

Guidelines to Safeguard the Independence of Journalism at Axel Springer

Preamble

The editors of Axel Springer AG are aware of their responsibility for providing information and shaping public opinion in Germany. Independence is essential as a basis for their work.

The guidelines are a concrete expression of Axel Springer's understanding of the journalistic principles set forth in the Press Code of the German Press Council. Adherence to these guidelines by all editors in their journalistic work safeguards the overall conditions that enable independent, critical journalism at Axel Springer.

The chief editors are responsible for adherence to the guidelines and their implementation in day-to-day work.

Advertising

Point 7 of the Press Code requires publishers and editors to make a clear distinction between editorial text and advertising copy and points out the need to adhere to the regulations for paid advertising.

The journalists at Axel Springer

...shall ensure, together with the management of the publishing house, that a distinction is made between advertising and editorial material. Advertisements must not create the impression, through their overall design or major components, that they are part of the editorial material of the title. Special attention must be given to using different typography. If there is any doubt, the advertisement must be marked as such clearly and in sufficiently large type.

... shall resist attempts by advertisers or interested parties to influence content, and enter no agreements that might jeopardize their independence as journalists. Merchandising campaigns and media partnerships must be identified as such where necessary.

Personal and business interests

It is part of the responsibility of the press towards the public that journalistic publications should not be influenced by the personal or business interests of third parties or the personal financial interests of the editors themselves.

This is the subject of Points 6 and 7 of the Press Code.

The journalists at Axel Springer

...shall not report on persons with whom they have a close relationship, especially family members, in the form of copy or photographs unless there is an objective reason for doing so that has been approved by the writer's superior.

... shall not use their reporting to obtain benefits for themselves or others.

...shall consult their superior if membership of or the holding of an office or a seat in a society, political party, association or other institution, investment in a company, permitted side-line employment or a relationship with persons or institutions might create the impression that the neutrality of their reporting on such societies, political parties, associations, persons or other institutions is thereby impaired.

...shall take special care to meet the legal and professional obligations of the press with regard to inside information as set forth in the German Press Council's publication "Journalistic ethics concerning inside and other information with a potential effect on security prices".

Invitations and gifts

Point 15 of the Press Code is concerned with personal benefit as a danger to independent journalism. Even the appearance that journalists' freedom of decision might be impaired by the acceptance of invitations or gifts should be avoided.

The journalists at Axel Springer

...shall ensure that all costs (travelling expenses, entertainment etc.) incurred in the course of their research are paid by the editorial department. Any exceptions must be approved by the chief editor.

...shall not accept any gifts that constitute a personal benefit or, if it is impossible to refuse them, shall pass them on to the company, which will then give them to a charity.

Treatment of sources

The journalist's duty of care in the treatment of information sources is extremely important for journalistic work and the public's opinion of the press. Point 2 of the Press Code regulates the treatment of sources in addition to the existing legal provisions.

The journalists at Axel Springer

...shall in all cases make sure that interviews are authorized verbally or in writing by the person interviewed, even if time is very short.

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