



DECISION OF THE CENTRAL ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMISSION OF VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

On the appeal of Vilnius University graduate J. G. of 14 February 2025

The Central Academic Ethics Commission (hereinafter the ‘Commission’) received an appeal registered on 14 February 2025 from J. G. (hereinafter the ‘Applicant’), graduate of the /Unit/, requesting to investigate a case of potential plagiarism in the publication ‘/.../’ of Assoc. Prof. Dr M. Č., in which, according to the Applicant, the content of her Master thesis was used illegally and without her permission. Assoc. Prof. M. Č. was the supervisor of the Applicant’s Master thesis. The Applicant substantiates her claims by providing written correspondence between her and the supervisor and a comparison of her Master thesis and the supervisor’s publication.

In accordance with Item 29 of the Commission Regulations, the Commission contacted the Rector of Vilnius University regarding the formation of an expert group to investigate the situation in question. The conclusion of the experts provided on 22 April 2025 finds that the publication ‘/.../’ of Dr M. Č. is a plagiarism of the Applicant’s Master thesis ‘/.../’: research data and explanatory statements provided in the publication matches that of the Master thesis, and the provided research problem is only adjusted stylistically rather than in meaning.

The Commission requested clarifications regarding the situation in question from Assoc. Prof. M. Č., who admitted in part to the plagiarism in her response to the Commission, stating that in her publication, the ‘research part was prepared relying on the Applicant’s Master thesis ‘/.../’ and I did not sufficiently clearly indicate her as the co-author, and did not provide a reference to her research work.’ The rest of the publication, according to her, was prepared independently. Assoc. Prof. M. Č. claimed to understand that her actions may have been unethical, admitted her error, and apologised for her actions.

Upon familiarising itself with the Applicant’s appeal, the conclusion of the expert group formed by the Rector, and the explanations provided by Assoc. Prof. M. Č., 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 competency, 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 competency.

2. Item 13 of the Commission Regulations states that the Commission investigates complaints and appeals within its competency. The requirements for these documents are detailed in Items 23 and 24 of the Commission Regulations, which state that, among other things, applicants must include in the appeal their position at the University (or the unit where the person studies) and the e-mail address provided by the University. The aforementioned requirements confirm that only members of the University community may submit an appeal or complaint to the Commission and become a party to a dispute regarding academic ethics. This provision also follows logically from the purpose and powers of the Commission as an autonomous dispute settlement commission for the community, not a law enforcement authority.

Understandably, there are cases when a non-University employee or student may inform the Commission about the potentially unethical behaviour of a member of the University community. In such cases, the Commission shall also assess the content of the appeal or complaint received and, having assessed that it falls within the competency of the Commission, shall have the right to initiate an investigation on the basis of such information concerning a possible violation of academic ethics on its own initiative (Item 14 of the Commission Regulations). It should be noted that in such a case, the information received is not subject to the requirements set out for complaints or appeals, and its investigation is not subject to specific procedural requirements and time limits established for the investigation of complaints and appeals, but the information is examined in accordance with the principles set out in the Commission Regulations, and the investigation is closed upon a decision on whether academic ethics were violated or not. When the investigation is carried out pursuant to Item 14 of the Commission Regulations, the person who appealed to the Commission and submitted the information shall not be considered a party to the dispute regarding academic ethics, but shall be informed of the decision taken by the Commission.

Having evaluated the information provided by the Applicant and the accompanying evidence of a potential violation of academic ethics, the Commission decided to investigate the information provided by the Applicant and evaluate the actions of Assoc. Prof. M. Č. in terms of academic ethics.

3. The Commission hereby explains that when expert opinion is required for it to make its decision, the Commission shall contact the Rector regarding the formation of an expert group and shall make its decision following the conclusion provided by the expert group (Items 29–31 of the Commission Regulations). As already mentioned, the formed expert group concluded that Assoc. Prof. M. Č. committed plagiarism. Having familiarised itself with the conclusion provided by the expert group and having determined no substantial shortcomings in the formation of the expert group or in its conclusion, the Commission hereby concludes that Assoc. Prof. M. Č., through her actions, committed a violation of academic ethics established in Item 19(2) of the Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University (*‘a person submits a work under their own name that uses statements from another person’s work, generated by artificial intelligence or other similar technological means, with minor changes to words or sentence structures and with no or inaccurate acknowledgement of the source’*).

4. The Commission hereby points out that in accordance with Item 18 of the Code of Academic Ethics, ‘research activities at the University must be carried out in an honest, moral and responsible manner.’ Plagiarism, i.e. the use of ideas, texts, illustrations generated by other persons without acknowledging the author, presentation of another author’s work or part thereof as their own, republishing of academic production, and other instances set out in Item 19 of the Code of Academic Ethics, is one of grossest violations of the principle of honest, moral, and responsible research activities and is prohibited at the University. Due to this reason, even if plagiarism is detected only in part of the publication in question, regardless of the author’s contribution to the rest of the publication, it results in the whole publication in question not meeting the requirements of academic ethics and fair authorship. Taking this into account, the Commission hereby informs the /Unit/ administration about the decision taken and instructs it to inform the editorial board of the ‘.../’ journal about the detected fact of plagiarism and take other necessary actions so that the publication ‘.../’ of Assoc. Prof. M. Č. is not made available in public scientific publication databases.

5. 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 14, 31, 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 Assoc. Prof. M. Č., through her actions, committed a violation of academic ethics established in Item 19(2) of the Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University.
2. To make the depersonalised decision of the Commission publicly available.

The Commission's decision was taken by a majority vote (five 'for', and two 'against').

Chairperson

Assoc. Prof. Dr Vigita Vébraitė