[BE] New Flemish Code on Journalism Ethics

IRIS 2011-1:1/10

Hannes Cannie
Department of Communication Sciences / Center for Journalism Studies, Ghent University

The Vlaamse Raad voor de Journalistiek (Flemish Council for Journalism Ethics) has created a new code on journalism ethics that was made public on 6 October 2010. This Council is an independent self-regulating institution that supervises journalistic work in all Flemish media upon the filing of a complaint by a member of the public, thereby guaranteeing that journalistic ethics are upheld. It can also issue ethical directives and recommendations on its own initiative. The new ethical code is all-integrating, as it contains 27 provisions inspired by two classic texts that are very often referred to in the Council's practice (the Declaration of Munich (1971) and the Belgian Code of journalistic principles (1982)), supplemented by the Council's own directives which clarify these provisions. The code formulates provisions concerning four categories of deontological duties. Firstly there is the category related to truthful coverage (Articles 1-6), amongst others encouraging journalists to check and expose their sources (if this is possible and relevant) and obliging them to rectify wrongly covered information. Secondly, the category of independent coverage (Articles 7-14) provides some rights to journalists related to their freedom and autonomy when practising their job, but also prevents them from engaging in advertising, conflicts of interest or reception of presents or other advantages, in order to guard their independence. Thirdly, the category of fair play (Articles 15-21) focuses mainly on methods of news gathering, containing the principled prohibitions of paying for information and concealing the professional capacity and the obligation not to disclose the identity of sources to which confidentiality was promised. The last category of respect for privacy and human dignity (Articles 22-27) amongst others obliges journalists to balance the rights of all persons involved against the societal interest in disclosing information before covering news facts and to act very carefully when vulnerable persons, such as minors and victims of crimes, disasters or accidents, are concerned. This code functions as a practical guide and the Council for Journalism Ethics will apply its provisions to concrete cases.

Code van de Raad voor de Journalistiek

http://www.rvdj.be/sites/default/files/pdf/code2010.pdf

Code on Journalism Ethics

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026