



Newsletter

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Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia

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Self-regulation is not censorship, but regulation without sanctions



We all have to put journalism where it belongs, and that is not production of content, but a service for provision of consistent, ethical and truthful information to the public. This was one of the messages conveyed at the annual conference of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM), “Media Self-regulation and Ethical Challenges in the Media”, held on May 17 in Skopje.

The conference promoted self-regulation in the media, and it especially addressed the problems with media self-regulation in the digital world. “It is our priority to rid the media of lies and propaganda, and then of all the other inconsistencies in the ethical conduct”, said Dragan Antonovski from the CEMM Managing Board.

The Head of the OSCE Mission in Macedonia, Nina Suomalainen, underlined that “self-regulation is neither censorship nor self-

regulation without sanctions and a credible alternative to court procedures that helps to enhance the ethical journalism oriented towards gaining trust.”

“The Council of Media Ethics has a noble role to constantly remind media and journalists of professional ethics. It is about principles which not only protect the profession and its members, but also the democracy and its wider influence”, maintained the Head of the EU Delegation to Macedonia, Samuel Žbogar.

Mladen Čadikovski, editor-in-chief of TV 24 and Isuf Kadriu, deputy editor-in-chief of TV Alsat-M, also spoke about the role of media in the democratization of the country and the journalism today, as well as about the need for professionalization in the work of the media.

Self-regulation instead of regulation of online media

The regulation of online media is unnecessary and impossible, and internet portals should guarantee their integrity with transparent ownership and editorial structure and policy. This was one of the messages of the event jointly organized by AJM and CMEM in November.

According to the President of AJM, Naser Selmani, Macedonia, as a member state of the Council of Europe, has an obligation to respect and promote its recommendation on the freedom of the internet from 2016. Mirče Adamčevski from CMEM, in turn, held that although online media are not covered by the media laws in Macedonia, they are regulated with provisions from other laws pertaining to the area of online media.

“Self-regulation is more efficient than regulation of online media. Amid continuous changes in the media technology, self regulation offers greater flexibility compared to state regulation. It is more efficient and takes less time than the long and complex litigations”, said Adamčevski.



“Full political support is necessary in order to strengthen the freedom of the media through provision of safe working conditions for journalists. It is a fact that good news cannot come from bad practices, but also that there is no such thing as the phrase ‘let’s give some freedom to the media’. They will either be completely free or not free at all, and the price for this freedom is responsibility.”

- Marina Tunteva, Executive Director of CMEM

CMEM AND THE MEDIA

The top five journalistic stories for 2017 according to CMEM



The Council of Media Ethics awarded five journalistic stories which focused on the promotion of human rights and the rights of the socially vulnerable and marginalized groups.

The first prize was given to the story by the journalist Irena Mulačka from Focus about the Skopje Gynecology Clinics scandal, after doctors working in the Clinics revealed information that around 80 newborns died in a period of six months.

The second prize was given to the author Nikola Zdavkovik for the article titled: “A family tragedy left Gordana Slavkovik breadless”, shown as a part of the 360 degree programme on Alsat – M Television.

The third prize was shared by two journalistic works. The first is authored by the journalist Mirjana Mirčevska – Jovanovik for the series of articles about “Little Ivan and his grandmother”, shown on Kanal 5 TV, and the second is by the journalist Marjan Nikolovski for the article “Can religious communities remove all barriers for uninterrupted prayer”, shown on the programme “On the same side” on Sitel TV.

CMEM also awarded two certificates – for the journalistic story by Maja Ravanska, “The Macedonian Stephen Hawking stuck in the clutches of a non-inclusive society” published in the newspaper „Face to Face“, and for the television news item „Let’s make things more visible“ by Zoran Jovanoski from the 360 degree project on Alsat-M TV.

The awards were given for a competition supported by UNESCO and EU within the project “Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey”.

Free information from MIA for the portals that complied with the ethical reporting standards

The internet portals that complied with the Code of Journalist of Macedonia and the CMEM Charter of Ethical Reporting were allowed to share information from the Macedonian Information Agency free of charge in a period of three months, until the end of the local elections in October, 2017.

The idea behind the joint initiative of MIA, CMEM and AJM was to improve the professional journalistic standards.

“The rules, standards and principles are in place and have been for a long time, we merely need to remind ourselves that the responsibility for creating such a future of professional journalism lies precisely in the hands of the media”, the executive director of CMEM, Marina Tuneva said about the initiative. According to the President of AJM, Naser Selmani, this is one of the ways to intensify self-regulation in the media.

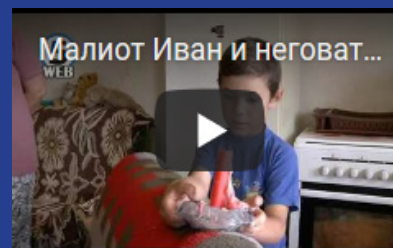
Around 80 newborns died in a period of six months



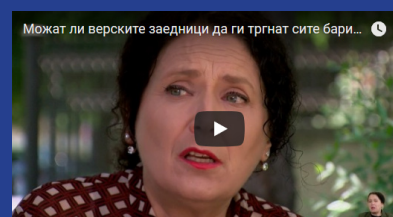
A family tragedy left Gordana Slavkovik breadless



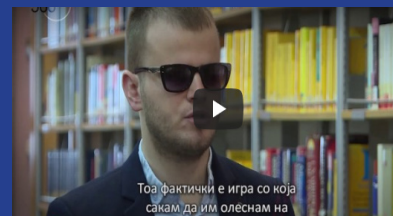
Little Ivan and his grandmother



Can religious communities remove all barriers for uninterrupted prayer



Let’s make things more visible

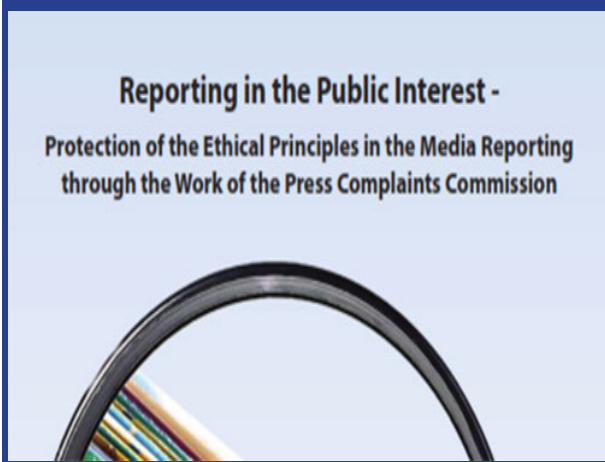


The Macedonian Stephen Hawking stuck in the clutches of a non-inclusive society



PUBLICATIONS AND ANALYSES

PUBLIC INTEREST REPORTING – PROTECTION OF THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF REPORTING THROUGH THE WORK OF THE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION



The purpose of the publication is to contribute to a better understanding of self-regulation and to the improvement of the level of media professionalism, transparency and accountability.

It provides an examination of the compliance with some of the basic principles of journalism and an overview of the most characteristic decisions made by the CMEM Complaints Commission. In only three years of existence, about 200 complaints from the public regarding content published in the print-based, electronic and online media have already been submitted to CMEM, with the number of complaints increasing almost on a daily basis.

Due to the sheer volume of the material, the publication does not provide an overview of every decision by the Complaints Commission, but only of the ones related to the violation of the most important principles of journalistic reporting. A more detailed overview can be found on www.semm.mk. The publication is authored by Dr. Sefer Tahiri and Mirče Adamčevski and edited by Dr. Snežana Trpevska.

REVIEW OF EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCILS FOR MEDIA ETHICS

The idea behind this overview is to provide an account of experiences and practices of ethics councils in dealing with certain issues – members of the Alliance for Independent Media Ethics in Europe, but also their ethical codes.

The emphasis is put on their provisions pertaining to reporting on certain sensitive issues, such as: protection of individual privacy, prevention of discrimination on various grounds, reporting on crime, suicides etc.

The results are not only useful for the expert public, but also for the general public, which needs to be closely familiar with the work, approach and benefits of the existence and operation of CMEM as a self-regulation body. The author of the publication is Dr. Dejan Donev.



SELF-REGULATION OR REGULATION OF ONLINE MEDIA IN MACEDONIA



Is there a need for legislation regulating the work of online media? Or all professional issues can be resolved within the profession itself through the existing self-regulation mechanisms?

This question has been raised in Macedonia due to the necessity of providing reliable and independent information on the Internet and reducing abuse and extreme phenomena, such as hate speech, discrimination, nationalism, fake news and propaganda, but also creation of unfair competition for the traditional and online media that comply with the professional and business rules. Therefore, this analysis describes the legal postulates and ethical standards pertaining to the online media and identifies some of the issues that online journalism faces in Macedonia. It also provides brief overview of certain standards and recommendations from relevant international bodies and gives examples for mechanism from the international practice for dealing with ethical and professional problems of online media.

INFORMING OF THE CMEM MISSION

The number of complaints about unprofessional reporting is increasing

CMEM organised series of debates in several cities over the year in order to familiarise the public more closely with the work of this self-regulatory body and also to instigate the process of filing complaints due to unethical reporting in the media.

„The public is constantly reacting to the cases of unprofessional reporting. And that is good. That means that the citizens are recognising the matrix of propaganda and missionary reporting more and more. Over 220 cases of unethical informing have been reported to CMEM by now”, stated the executive director of the Council, Marina Tunteva on the debate in Tetovo.

The meetings with the citizens provided information that during the three-year work of CMEM, the citizens generally complained about one-sided informing, discrimination, hate speech and placing fake news in the media, particularly in the online sphere. Most commonly violated were the Articles of the Journalist Code which refer to the accuracy of information, differentiating between facts and opinions, news and comments, the balance as well as the impartiality while reporting on political processes.

While discussing the most common identified problems in media reporting, the mediation process as well as the manner of complaint filing to CMEM were presented during the debates. The Council representatives underlined the importance of further strong support of self-regulation through an increase of the membership in the Council, provided that the criteria for consistent and professional reporting are met.

A more detailed overview of the CMEM decisions can be found on the **FOLLOWING LINK**.



Debate in Tetovo



Debate in Skopje



Debate in Veles

Other meetings of the CMEM representatives



Meeting with the Austrian Press Council in Vienna



Meeting with Representatives of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom and the South East Europe Media Organisation



Participation of the CMEM in the Media Platform for Cooperation of CIVICA



Debate with the postgraduate students of the Institute for Communication Studies

FOR PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL JOURNALISM

From the debate on TV 24: What kind of journalism and media does Macedonia need?



Marina Tunteva: The consolidation of the journalistic profession should happen within the editorial offices

“The journalism suffered enormous damages as a consequence of the reporting manner by some who claimed that they belonged to the profession or by some who had the power to speak publicly through the media. The consolidation of the journalistic profession should happen within the editorial offices. They should pose themselves the question how to continue further, without neglecting the determined matters. It is undoubtedly true that self-regulation has a tremendous significance, what has by now been stated as a moral sanction by the Council of Media Ethics.

But they themselves should reconsider what situations have arisen as a result of pressure and the bad situations in journalism. It is a matter of choice whether that would happen through public and unconditional support of the self-regulatory body or they themselves would create practices which will be a way towards professionalism, unlike what had previously been an improper manner of work.

The matter of how the state could fix the conditions in journalism has been discussed on many occasions, but where is the focus regarding the issue of what the media could do for themselves? Greater support is necessary in the process of self-regulation, reintroduction of the professional practice in the editorial offices, the media should cooperate more, the public should be heard more, the citizens should react. That is the reason why this self-regulatory body that enables a connection between the citizens and the media exists, a body which, if it receives support, will enable a correction of the unprofessionalism in the media, but also a satisfaction of the public interest. “

From the Conference e-Society of the Metamorphosis NGO in Skopje

Mirče Adamčevski: How do we come to a situation of fewer complaints and more ethics?

„Firstly, journalists seem to have forgotten what they studied during their first days of journalism studies. And that is the fact that information should be accurate and checked. Perhaps over 70% of all complaints testify to the fact that the lecture learnt in university or in an editorial office seems to be forgotten. Secondly, the private interest is jeopardized and the journalist is completely heedless of the consequences of such conduct. What is more, the facts that hate speech is a crime and the discrimination on different grounds seem to be neglected. Similarly, journalists prefer to give comments rather than report or work with facts. The fact seems to be an erased category. There is no cultivation of speech culture and the improper communication with the public does not fade away. The fact that the reporting on elections should be impartial and balanced is forgotten.

The Complaints Commission received the highest number of complaints filed against online media. Topics, news and events are being invented and we can even witness a collective publication of one and the same text, without even changing a full stop or comma. There are texts full of plain lies because they are not supported by facts. Texts stating “we learn” instead of “we know.” Journalists should learn, but not from one source alone or from some public relations centre. We have complaints against media of which we cannot find an address for communication, that do not have impressums nor editorial offices. The question that is now posed to us as CMEM is how to proceed further. How to enhance the professionalism and how to improve the ethics in the media?



The response is not simple. Especially when online media are in question. Broadcasters are regulated by law to a certain extent, but some changes will have to be implemented in that segment as well, so that the new challenges the ethics faces could be tackled. We can see that things are moving in a direction towards a certain type of internet regulation. In the ethics area, online media will most probably be subject to self-regulation, and there will be a certain registration, which is also the case with print-based media now. Whatever it is, all those dealing with media will have to be prepared for everything to end in the most favourable way for the media, and we should not be brought into a situation of a state dictatorship, regardless of what parties are in power. This will also be a challenge for the self-regulatory body. And it will have to adapt to the novelties, and the least it will have to do is align the existent Code with the new times and demands.”

FOR PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL JOURNALISM

Marina Tunteva: Serious reforms for liberation of the media



From the "Freedom of the Media in the Western Balkans" OSCE Conference in Vienna

„Generally, the media are not willing to publish the CMEM decisions, which is an indication of poor commitment for self-regulation of the ethic standards. Fortunately, things have gradually started to change. The continuous efforts to develop a culture of professional ethics have resulted in more frequent reactions by the public.

The Council of Media Ethics has never been under an illusion that the media self-regulation could bring the expected results if the government does not act responsively and interferes in the media sector. Self-regulation cannot deal with the violence against journalists, wiretapping journalists, corruption in the media and political and party influence over the media regulator and the public broadcasting service – MRT. We need serious reforms which will liberate the media from politics and business pressure. “

Marina Tunteva: A comprehensive cross-sectoral partnership is necessary



From the Annual Conference of the Alliance of Independent Press Councils in Europe (AIPCE) in Budapest

Evidently, there is a need for more comprehensive cross-sectoral partnership on several levels and involving various stakeholders.

In this direction, CMEM is attempting to establish a good cooperation with the higher education system, the media industry, the judiciary, the organs for prevention of discrimination and the media in order to provide help in the reconstruction of the credibility of the journalistic profession. Furthermore, we realised that regular consultations with the managerial structures in the media are necessary in order to stimulate them to actively participate in the promotion of the self-regulation concept. In addition, there is a need to work actively with the citizens, especially with the students and the younger generations, in order to help them understand the forms of unprofessional reporting and to support our job.“

Regular Annual Assembly of CMEM



Workshop on Strategic Communication of CMEM

The CMEM mission, the current practice of communication with the public and the citizens as well as the strategic goals for the forthcoming period were discussed on the meeting.

The event resulted in a preparation of communication strategy, whose purpose is active approximation of the CMEM work to the citizens and enhancement of greater cooperation and support for this self-regulatory body.

CMEM supporters for 2017



Kingdom of the Netherlands