

[DE] Press Council extends Press Code to on-line media

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*Werner Hübner
Institute of European Media Law (EMR), Saarbrücken/Brussels*

On 20.11.96 Germany's Press Council decided to extend its system of journalistic self-regulation beyond the printed word to cover publications in digital form.

The German Press Council (Deutscher Presserat - DPR), founded in 1956, has four pillars: the Federal Association of German Newspaper Publishers (Bundesverband Deutscher Zeitungsverleger - BDZV); the Association of German Magazine Publishers (Verband Deutscher Zeitschriftenverleger - VDZ); the German Journalists' Association (Deutscher Journalistenverband - DJV); the Trade Union for the Media, journalism section (IG Medien).

The statute of the carrier association states that the Council's purpose is to uphold the freedom of the press in the Federal Republic of Germany and to safeguard the reputation of the German press.

As the representative of the German press, the German Press Council stands for fair, accurate journalism. It safeguards the independence of the press vis-a-vis any possible control on the part of the state. It gives an opinion on fundamental issues concerning the fraught relations between the press and society, and helps to formulate ethical rules for the profession. Its Press Code gives journalists and publishers indications and recommendations for their day-to-day work. The Press Code consists of 16 articles, given tangible form in the shape of guidelines. The Code was adopted in 1973, and the version dated 14.2.96 is currently valid.

Moreover, the German Press Council also champions free information of the individual citizen. Anyone is free to lodge a complaint with the Press Council. To this end, in 1972 it set up a special Complaints Committee, whose members are drawn from its ranks. The Committee measures complaints against the basic journalistic principles of the Press Code. If the Complaints Committee finds that there has been a breach of the code, its verdict may take the form of noting the matter, issuing a rebuke or issuing a public reprimand. Under article 16 of the Press Code, a public reprimand "must be printed, particularly in the publications concerned".

By its decision of 20 November 1996 the Press Council extended the scope of the Press Code to cover the on-line media. According to a press release dated 25.11.96, the Complaints Committee will be responsible in future not only for complaints relating to the printed word, but also for complaints which "relate to

published material containing journalistic or editorial contributions which is circulated by newspaper or magazine publishers or by press services solely in digital form or also in digital form." The amendments to the statute which are necessary in order to extend the code have already been adopted.

