



DECISION OF THE CENTRAL ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMISSION OF VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

On the appeal of T. M., student at the /Unit/, of 14 April 2025

On 14 April 2025, the Central Academic Ethics Commission (hereinafter the 'Commission') received an appeal from T. M. (hereinafter the 'Applicant'), student at the /Unit/, requesting an investigation of the potentially unethical behaviour of A. M., a member of the teaching staff at the /Unit/. The appeal states that during the /.../ lecture that took place on 1 April of this year, A. M. commented on Jewish people and told the students a potentially unethical joke based on 'anti-Semitic attitude that Jews are inclined to diligently obey their religious authorities and have deceptive business practices.' The Applicant claims that such comments and the joke that was told violate Item 7(1) (*'discrimination of members of the community of any form, as well as tolerance of such discrimination'*) and Item 10 (*'The behaviour of teachers and researchers (in either science or arts) (hereinafter referred to as the academic staff) must be an example of academic ethics for other members of the community'*) of the Code of Academic Ethics, undermined the ethics of the Unit's administration, and makes members of minority communities feel unwelcome.

When the Commission introduced A. M. to the contents of the depersonalised appeal it received, A. M. provided a response to the Commission apologising to anyone who were insulted by his comments and explained that he does not and did not hold any anti-Semitic convictions and, on the contrary, does not tolerate anti-Semitic behaviour and statements. A. M. admitted to having told a joke about Jewish people, however, the joke concerned the /.../ course unit he teaches and there was no intent behind it to insult or discriminate anyone. The member of the teaching staff also noted that other quotes detailed in the Applicant's appeal were inaccurate or misunderstood.

Having familiarised itself with the Applicant's appeal and the explanations provided by A. M. at the Commission's request, the Commission hereby points out that:

1. In its activities, the Commission is guided by the Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University approved by the Senate of Vilnius University (current version approved by Resolution of the Senate of Vilnius University No. SPN-54 of 21 October 2020) (hereinafter the 'Code of Academic Ethics') and the Regulations of the Central Academic Ethics Commission of Vilnius University

(current version approved by Resolution of the Senate of Vilnius University No. SPN-55 of 21 October 2020) (hereinafter the 'Commission Regulations'). The Commission Regulations define the Commission's competence, the decisions that it can possibly make, and describe the Commission's operating procedures. In its decisions, the Commission only comments on matters that fall under its competence and evaluates reasoned and substantiated appeals submitted by applicants.

2. The Commission hereby points out that any discrimination of other members of the community is prohibited at the University: The University is governed by the principle of non-discrimination (Item 2 of the Code of Academic Ethics) and relationships between members of the community (Item 7 of the Code of Academic Ethics) and between the academic staff and students (Item 11 of the Code of Academic Ethics) are based on this principle. At the University, discrimination is understood as unwelcome behaviour when, on one or more grounds for discrimination (gender, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, social status, faith, beliefs or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, health status, marital and family status, membership in a political party, trade union or association, religion, intention to have children and other grounds established by law), less favourable conditions are applied to a person than are, were or would be applied to another person under similar circumstances (Items 7(3) and 7(4) of the Policy on the Prevention of Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Violence and Persecution at Vilnius University). Actions violating these principles and discriminating persons belonging to a certain group are not tolerated and strictly prohibited.

3. The Commission hereby also notes that academic, teaching, and research freedom is recognised at the University, meaning that members of the community are guaranteed the right to openly express their thoughts, create, and carry out scientific research (Items 3 and 5 of the Code of Academic Ethics). Such freedom, *inter alia*, gives the right to members of the teaching staff to create the content of their course units and deliver it themselves, choose communication models and teaching methods, including cases when, in order to express their opinion or present the content of their course unit more illustratively, introduce it from other positions or in other contexts, members of the teaching staff may invoke figures of speech, comparisons, or humour.

Of course, none of the freedoms indicated in the Code of Academic Ethics shall be treated as absolute and the provisions of the Code of Academic Ethics, when evaluated systematically, define the limits of each, the academic freedom principle included. One of the most important factors limiting the academic freedom is the aforementioned non-discrimination principle. Following this principle, a member of the teaching staff must prepare and deliver the content of their lectures responsibly, including ascertaining that the content is not offensive, not humiliating towards certain members of the community or groups thereof, and not creating discrimination or tolerating it.

4. In the specific case in question, the Commission evaluated whether A. M.'s comments during the lecture and the joke he told about Jewish people crossed the limits of academic freedom and violated the non-discrimination principle. The following aspects of the situation under evaluation were considered:

4.1. A. M., before telling the aforementioned joke, pointed out the purpose of the joke and that he did not intend to discriminate or otherwise insult anyone on the basis of their nationality (this is both indicated by the Applicant and confirmed by the member of the teaching staff); therefore, in terms of objectives, there was no aim to discriminate or otherwise humiliate due to the nationality or other discriminatory basis.

4.2. The Applicant indicates the only case when A. M. made potentially unethical remarks regarding Jewish people in his lectures; thus, there are no grounds to conclude that the member of the teaching staff holds discriminatory views or aims to humiliate anyone on the basis of their nationality. It is therefore the opinion of the Commission that the aforementioned remark shall be considered a one-off means of expression, a comment, and not a systematic and purposeful dissemination of unethical views.

Having evaluated the detailed aspects and the content of the non-discrimination principle disclosed in the legal acts of the University, the Commission hereby concludes that A. M. did not violate academic ethics by his actions in the specific case under consideration.

5. The Commission hereby notes that the Code of Academic Ethics establishes the duty for all members of the University community to uphold the highest standards of ethics and the behaviour of the academic staff must be an example of academic ethics for other members of the community (Item 10 of the Code of Academic Ethics). Taking this into account, in the context of the specific case at hand, the Commission hereby recommends the academic staff to avoid making remarks irrelevant to the content of their lectures when delivering them, as well as to avoid comments or other illustrative figures of speech that single out separate groups of people on race, nationality, or other discriminatory basis when there is no subject-specific aim. Such remarks are also suggested to be evaluated in advance in terms of the social and geopolitical contexts.

6. The Commission hereby notes that, in accordance with Item 39 of the Commission Regulations, the depersonalised Commission's decisions (or summaries thereof) are published on the University's website. The Commission explains that it is done with the aim to more clearly define the ethical standards applied at the University, to make the University community aware of the examples of inappropriate and intolerable behaviour as well as the examples of good practice in the activities of commissions, and to promote following the principles of academic ethics introduced and fostered by the University in their activities at the University and beyond.

In the light of the foregoing, in accordance with Items 13(2) and 35(2) of the Regulations of the Central Academic Ethics Commission, the Central Academic Ethics Commission hereby d e c i d e s :

1. To conclude that A. M., a member of the teaching staff, did not violate academic ethics.

2. To make the depersonalised decision of the Commission publicly available.

The Commission's decision was adopted unanimously at the meeting attended by 6 of the 8 members of the Commission.

Chairperson

Assoc. Prof. Dr Vigita Vèbraité