

[UA] Profane language permissible in specific context

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On 9 March 2022, the Commission on Journalistic Ethics, a board of 15 people elected by the signatories of the Code of Ethics of Ukrainian Journalists, adopted a decision on a complaint it had received, on 1 March 2022, from citizen Serhii Hordyshev in relation to a programme aired that day by Channel 5 (a private, national network). A newscast had text overlaying the video on the lower third, saying “Russian warship, go f*ck yourself”. The Commission reviewed the complaint without the respondent's presence and decided to dismiss it. Article 15 of the Code of Ethics of Ukrainian Journalists states the following: “No one can be discriminated against due to gender, language, race, religion or ethnic, social origin or political preferences. This information can be pointed out only if it is a necessary part of the material. A journalist should avoid offensive words and foul language, hints or comments about a person’s physical disabilities or diseases”. Although the Code sets out the requirements for the need to refrain from using offensive language and profanity, the Commission found that this case of non-compliance had to be considered in the light of the specific context. This particular phrase, explained the text of the decision, originated from the response of Ukrainian border guards on Snake Island in the Black Sea to the demand of surrender that was coming from the Russian warships. Ukrainians admired their brave response, which had become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance. At the same time, the Commission called the media to: 1. Refrain from the use of offensive language, profanity, unless justified by the context, but even then – to avoid frequent use of such language and to be able to justify the use of any offensive language. 2. Always refrain from the use of offensive and obscene expressions in programming or websites aimed at children. 3. Be especially vigilant about adhering to the standards of journalism and journalistic ethics during martial law in Ukraine.

Commission on Journalistic Ethics, Decision on the complaint against TOV Channel 5 (Piatyi kanal) due to the use of the response of Ukrainian soldiers from Snake Island

<https://cje.org.ua/news/the-complaint-against-tov-channel-5-piatyi-kanal-due-to-the-use-of-the-response-of-ukrainian-soldiers-from-snake-island/>

Code of Ethics of the Ukrainian Journalist (2013)

<https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes/Ukraine-Journalist>

