfounded accusations, defamation, and rumors, as well as content where the author is unknown, or their identity cannot be verified.**

Guidelines:

a) If a journalist believes that publishing an unconfirmed piece of information or speculation is in the public interest, they are obliged to clearly and unambiguously state that the information has not been confirmed.

**4. Omitting facts that could significantly affect public perception of an event is equivalent to intentionally distorting or spreading falsehoods.**

Guidelines:

a) If the sources of information are representatives of political parties, individuals, or companies, this fact must be stated because of the potential direct or indirect influence on the objectivity of reporting.

b) It is not allowed to publish fabricated communication or alter and subsequently publish communication (emails, SMS messages, social media posts, communication platform content, or other communication channels) that changes its original meaning, context, or presentation.

c) Backdating and subsequent changes to the publication time of content are not allowed.

**5. The headline of an article/segment must not contradict the essence of the content.**

Guidelines:

a) Media should refrain from using "clickbait" headlines and those that generally reflect the content but are exaggerated or sensationalized.

**II INDEPENDENCE FROM INFLUENCES**

**1. Journalists and editors should oppose any pressure on journalistic freedom and any form of censorship.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists and editors should inform the public about any pressures that threaten the freedom of information and media independence.

b) Editors must protect journalists from all forms of censorship and pressure they are aware of, regardless of whether the pressures come from publishers, owners, the state, interest groups, or other stakeholders.

c) Self-censorship is considered a violation of professional and ethical standards.

d) Editorial interventions must not change the facts, context, or views of the journalists who sign the article.

e) If editors change the facts, context, or views in the article, journalists have the right not to sign the text.

**2. Economic and political interests of publishers must not influence editorial policy in a way that results in inaccurate, biased, incomplete, or untimely information being provided to the public.**

Guidelines:

a) When reporting on individuals or companies that have ownership in the media, journalists and editors are obligated to state this fact.

b) If media publishers have a stake in an organization or company being reported on, journalists and editors must state this fact.

c) The potential impact of published information on the media or its owner must not influence the decision to publish it.

d) Advocacy for any political party or option is incompatible with the journalistic profession.

e) Statements from political parties or other interest groups must be clearly labeled.

**3. Journalists and editors must not agree to place any form of commercial advertising or political propaganda in any journalistic format.**

Guidelines:

a) Political and commercial advertising (including humanitarian campaigns if they promote a legal entity) must be clearly labeled as political marketing, advertisement, promotional content, etc.

b) Journalists will not put their name under commercial advertisements or political propaganda.

c) Journalists must be especially cautious when using press releases, texts, and other materials from PR and marketing agencies, as they are primarily intended to provide free and favorable publicity for clients (directly or indirectly).

**III RESPONSIBILITY OF JOURNALISTS**

**1. Journalists are obliged to act in public interest and, in accordance with professional norms, publish facts necessary for citizens to make informed decisions.**

**2. Journalists should foster a culture and ethics of public discourse, do not use hate speech, aggressive rhetoric, or rhetoric that may incite discrimination or aggressive behavior.**

**3. Journalists are primarily responsible to the public. This responsibility must not be subordinated to the interests of others, especially not to the interests of publishers, corporations, governments, or other state bodies.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists must not report what contradicts the Code of Journalists in Serbia.

**4. Editors are responsible for the entire content of the media.**

a) Media content includes texts, photos, audio and video recordings, cartoons, as well as advertisements, supplements, and reader comments, including all content and comments on official media social media accounts.

b) Media must disclose how their user-generated content moderation system works, regardless of the type of moderation (pre- or post-moderation), and establish clear rules about which content is not allowed on their platforms.

**5. Journalists must respect the presumption of innocence and must not declare anyone guilty before a final court ruling**.

Guidelines:

a) Journalists and editors must respect the presumption of innocence and protect the privacy and identity of suspects or offenders, even in cases of a confession, unless there is a prevailing public interest.

b) If a victim of a crime agrees to an interview, journalists must not, based on that interview, reveal the identity of the victim or the alleged perpetrator.

c) Journalists must consider the possibility of false accusations and should clearly indicate in their reports that the claims have not yet been proven.

d) Journalists must not retraumatize victims (secondary victimization) by publishing details that further harm them.

**6. Editors respect the right of reply and correction and are obliged to publish them in a timely manner.**

Guidelines:

a) Media must immediately publish accurate and complete information, even if they unintentionally published an unverified accusation, rumor, insult, or defamation.

b) If material facts in the published text are changed, this must be clearly stated.

c) If content is entirely removed, the media must inform the audience.

**7. Media must use artificial intelligence (AI) tools in creating content transparently, responsibly, and proportionately, and are fully responsible for such content. They must notify the public when media content has been created using AI tools.**

Guidelines:

a) The use of AI tools that significantly impact journalistic content processing must be clearly marked and must not mislead the public.

b) Content generated with AI, regardless of the stage of collection, processing, or distribution, must be under editorial control and in compliance with the Code of Journalists in Serbia.

c) In reporting current events, content must be clearly marked to distinguish AI-generated (synthesized or significantly processed) content from authentic content created through direct journalistic coverage.

**IV CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

**1. Journalists must not accept or request material or other benefits for gathering, publishing, postponing, or preventing the gathering or publishing of information.**  
Guidelines:

a) Journalists and editors must not sell data, documents, audio/video recordings, and other work materials obtained for the purpose of media reporting. These materials should not be provided to other media without the consent of the source.

b) It is recommended that materials obtained from sources remain in the possession of editorial offices or media documentation centers for which the journalist or editor reports.

**2. Journalists are obligated to refuse gifts if there is reason to believe the gift is related to their professional duties and could influence their objectivity. Journalists must report to the editorial office any offer or receipt of gifts related to their journalistic work.**  
Guidelines:

a) Accepting gifts is allowed only in cases of promotional materials (e.g., pens, notebooks, caps, etc.) or items of insignificant material value.

**3. If an individual or organization has paid travel expenses for journalists, editors, or the editorial office, this must be disclosed in the article or report.**

Guidelines:

a) If reporting on topics related to study trips, professional training, or scholarships organized and paid for by government bodies, international and domestic NGOs and foundations, political parties, companies, etc., this must be explicitly stated in the article or report.

**4. Journalists should not report on topics where they have a personal (individual or group) interest.**

Guidelines:

a) If journalists have a personal interest, they may report on a topic of public interest. For example, a journalist living in a certain part of the city may write about the need for a new school in that area.

**5. Journalists should do everything they can to avoid situations that may lead to a conflict of interest or cause them to compromise on their reputation or the reputation of the profession. Journalists who cannot avoid a conflict of interest are required to inform their editor immediately.**  
Guidelines:

a) Journalists should not report or express opinions about people with whom they are closely related, through family, marriage, or close friendships.

b) Journalists and editors should not report on topics where they have a personal, political, or commercial interest, such as being members of the board of directors, supervisory board, or business committee of a company/organization/club, etc.

c) Journalists should not engage in sectors where members (close or distant) of their family or close friends have decision-making power.

**6. The journalistic profession is incompatible with working in PR and marketing agencies, lobbying agencies, government bodies and institutions, and political parties.**  
Guidelines:

a) Participation in political, electoral, or media campaigns and events organized by political parties, companies, etc., must not coincide with journalistic/editorial work.

b) Political activity of family members of journalists and editors may also cause a conflict of interest.

c) Work in counterintelligence, intelligence, and other security services is incompatible with the journalistic profession.

**7. Journalists should not have any business relationships with the subjects they cover.**  
Guidelines:

a) Journalists should not write about businesses whose success depends on their own or their family's interests. If such an interest exists, journalists are required to inform their editor when assigned to cover the topic.

b) Journalists should not report on stocks they own or intend to trade.

**V RESPECT FOR DIGNITY**

**1. Journalists must not discriminate, among other things, based on race, gender, age, personal traits, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin.**

Guidelines:

a) Affiliation with a certain ethnic, political, ideological, or other group, as well as marital status, religious affiliation, or social origin, should only be mentioned when necessary to fully understand the context of the event being reported.

b) Journalists must avoid phrases with chauvinistic, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory connotations.

c) Journalists should use gender-sensitive language, strive to equally include representatives from different groups relevant to the topic (gender, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation), and approach societal diversity responsibly.

**2. Journalists must respect and protect the rights and dignity of children, crime victims, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.**

Guidelines:

a) Minors, as a rule, can only be interviewed with the presence or consent of a parent or guardian.

b) In the case of a missing or kidnapped child, journalists may publish the child’s identity and photograph, in accordance with the law. Once the need for clear identification is no longer present, the published data and images must be immediately removed.

**3. Journalists must respect the principle of non-harm to a person's reputation and dignity and must not participate in spreading falsehoods or continuously maliciously damaging the reputation of those they report on.**

**4. Journalists must not exploit the emotions, ignorance, or limited ability to reason of others**.  
  
Guidelines:

a) Journalists must keep in mind that interviewees may not always be aware of the power of the media and the consequences their statements may have on them or those they speak about.

b) In reporting on events involving personal pain and shock, journalists should only take statements when there is a public interest and adapt their questions to reflect compassion and discretion.

c) Photographers and cameramen must treat victims of accidents and crimes with respect and compassion during filming and photography.

**5. Journalists should not report from funerals, except in the case of high-profile public figures.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists should not report on suicides of individuals who are not public figures to avoid copycat suicides. They should also exercise caution when reporting on suicides of public figures and only do so when there is public interest.

**6. Journalists must not incite fear or unfounded hope in the public.**

**VI RESPECT AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY**

**1. Journalists must respect the privacy of the people they write about.**  
Guidelines:

a) In reporting on accidents and crimes, the names and photographs of victims or perpetrators that clearly identify them should not be published. Neither should any data that could indirectly reveal the identity of victims or perpetrators before the competent authorities make it official.

b) Even if state authorities publish information that falls under the domain of privacy for victims or perpetrators, the media should not transmit this information. Mistakes or poor communication practices by state bodies do not justify violations of the Serbian Journalists’ Code of Ethics.

c) Private data and records, including private photographs, videos, and other records published on social networks or other platforms, can only be published with the prior consent of the person or their representatives, unless there is a public interest that outweighs the right to privacy or if the person has made this information public.

d) If a person’s private data includes information about others (e.g., tags on social media), the media are obliged to hide their identity, unless there is a public interest that outweighs the right to privacy.

**2. Public figures enjoy a lower level of privacy protection.**  
Guidelines:

a) Public figures are those who perform a public function and/or use public resources. In a broader sense, public figures are individuals who have a role in public life, whether in politics, economics, art, sports, media, science, entertainment, or other areas.

b) Private life data of public figures should only be published if it is in the public interest, if it has direct consequences for many people, contradicts the spirit of the function they perform, or goes against the ideas they publicly represent.

**3. Journalists are obliged to ensure that a child is not endangered or exposed to risk due to the publication of their name, photograph, or video with their image, place of residence, community, or identifiable surroundings.**

Guidelines:

a) Information from police, health, educational, social institutions, or their employees that directly or indirectly points to the identity of a minor must not be published.

**4. Editors of media outlets can remove names and personal data from online media at the request of the person whose rights have been violated, provided that the publication of such data is not in the public interest or does not outweigh privacy protection.**Guidelines:

a) When deciding, editors should consider the nature and timeliness of the topic, as well as the significance and social position of the person being reported on.

b) If the data is no longer current and is not of scientific and/or historical significance, editors may remove it while keeping the media content.

c) If editors decide to fully remove the content due to a request for data deletion, they must clearly and unequivocally inform the public about this.

**VII USE OF HONORABLE MEANS**

**1. In collecting data, photographs, documents, audio and video recordings, and their publication, journalists must use only honorable means.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists and editors must not publish materials obtained through hidden cameras, listening devices, or unauthorized wiretapping or recording, except when protecting the public interest, e.g., publishing information about threats to public health and life, corruption, abuse of power, and similar matters. This exception applies in accordance with the rules set by this Code.

b) Journalists should not continue asking questions, making phone calls, taking photographs, or recording private individuals after they have been asked to desist.

**2. It is the right of journalists to continuously ask questions to state and other institutions that they deem of public interest, even if they are asked to stop.**

**3. Journalists must not use extortion, threats, harassment of sources, bribery, or offering counter services in collecting information.**

**4. Journalists are required to introduce themselves to the interlocutor and specify the media for which they work, except when a different approach serves the public interest and is in accordance with the rules established by this Code.**

Guidelines:

a) Concealing a journalist's identity can only be used as a last resort to obtain data or information of exceptional public interest, if other methods have been unsuccessfully attempted and if the data cannot be obtained by other means.

b) In the case of concealing the journalist's identity, editors must be notified.

**VIII RELATIONSHIP WITH SOURCES**

**1. Journalists are required to respect a source's request for anonymity. Anonymity should only be granted to sources who can provide important firsthand data or information, or documents of public interest.**

**2. Fabricating unnamed sources is a serious violation of the Journalists' Code of Serbia.**

Guidelines:

a) Unnamed sources are used only when there is no other way to obtain data or information of exceptional public significance.

b) If a source requests that their identity not be revealed even to the editor, the journalist may refuse such a request.

**3. Journalists are required to consult as many sources as possible.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists must consult at least two independent sources to confirm or disprove the obtained data or information.

b) Two independent sources are especially desirable if there is reason to suspect that an official source is providing incomplete and/or inaccurate information.

**4. Journalists must not blindly trust their sources. Journalists should be aware that sources often pursue their own interests or the interests of the social groups they belong to, adjusting their statements to these interests.**

Guidelines:

a) Special attention is required when contacting sources to avoid bias arising from close personal relationships.

**5. Social media and other digital platforms should be treated like any other source.**

**IX RESPECT FOR AUTHORSHIP**

**1. When media outlets republish content or parts of content from other media, they must indicate the source and the authors.**

Guidelines:

a) Journalists and editors must respect the terms of use set by the media whose content they are republishing.

b) Media outlets should establish their own rules that specify the method and extent of republishing their media content.

c) When republishing content or part of content from online media, journalists and editors must indicate the media and author(s), as well as provide a link to the original text.

**2. Forgery and plagiarism are prohibited and considered serious violations of the Journalists' Code of Serbia.**

Guidelines:

a) Using others' information, research results, photographs, and graphics without properly citing the source is considered plagiarism.

b) Using facts, ideas, and themes from other media is not considered plagiarism.

c) Any interventions (by editors, graphic editors, designers, etc.) in the content of a text or photograph are not permissible without the consent of the author(s).

d) The distinction between documentary photography and photomontage must be clearly emphasized. The public should not be misled.

**3. Journalists will not sign texts, drawings, illustrations, cartoons, photographs, videos, and audio recordings created by other authors**.

**4. Archival audio and video recordings must be appropriately labeled.**

**X PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS**

**1.Journalists who adhere to this Code receive support and protection from their professional association.**

**2. Journalists who follow this Code have the right to legal and material assistance in protection from violence, threats, insults, and other negative consequences due to their journalistic work.**

**3. Anyone who believes that a journalist has violated any provision of this Code may address the honor courts of journalistic associations and the Press Council.**