



JOURNALISM & DIVERSITY

ETHICS & DEONTOLOGY UNITS

PRACTICAL SHEETS FOR JOURNALISTS & MEDIA MANAGERS

UNIT 1 - DIVERSITY

WHY SHOULD IT MATTER TO JOURNALISM?

MARS - Media Against Racism in Sport

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



EUROPEAN UNION



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Implemented
by the Council of Europe

UNIT 1 **DIVERSITY: WHY SHOULD IT MATTER TO JOURNALISM?**

The mission of journalists is to cover present reality in all the events through which it unfolds, and to convey the spectrum of diversity of the societies in which they live. Indeed, media presentation of information should still more emphatically reflect ethnic, cultural and social diversity as well as diversity regarding gender, sexual orientation and disability. In sport, ethnic and cultural minorities are fairly well represented. This visibility is chiefly due to the fact that sports participation presents itself as one of society's most open and diversified spheres. However, where the handling of sports news and the media image of diversity are concerned, combating of all forms of discrimination must be carried on for at least two reasons:

A question of professional ethics for journalism - Diversity reporting is in keeping with the mission of social cohesion assigned to journalists by the press councils existing in most countries of Europe

Among the Council of Europe member states, 25 countries have established a national press council. Most of these countries consider that journalists have a civic responsibility and should contribute to social cohesion, in particular by reflecting the diverse features of the society to which they belong. But these diverse features are not necessarily visible, since numerous forms of discrimination tend to minimise or mask women and many minorities.

To avoid replicating this discrimination, journalists must emphasise the prevalent lack of diversity in numerous agencies of power or, conversely, help to bring out facets of diversity which are real enough but left invisible by the mechanisms of representation.

A question of ethics for each journalist - Equitable representation of society's different components is in keeping with the mission of journalistic honesty

Even in the realm of sport, certain minorities such as people with disabilities remain very minimally visible. Besides, even though the ethnic and cultural diversity of sports players is well represented in the media, the players only appear in 10% of sport items, and expertise in sport is conceded to the sole category of sport experts, journalists and analysts, generally white males over fifty years of age.

Blatant racism has most fortunately been banished from the media sphere, and racist acts by players or spectators are vigorously condemned (even penalised). However, today discrimination becomes more insidious, when for example the adjectives used to describe a black athlete denote animals ("A thoroughbred", "A gazelle") while they belong more to technology for a white athlete ("A rocket")².

² See *Gender Issues – Equality in the Media – Guide for Journalists – MARS Programme – Council of Europe – 2012*
www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/mars/Source/Documents/EEM/fiches-pratiques_en.pdf

FOCUS LITHUANIA

Ethical code and committee ensure freedom from external pressure

In Lithuania, when media and sports clubs have the same owners, journalists must struggle to preserve independence in the journalistic approach to sport. To guard against any external pressure, journalists may invoke the Code of Ethics, observance of which is guaranteed by an Ethics Committee:

The Code of Ethics for journalists and broadcasters adopted in 2005 contains, in Articles 54 and 55, specific provisions on combating racism and discrimination - It thus encourages journalists to refuse to co-operate in humiliating or ridiculing persons or groups on the ground of their race, nationality, culture, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation or disability, even where these persons have committed a crime.

The Ethics Committee was set up by the Lithuanian Union of Journalists in 2009 to enforce the Code of Ethics, consider complaints and issue recommendations and decisions:

- *Its authority is invoked in editorial boards or media institutions as well as in the field so that journalistic work may be done in complete independence.*
 - *Freedom from pressure brought to bear by governing circles, including those in the world of sport, especially where such pressure concerns publishing racist statements in an interview. Such statements, quite common in sports communities in Lithuania, are often disputed subsequently by the culprits, thereby casting doubt on the integrity of the journalists who received them.*
 - *Refusal to account for and condemn the behaviour of a suspect or suspects by their belonging to a social or cultural group or by their sexual orientation.*
-