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**COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

**ON THE SITUATION WITH FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE
VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA IN ARMENIA**

**2018 Annual report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression**

*The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression regularly submits to the public its reports on working environment and issues of Armenian media and its personnel, on the status of the freedom of expression and on the violations of the rights of the media and the journalists. This report reflects the data from 2017.*

*The sources of facts included in the report are the following:*

*- phone calls to CPFE “hot line”*

*- meetings and conversations of the CPFE experts with media personnel,*

*- replies to official inquiries sent to public bodies,*

*- materials from court cases with media involvement,*

*- materials disseminated by the partner journalistic organization,*

*- publications by the media outlets.*

***BRIEF SUMMARY***

 2018 was an intense and complicated period for the Armenian media outlets, the reason being the velvet revolution that took place in the country and related to it political developments, including snap elections to the Yerevan City Council and to the RA National Assembly.

 Monitoring of the previous years show, that under the conditions of important processes that take place in the domestic political life, especially the tension, which occurs during the elections, tension over the media, the number of cases of violating their rights is increasing. In 2018, majority of such cases were recorded in April, during the most heated period of the velvet revolution. During that period, the CPFE recorded 18 cases of physical violence against media representatives and eight cases of impeding their professional activity. The wave of attack and pressure on journalists stopped after Serzh Sargsyan’s resignation. Criminal cases were filed only in 15 out of 26 recorded incidents; only four of them went to court, of which only in relation of three a decision was made.

 In terms of snap elections to the Yerevan City Council and to the NA, they were significantly different from all the previous ones not only with the level of freedom, justice and transparency, but also in terms of unconstrained operation by the journalists and media outlets. Unlike the formed fallacious tradition, when elections were coupled with a number of violations of the rights of the media employees, this time there were few of them. During the elections to the Yerevan City Council one case of violence and on case of impeding professional activity were recorded; on the day of elections to the NA, there was not even an attempt to use force against the journalists and cameramen, but three cases of impeding professional activity were recorded of which two were resolved on site, and one was sent for investigation.

 In general, in 2018 the CPFE recorded 21 cases pf physical violence against journalists, 67 cases of various types of pressure on media and their employees and 98 cases of violating the right to receive and disseminate information.

During the post-revolutionary period, serious concern was created by the search and seizure of equipment by the law enforcement bodies at the editorial office of the “Yerevan.today” news site, and during the pre-election period, concern was created by the illegal actions at “News.am” and “Aysor.am”, where they were required to show videos and “grounds” for the publications. While referring to these facts, the CPFE, along with partner organizations, made a statement and called for the new authorities to take actions to keep the media free from illegal actions by the police and to create more favorable conditions for the journalists and the media outlets to operate freely, irrespective of their political affiliation[[1]](#footnote-1).

During the heated political struggle as a result of revolution, the speech of hatred, insult and slander became widely spread in the social media. Representatives of various political powers, media outlets, non-governmental organizations and international institutions expressed their concerns in this respect. The problem became a subject matter of public discussions, one of which was initiated by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression jointly with the Delegation of the European Union in Armenia on the eve of the campaign for the parliamentary elections. Although during the post-election period the scope of the speech of hatred in the social media significantly decreased, it is too early to consider the situation as good.

 It is noteworthy, that in 2018, 13 new claims were brought to court against the media outlets and journalists, and they all are under Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code, i.e. insult and slander. It should be noted that among the claimants are RA second president Robert Kocharyan, Deputy Prime-Minister Tigran Avinyan, as well as there are cases when one media outlet sued another one, moreover, in case of one it is related to a post by a journalist on Facebook.

During the year, in relation to resolved court cases nine decisions were made to the detriment of the media outlets and journalists, and ten decisions in their favor.

During 2018, the CPFE continued to monitor criminal cases related to the events in Baghramyan Ave. on June 23, 2015 (#ElectricYerevan) and in Khorenatsi Street and Sari Tagh in the second half of July 2016, which were coupled with impediments of professional activity and mass violence against the journalists and the cameramen. No significant progress was recorded in either of the cases; no new defendants or event suspect have been identified, which proves the inefficiency of the pre-investigation. Moreover, on September 25, the Special investigate e service stopped the proceeding of the case related to “Sari tagh”, with the reason that “the person engaged as the defendant is unknown”. With the support from the CPFE, two of the journalists recognized as case-related victims, Mariam Grigoryan from “1in.am” and photo-journalists Gevorg Ghazaryan appealed the decision by SIS to the prosecutor’s office, and after being rejected, they turned to court. The case is current.

 During the post-revolutionary period, the media outlets complained of the problems related to receiving information of public importance from the state agencies. In this respect the data by the CPFE also speak of the aggravation of the situation. Although the head of the new Government and some members sometimes go live on their Facebook pages and tell about current activities and future actions, as well as express their opinion about the most important problems, it cannot fully replace the work of the press secretaries and the department of the public relations.

 During the 2018, and especially after the velvet revolution, certain rearrangements took place in the field of media outlets. Firstly, it was the result of RPA leaving the position of the authorities and reducing or stopping the funding of their own media outlets. Noticeable impact on this process was made by the return of the RA second president Robert Kocharyan to politics, after which a number of media outlets were linked to his name. In this respect, noteworthy was the sale of the “Ararat” TV company, affiliated to RPA, and turning it into “Channel 5” with completely different political orientation. At the end of the years, we learned about the change of the owner of the “ArmNews” TV Company. This processes have the tendency to continue and, quite probably, will also include printed and online media. In particular, “Hayots Ashkharh” daily will stop being issued in 2019 because of financial reasons.

 In 2018, one of the most serious problems in the field of broadcasting remained unsolved, i.e. the problem of creating a private multiplex. On December 28, the TV and radio Commission announced failed the tender which started on June 23, as no application was submitted during the defined period. This is the third tender without results; the previous two were held in 2016 and 2017, however they had no applicants. The CPFE and partner organizations have mentioned a number of times that the terms and requirements stipulated by the law “On TV and radio” to create a private digital network for broadcasting, i.e. a multiplex, are unacceptable: they are not attractive from business perspective and are not promising in terms of the development of this field. However, the TVRC, ignoring the essence of the problem, organizes tenders of formal nature, which are destined to fail from the very start.

 Unlike the field of broadcasting, the Armenian online media has noticeably improved its positions. On November 1, the “Freedom House” human rights organization published a report “Freedom on the Net in 2018” in which Armenia moved from list of the countries with “partially free” Internet to the list of the “free”. The authors of the document mention that this improvement is directly connected with the “velvet revolution” during which the citizens actively used the social media platforms, communications applications and live streams on the Internet.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

 The 2018 was a year full of political events for Armenia. The velvet revolution in April and conditioned with that snap elections to the local self-governing bodies and to the National Assembly were a serious test for the Armenian media. The coverage of those events and related to them public-political processes required great efforts and professional responsibility from the journalists, cameramen and editors. In general, the media outlets, firstly the media, were able to do their mission, operatively informing the Armenian and international public about the radical changes that were taking place in the country.

 The velvet resolution introduced a new culture for politicians to communicate with the public: the Prime Minister and many members of the Government started to go online from their Facebook pages and to tell about their routine activity, decisions made and future actions. However, the media outlets did not accept this “online democracy” smoothly. A number of media outlets complained of the fact that no press release is sent in relation to any event, instead information is disseminated through Facebook posts. On July 17, heads of a number of media outlets made a statement expressing their concerns related to the negative tendencies of the operation of the media outlets, according to their assessments[[2]](#footnote-2).

 Violations of the right to receiving and disseminating information recorded by the CPFE prove that the public bodies often fail to conduct their duties in providing information. Besides leaving the inquiries unanswered or refusing them groundlessly, the respective departments of the agencies violate the 5-day period defined by the law for the provision of information or they give incomplete answers, and all these create extra impediment in the work of the media. The Freedom of Information Center has also recorded big number of such violations. During October-December months, through sending similar inquiries to ministries, administrations, municipalities and other public agencies and analyzing their responses, in 40 incidents the FIC recorded various types of violations[[3]](#footnote-3).

 Legislative changes are also necessary to develop the freedom of information. In particular, it is very important to review a number of provisions in the law “On the structure and operation of the Government” and law “On local self-government in Yerevan City” adopted on March 23 by the previous authorities, as well as to make changes in the law “On procurement” and law “On the protection of personal information” while lifting the groundless restrictions to receive information.

 Surely, the new authorities demonstrate a unique approach in applying the aforementioned two laws. The Government sessions, as a rule, are public in contrast to the RA law “On the structure and operation of the Government”, according to which they should be behind the doors and only by the decision of the Prime Minister they can be held public. The same can be said about the application of the provisions related to the media outlets in the law “On local self-government in Yerevan City”: during the post-revolutionary period, the journalists operate more freely in the City Hall, than it is stipulated by the law adopted by the previous authorities. However, it is very important that these progressive and liberal approaches are enshrined by legislative changes. As a first step of this process can be considered the fact, that starting November 11 on [www.e-draft.am](http://www.e-draft.am), common website for the publication of draft bills, they started discussing the draft on making changes and amendments in the RA law “On the structure and operation of the Government”, according to which, among other things, it is recommended to hold government sessions publicly. In terms of the restrictions in the law “On local self-government in Yerevan City”, at the end of the year a discussion was held on the subject matter with the participation of officials from the municipality and representatives from media organizations.

 The guidebook titled “The right to protection of personal data during public events” circulated on September 27 by the Personal Data Protection Agency under the RA Ministry of Justice, also requires comprehensive discussion. While respecting the right to protection of personal data, the CPFE expresses belief that it should not contradict another fundamental right – the freedom of expression. From this perspective the aforementioned document has a number of controversial provisions, which can be qualified as groundless restriction of the media and journalists’ activity. In particular, while agreeing with the statement that during the seminars and conferences the phot and video-shooting should be mutually agreed with the participants, according to the CPFE, in absence of consensus those who do not want to be videotaped should be an obstacle to hold the event and to cover it. After all the seminars, conferences and other similar events have public nature and the participants should be ready for free communication, including tolerating presence and activity of media, or simply they should not participate.

 In terms of exercising the right to receive and disseminate information, as well as creating favorable conditions for the journalists to operate, the bill on making changes and amendments in the Administrative procedural code adopted by the National Assembly on February 8 had positive impact. According to it, for the photo- and video-taping of the administrative court cases the consent of the parties is required, but not the permission by the court based on the motion by the party to the trial.

 The velvet revolution also contributed to the establishment of another culture in the field of politics and media activity, i.e. political TV debate. During the campaign of the snap elections to the NA, the public witnessed a number of such debates, and on the last day of the campaign the number ones on the lists of the 11 political parties and alliances had a debate on public TV, which was an unprecedented event for the Armenian reality.

 The snap elections to the Yerevan City Council and to the NA held during the post-revolutionary period were qualitatively different from all the previous ones in terms journalists and media outlets operating without any constraint. In fact, the fallacious tradition was broken, when on the day of the election at the polling stations the media representatives underwent violence and various types of pressure. During the last elections, the cases of violating the journalists’ rights were rare, moreover, in certain cases they were resolved on site. This is a very important thing, which should be developed.

 In 2018, majority of the cases of violating the rights of the media outlets and journalists were recorded in April, during the heated period of the velvet revolution. In relation to 18 cases of physical violence against media representatives and eight incidents of impeding their professional activity, the CPFE has recorded the following developments. Criminal cases were filed only in 15 out of the 26 incidents. Four of them (Arus Hakobyan, correspondent from radio “Liberty”, Tehmine Yenokyan, correspondent from “Lragir.am”, Tirair Mouradyan, journalist form “Union of informed citizens” NGO, two incidents) went to court, of which only in relation to three decisions are made. In the rest of the cases, either criminal case was not field from the very beginning or after studying the materials it was decided to reject the filing of the criminal case, or the proceeding of the filed criminal case was stopped.

 Part of these decisions created serious concerns in the media environment. E.g., they stopped the criminal case filed in relation to impeding professional legitimate activity of Arevik Sahakyan, editor-in-chief of “Factor.am” news site and cameraman Gevorg Martirosyan, and forcing them to refuse to disseminate information, moreover, on the ground that the person who committed the crime is unknown. This is in case, when there are footages about how the victims pointed at the persons impeding their activity, and identifying them should have been very easy.

 By the way, testimonies by the journalists who suffered during the days of revolution prove that the violence against the media employees were intentional and targeted, like in incidents during 2015 “Electric Yerevan”, in 2016 on Khorenatsi Street and Sari Tagh, and in many other incidents. Various types of pressure and impediments could not be avoided even in case when the journalists showed their IDs and the videotaping equipment had the media logo on them.

The goal of the police was to prevent the coverage of any forceful actions against the demonstrators by any means.

 While responding to this situation, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, along with partner and human rights organizations made statements on April 19[[4]](#footnote-4) and 23[[5]](#footnote-5) condemning violence and demanding from authorities to identify those to blame operatively and to bring them to responsibility. The “Journalists without borders” international organization has also referred to the violation of the rights of the journalists covering the events of the revolution, which in its message on April 25 qualified the targeted violence against the media representatives in Armenia as “an accepted sad practice”.

 Grounds for such an evaluation by the international organization were the known cases of the previous years, including the events in Baghramyan Ave. on June 23, 2015 (#ElectricYerevan) and in Khorenatsi Street and Sari Tagh in the second half of July 2016, which were coupled with impediments of professional activity and mass violence against the journalists and the cameramen. We should remind that during only those two incidents, according to the official data, more than 40 journalists and cameramen suffered, however as a result of pre-investigation the number of charges brought (under criminal case of “Electric Yerevan” – 4, “Sari Tagh” – 9 persons) is not equivalent to the scope of violence against the media representatives on those days.

 During 2018, the CPFE continued to monitor the criminal cases of “Electric Yerevan” and “Sari Tagh” and recorded, that throughout the year no new defendant or at least a suspect was identified in relation to any of the cases. Moreover, on September 25, the Special investigative service stopped the proceeding of this case on the ground that “the person engaged as a defendant is unknown”. These are evident facts, which prove that the pre-investigation is ineffective. Moreover, if we take into consideration that in a number of videos and photos available in the media archives and on the Internet one can see both policemen and persons in civilian clothes acting as policemen illegally using force and special means against the journalists and the cameramen.

 The special attention by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression on these criminal cases is reasoned by the fact that the organization is representing three journalists (Hakob Karapetyan, Gevorg Ghazaryan and Tehmine Yenokyan) in the pre-investigation of “Electric Yerevan”, and 2 persons in “Sari Tagh” case (Mariam Grigoryan and the same Gevorg Ghazaryan). From the very beginning they did not have an advocate and turned to the Committee for help.

As in the previous years the pre-investigation was also ineffective, according to us and our partners, and often it had formal nature, the CPFE supported these five journalists to turn to the international instances, i.e. to the European Court and to the UN Human Rights Committee, without exhausting all the instances domestically, which is sometimes stipulated by the aforementioned institutions. Although both instances registered the complaints, moreover the UN Human Rights Committee communicated the complaints by the Armenian journalists via addressing questions to the RA Government, on December 14, the CPFE was notified that those complaints were rejected and it was necessary exhaust all the instances domestically, after which they should turn to the international instance. Nevertheless, the complaints sent to the international instances contributed to the fact so that three years after the events the SIS cross-examined then the First Deputy Chief-of-Police Hunan Poghosyan (on September 3) and Deputy Chief-of-Police, Commander of internal troops Levon Yeranosyan (on September 7) with case-related victim Hakob Karapetyan.

 Under these conditions, in relation to “Electric Yerevan” criminal case the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression intends to turn to court challenging the actions (inaction) by the Special investigative service. In terms of the decision by the SIS to stop the “Sari Tagh” case, a complaint was brought to the prosecutor’s office against it, and after being rejected, to the Yerevan court of general jurisdiction. The complaint was taken over a proceeding; the first court session is on January 23, 2019.

Although during the post-revolutionary period the violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets have reduced, a number of facts like stopping the “Sari Tagh” criminal case, ineffectiveness of the “Electric Yerevan” case, many of the people impeding activity of the media representatives and/or exerting violence against them in 2017 elections, as well as during the 2018 revolution, who remained unpunished, are of serious concern.

Besides, from the perspective of freedom of expression and media outlets operating without constraints, the self-willed actions by the law-enforcement bodies against the media during the post-revolutionary period is strictly unacceptable. The first such case happened on September 17, at the editorial office of “Yerevan.today” news site, where Department 6 of the RA Police and Special investigative service employees conducted a search. They were looking for wire-tapping devices, also they checked the computers to find out how the site received and published the YouTube link of the wiretapped conversation between NSS Director Arthur Vanetsyan and Head of the SIS Sasoun Khachatryan two days before it got spread on the Internet[[6]](#footnote-6). According to the official clarification, the search at the editorial office “had nothing to do with the journalistic activity”, but rather it was aimed at “ensuring comprehensive, objective and full examination of the criminal case.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

As the law enforcement bodies did not introduce any solid facts reasoning the need for such rough actions, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, along with partner organizations made a statement, which said that without serious grounds the incident can “be considered as intervention in the activity of the media outlet and can threaten the protection of information sources.” So, the authors of the document required from the law enforcement bodies to return to the editorial office the seized equipment as soon as possible, to publish the main results after the end of the expert examination, and to take into consideration the violations highlighted by the site editor, which took place during the pre-investigation[[8]](#footnote-8). 1.5 months after the incident, the CPFE sent a letter to the Investigative committee to find out why equipment was not being returned to the editorial office. The RA IC replied that it would take place after the necessary actions are over. However, on December 28, only the equipment was returned to the editorial office.

 On November 20, a case of pressure was also recorded against the “Aysor.am” news site, when the police intruded into the editorial office requiring the recording about one of the covered press conferences. This action by the law enforcement bodies is illegal by itself, however it is more unclear, if we take into consideration that a number of other media outlets were present at the press conference, and the information presented there was completely public. The editorial office provided the recording, and the police provided no grounding or clarification for the actions of its staff.

Such modus operandi by the law enforcement continued during the pre-election period. On December 7, the policemen, evidently abusing their powers, conducted illegal actions at the editorial office of the “News.am” news site. The law enforcement bodies demanded from the media outlet grounds proving the contents of the online speech by one of the politicians, which is funny from the perspective of both media activity norms, and the law. Responding to this fact, the CPFE and partner organizations made a statement and called for the new government established as a result of elections, to take actions to keep the media outlets free from illegal police actions and to create more favorable conditions for the unconstrained operation of the media outlets irrespective of their political affiliation[[9]](#footnote-9).

The revolution and revolutionary processes, including the struggle related to the snap elections, were coupled with large prevalence of the speech of hatred, insult, intolerance and hostility. The situation was especially alarming in social media. In fact, the uncompromising political struggle was transferred to this dimension and reached licentiousness. This was a new challenge that the Armenian society faced. By the way, the losing RPA put the blame on the revolutionaries, and the latter, on behalf of the new government, blamed on the leaving authority; the rest of the political parties looking for their place in the new reality blamed either one side or the other. While each complaining political camp was operating created by them “factory of fakes” and “groups of trolls” with typical to them vocabulary.

 So, the representatives of the previous authority rang the alarm a number of times, saying that through their supporters, the representatives of the new authority are conducting a discrediting campaign against them through using speech of hatred, insult and slander. Vice-president of RPA Armen Ashotyan referred to the swearwords addressed to him[[10]](#footnote-10). His party member Arpine Hovhannisyan, Vice-Speaker of the parliament of the previous convocation, considered it necessary to hold professional discussions[[11]](#footnote-11) about sanctions for notes and comments containing insult and slander.

 On the other hand, through examining the “Fip.am” site for fact checking, it was found out how many “fakes” functioned and with what mechanism during the campaign initiated against Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan. Moreover, the fake news was also spread through media outlets. All these was covered by “Fip.am” in “300 fakes against Arsen Torosyan”[[12]](#footnote-12), “Mad and true nuts” video is fake: campaign against Arsen Torosyan continues”[[13]](#footnote-13), “Armenia” TV Company has targeted Arsen Torosyan”[[14]](#footnote-14) and other publications.

As a rule, similar campaigns have political and personal context.

Taking into consideration the unprecedented prevalence of the speech of hatred and the urgency to find solutions to the problem, on November 26, on the eve of the election campaign to the NA, the CPFE, jointly with the Delegation of the European Union in Armenia held a seminar-discussion in Yerevan on the topic “Freedom of expression: where the borders are”. According to the experts who participated in the event, the current situation is typical to the post-revolutionary period; some thought it is the result of low level of education in the society. The expert invited from the European Court of Human Rights developed a list of recommendations based on the discussions addressed to the media representatives and politicians[[15]](#footnote-15). During the event, they introduced to the participants the RA NA 2018 snap elections coverage memorandum drafted by the Observing body of the Armenian media ethics, which is based on the most important professional principles and approaches. The document also contains provisions relating to the exclusion of speech of hatred and discrimination.

 Although after the December 9 elections the scope of the speech of hatred significantly decreased, the problem cannot be considered as solved.

 The radical political changes that took place in the country also impacted the field of media. Noticeable rearrangements took place in the media environment, which firstly was reasoned by the fact that after the revolution, the previous authorities and accreted to it business reduced or completely stopped the funding of certain “friendly” media outlets, which, in fact was protectionism in political terms. Other “channels” feeding the media were closed down for the same purpose: e.g. allocations from various ministries and administrations or their SNCOs for the coverage of some programs (details in CPFE 2018 2nd and 3rd quarterly reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am), section “Reports”).

 These processes were more painful for the printed media, which was in deep crisis as it is. At the end of the year, the “Hayots Ashkharh” daily announced that it will not be published any more in 2019. The online version will not exist either. As Gagik Mkrtchyan, editor-in-chief of the newspaper told CPFE, the functioning of the media outlet was stopped because of financial problems. According to the prediction by experts, at the beginning of 2019, editorial offices of several newspapers will also close down.

 However, in 2018, the most noteworthy fact of rearrangement in the Armenian media field was transfer of 100% shares of “Ararat” TV Company, affiliated with the RPA, to a close relation of the RA second president Robert Kocharyan[[16]](#footnote-16). After the transaction, the station was renamed into “Channel 5”. In general, Kocharyan’s return to politics was marked by persistent news circulated in the press, that he intends to buy media outlets. Several of such publications have become a reason for court claims, which is introduced in the subsection of this report “Pressure over media and their employees”.

 At the end of the year, it became known, that the biggest private media in Armenia, the “PanArmenian Media Group” is splitting, and the owner of “ArmNews” TV Company, which was part of the holding, also changed, as a result of which the contract concluded in 2012 between “ArmNews” and “A1+” TV Company was terminated. According to that contract “ArmNews” was broadcasting “Aib-Fe+” news program by “A1+”[[17]](#footnote-17).

As we have already mentioned in the “Brief Summary” section, in 2018, one of the most serious problems in the field of broadcasting remained unsolved, i.e. the problem of creating a private multiplex. On December 28, the TV and radio Commission announced failed the 6-month-long tender, as no application was submitted during the defined period. This is the third tender without results. Whereas each failure of these tenders means, that the public digital network operator, i.e. the state multiplexor will maintain its monopoly position, and in the field of broadcasting appearance of new “players” and creation of competitive conditions are excluded for another year. Besides, the obscure situation will continue for 10 local TV companies operating in the provinces, which, as a result of short-sighted policy and unfair tender in the field, have been left outside the digitization process, and they continue to operate in analogue mode and are waiting for the creation of the private multiplexor.

 The CPFE and partner organizations have made a number of statements about this problem, saying that the reason for not submitting applications to the announced tenders is not the absence of the interest, but the fact the terms and requirements stipulated by the RA law “On TV and Radio” for the creation of private digital network are not realistic and attractive from business perspective, and they do not contribute to the development of this field. Under these conditions, the tenders organized by the TVRC have no perspective and are of formal nature. Consequently, legislative changes are required.

One of the achievements in 2018 was Armenia’s being recognized as a “free country” in the field of Internet. This is the assessment by the Freedom House international human rights organization, made in the report “Freedom on the Net in 2018”[[18]](#footnote-18) published on November 1. Among 19 countries that registered progress, Armenia significantly improved its position and moved from the list of “partially free” countries to the list of “free” countries. The authors of the document mention that this improvement is directly connected with the “velvet revolution”: Armenian citizens did the revolution actively using the social media platforms, communications applications and live streams on the Internet. “This proves that in terms of freedom of expression there is serious progress in Armenia and this is directly proportional to the democratic criteria”, the report says.

***VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS***

Violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets during the 2018 are introduced according to the following classification by the CPFE:

* physical violence against journalists,
* pressure on media outlets and their personnel,
* violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.

To some extent, this classification by the CPFE is conditional. In particular, sometimes impeding the receiving and disseminating information is coupled with violence against the journalist. Such facts refer to the type of violation they are quite close to, according to the authors. Nevertheless, the applied classification enables introducing in a comprehensive and vivid way the general picture of violations of the rights of journalists and media.

The relevant subsections of the report include facts about violations of the rights of the journalists and media outlets during 2018, as well as developments related to incidents that took place during the previous periods.

On the whole, in 2018, 21 cases of physical violence were recorded, in which 27 journalists and cameramen suffered; the number of cases of pressure on media outlets and their employees is 67, and 98 cases of violating the right to receive and disseminate information. Below we introduce the 2018 data according to quarters, as well as comparative data of respective periods in 2017 and 2018 in tables.

**Quantitative data of the violations that took place in 2018, by quarters**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of violations** | **2018, 1st quarter** | **2018, 2nd quarter** | **2018, 3rd quarter** | **2018, 4th quarter** | **Total** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 0 |  19 (23 victims) | 2 (4 victims) | 0 |  21(27 victims) |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 12 | 25 | 13 | 17 | 67 |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 14 |  12 | 22 | 50 | 98 |

**Comparative data of the violations that took place in 2017 and 2018**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of violations** | **2017**  | **2018** |
| Physical violence against the journalists  | 11 (17 victims) | 21(27 victims) |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel  | 113 | 67 |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 62 |  98 |

Like in previous reports, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression states, that the data in the tables might not be exhaustive and do not claim to be absolutely true. Sometimes the media representatives do not consider it necessary to make public the facts of impeding their professional activity, they ignore various threats addressed to them or prefer to settle the problems on their own and overcome illegal restrictions. Therefore, the CPFE is sure, that true number of impediments is more than it is recorded in the report. Below we introduce more significant facts.

1. ***Physical violence against the journalists***

*During the 1st and 4th quarters of 2018 no case of physical violence against the media representatives was recorded. The cases were mostly recorded during the second quarter, on the days of April revolution, during the civil disobedience actions and responding to them police activities. In general, during the 2018 21 cases of physical violence were recorded (27 victims), which is more by 11 as compared with the previous year. 15 criminal cases were filed in relation to them; four cases were sent to court, of which in relation to three decisions have been made.*

*Below we introduce the new cases of physical violence recorded in 2018, as well as the developments of the previous cases in chronological order.*

**On February 1,** the Cassation court refused to take over a proceeding the complaint by Special investigative service against the ruling by the Appellate criminal court made on September 1, 2017, which reversed the ruling by the court of first instance on stopping the criminal case relating to the violence exerted by former parliamentarian Rouben Hakobyan against Vahe Makaryan, journalist from “Hraparak” newspaper.

 We should remind that the incident happened December 7, 2016. The criminal case filed at the SIS was stopped on February 9, 2017, because of the absence of corpus delicti[[19]](#footnote-19). Vahe Makaryan challenged this decision by the SIS at the prosecutor’s office, and then at the Yerevan Arabkir and Kanaker-Zeytun administrative districts court of general jurisdiction. Being rejected, he turned to the appellate court. On September 1, 2017, the RA Appellate Criminal court met the journalist’s complaint while overturning the decision by the court of first instance. The SIS brought a complaint against this decision to the RA Court of Cassation. This instance decided that the SIS did not do objective investigation and the case was sent back for additional investigation. The SIS investigated it again and stopped again, after which the second round of complaints started.

 On June 27 and July 11, 2018, the Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Arabkir and Kanaker-Zeytun) held court sessions, and on August 27 the court decided to refuse Vahe Makaryan’s complaint against the decision by SIS. The plaintiff turned to the Appellate court, where the complaint was again refused. The plaintiff decided not to turn to the Cassation court for the second time.

**On February 5,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) held the court session on the case Levon Gasparyan and Julietta Kokolyan who impeded professional activity of Sisak Gabrielyan and Shoghik Galstyan, journalists from radio “Liberty” and “Araratnews.am” news site respectively.

We should remind that on April 2, 2017, on the day of elections to the Parliament, Sisak Gabrielyan from radio “Liberty” and Shoghik Galstyan from “Araratnews.am” news site underwent violence at the campaign office of Hakob Beglaryan (candidate from the RPA) at 15 Roustaveli street in Kond district (details in CPFE 2017 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”). The CPFE advocate represents the right of Shoghik Galstyan.

During the court session, the judge made a decision to announce Julietta Kokolyan, charged with impeding the work of Shoghik Galstyan as wanted[[20]](#footnote-20). The advocate of the defendant periodically informed the court that Kokolyan has health issues, and is often taken to hospital. The court required documents about the defendant’s health issues, but they were not submitted.

 On June 6, the Criminal investigation department of the RA Police, when responding to the inquiry by the CPFE advocate, informed that Julietta Kokolyan, charged with impeding the work of Shoghik Galstyan, as a defendant avoiding trial, is wanted under Article 149.2.3 of the RA Criminal Code (Hindrance to implementation of the right to elect, to the work of election commissions or to the implementation of the authority of the person participating in elections), and information about measures to find her can be asked from the Central Unit of the Yerevan City Department of the RA Police.

 On July 12, the CPFE advocate sent a second inquiry to the Central Unit of the Yerevan City Department of the RA Police to receive information about wanted Julietta Kokolyan charged with impeding the work of journalist Shoghik Galstyan. The advocate was particularly interested whether the law enforcement bodies have turned to the RA National Security Service to get information whether J. Kokolyan has crossed the RA state border. If yes, then what is the answer. This and following several inquiries about the result of the search remained unanswered.

 On December 4, a letter was sent to the RA Chief of Police complaining of inaction by the law enforcement bodies and demanding to take extra measures and to answer whether Julietta Kokolyan has crossed the RA state border, or not and what facts exist about it. This inquiry was replied by the Deputy head of the Criminal investigation department of the RA Police informing that the expected information cannot be provided as it contains personal data which are protected by law.

 Before finding Julietta Kokolyan, the court decided to stop the proceeding against her and to continue in a separate proceeding the case of the other defendant Levon Gasparyan. Case-related court sessions took place on March 2, 13 and 19, April 18, May 21, June 11, July 2, August 17 and 27, September 28, November 5 and December 5. The next session is on January 15, 2019.

**On February 23,** the criminal case[[21]](#footnote-21) filed on the incident of impeding legitimate professional activity of journalist Narine Avetisyan, director of “Lori TV” Ltd., to the Lori province court of general jurisdiction with the indictment.

We should remind that on September 28, 2017, Narine Avetisyan, after receiving information that the bridge adjacent to Holy Mother church was being paved while it was showering, went to that site to cover the activities. When videotaping, Tigran Nazaryan, head of the “Shinplyus” construction company, along with his staff members attacked Narine Avetisyan, twisted her arms, put her on the ground and seized the phone and deleted the photos[[22]](#footnote-22). Based on the report by Narine Avetisyan, at the Lori province investigative department of the Investigative Committee a criminal case was filed under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal Code (impeding professional legitimate activity of a journalist). On October 9 and 25 charges were brought against Tigran Nazaryan, director of “Shinplyus” Ltd and driver of the same company Vrezh Khachatryan respectively. The did not plead guilty.

 On February 27, 2018, the court took the case over the proceeding. The first court session took place on March 22. During the public session, they restricted the work of the media representatives present in the hall to cover it[[23]](#footnote-23). The judge asked the parties if they agreed the court session to be videotaped. The defendants and their advocates were against. The judge forbade to videotape the defendants and their advocate, and allowed to videotape only during the first five minutes from the session.

 Representative of the victim Arthur Sakounts expressed intention to announce withdrawal to the judge. To make a written motion on the withdrawal, the session was postponed and was assigned on April 30, which did not take place. Session were held on July 3, 30 and October 2.

On November 7, the case was moved to another court and was taken over a proceeding on November 9. On December 3, a new trial was assigned; on December 26 the first session took place. The next session is on February 27, 2019

**The cases of physical violence against media representative during the April revolution in 2018 (details in CPFE 2018 2nd quarterly report, see** [**www.khosq.am**](http://www.khosq.am) **site, section “Reports”) and the course of filed criminal cases**

**On April 16,** as a result of using special means by the police against the participants of protest on Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan injuries were caused to **Ani Keshishyan,** correspondent from “168.am” site and **Hovhannes Sargsyan[[24]](#footnote-24),** cameraman from “factor.am

In relation to Ani Keshishyan’s incident, during the pre-investigation of the criminal case under Articles 373.1 and 309.3 of the RA Criminal code, at the RA Special investigative service a decision was made to recognize Ani Keshishyan as a victim.

On September 25, 2015, in relation to the mentioned criminal case Levon Yeranosyan, former commander of the RA police troops, was engaged as a defendant, and charges are brought against him under Article 309.2 and .3 of the RA Criminal Code. The pre-investigation of the criminal case is current.

Public radio correspondent **Liana Yeghiazaryan’s** case was attached to this case, which will be introduced below.

**On April 17,** late in the evening, close to the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Tuomanyan street in Yerevan, a group of people organized disorders, and later they attacked **Arevik Sahakyan,** editor-in-chief of “Factor.am” news site and cameraman **Gevorg Martirosyan,** who were covering the events, exerted violence against them: they pulled around the journalist, tore off her journalist’s ID, as well as damaged the equipment of the cameraman operating on site. These actions were conducted in presence of the police and under conditions of their indifference[[25]](#footnote-25).

On April 18, in relation to the incident, the Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts prosecutor’s office a criminal case was filed under Article 225.1 and .2 of the RA Criminal Code (Mass disorder). Further pre-investigation of the criminal case was tasked to the **General Department of Investigation of Particularly Important Cases** of the Investigative Committee (GDIPIC IC), where a criminal case was also filed under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal Code, hindrance to the legal professional activities of a journalist and forcing him/her not to disseminate information. The investigator had made a decision to investigate these cases in one proceeding. Measures have been taken to find the perpetrators. However, on November 15 a decision was made to stop the proceeding on the grounds of perpetrator being unknown.

**On April 19,** at the RA Government building, people in civilian clothing beat up **Tirair Mouradyan**[[26]](#footnote-26)**,** journalist from “Union of informed citizens” NGO. According to him, the attackers were police officers, who, noticing that they appeared in the attention of the journalist, exerted violence against him even when the journalist showed them his ID.

 In relation to this incident a criminal case was filed at the Yerevan Kentron and Norq-Marash prosecutor’s office under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal Code. It was sent to the General department of the investigation of PIC of the Investigative Committee. Tirair Mouradyan was recognized as a victim. He was sent for a forensic examination. Charges are brought against detective Souren Torosyan for the mentioned criminal act.

 On August 2, the prosecutor’s office sent the case to court; on August 3 it was taken over a proceeding. Court sessions took place on August 24, September 5, 19, October 9, 18, November 12. On November 29, Yerevan court of general jurisdiction finished the trial of the case. According to the ruling Souren Torosyan and Areg Torosyan were found guilty under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal code for hindering the journalist’s activity through exerting force and were fined for AMD 300000.

**On April 20, Tirair Mouradyan,** journalist from “Union of informed citizens” NGOwas apprehended from Yerevan-Abovyan highway[[27]](#footnote-27). Although he showed the journalist’s ID, he was forced into a police car, taken in unknown direction and only after some time was brought back to the same place.

 On May 23, by the evidences obtained at the RA Special investigative service during the pre-investigation of the criminal case investigated under Articles 164.1, 309.2 and 308.1 of the RA Criminal Code, it was grounded that Arsen Arzoumanyan, Head of the Kotayk unit of the RA Police, via abusing his position, hindered the journalist’s professional legal activity. For that act charge was brought against Arsen Arzoumanyan under Article 164.2 of the RA Criminal code. On June 25, the Kotayk province court of general jurisdiction took over a proceeding journalist Tirair Mouradyan’s claim against Arsen Arzoumanyan.

 Case-related court sessions took place on August 28, October 1, 26, November 12, 20, December 17, 27. The day of the next session is not decided yet.

**On April 20,** close to the Armenakyan street and Saralanji Avenue intersection, one of the persons in civilian clothing using violence against the protesters, seeing that **Tehmine Yenokyan,** correspondent from “Lragir.am”, is videotaping their actions, hit her on the head, and one of the women who appeared there pulled her by the hair, another one tore off the lace of the bag[[28]](#footnote-28). According to Tehmine Yenokyan, the witness citizens said that earlier the persons who exerted violence introduced themselves as municipality employees, who later were in close communication with the policemen who arrived.

A criminal case was filed in relation to the incident under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal code. The pre-investigation was conducted at the investigative unit in the Yerevan Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts of the RA Investigative committee. Based on the evidence obtained, on June 25 charges were brought against a young man and a woman and as a restraint measure they were issued a restriction of travel order[[29]](#footnote-29). In terms of the 19-year-old young man, the criminal case with the indictment was sent to court[[30]](#footnote-30).

On June 26, the case was taken over a proceeding. The court session took place on September 10, and on November 13 a ruling was made, according to which defendant Aharon Mkrtchyan was found guilty under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal code and was fined for AMD 300000.

**On April 20,** next to the Mashtots park in the capital, when the demonstrators moved from Amiryan street towards Mashtots Avenue, the policemen tried to apprehend correspondents **Gayane Saribekyan** and **Narine Ghalechyan** from “News.am” site and radio “Liberty” respectively, who were covering their actions. In an interview with CPFE the journalists said they were taken for demonstrators, but when they saw their journalists’ IDs, they did not exert force against them any longer. This is why the journalists did not report on the incident.

**On April 21,** nearby Artashat, people in civilian clothes attacked **Arous Hakobyan,** correspondent from radio “Liberty”, who was covering the demonstration, and exerted force against her and caused bodily injuries[[31]](#footnote-31). A criminal case was filed in relation to this incident under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal Code, and charges were brought against Arthur Ghazaryan, director of the “Artashat” water-users company, who exerted violence[[32]](#footnote-32). The case was sent to Ararat and Vayots Dzor provinces court of general jurisdiction. Victim Arous Hakobyan brought an application to court, saying she has no claims against Arthur Ghazaryan. By the ruling from June 12, the defendant was fined for AMD 250000[[33]](#footnote-33).

**On April 21,** in Avan district in the capital, next to the private residence of former Yerevan Mayor Taron Margaryan, **journalist Ani Grigoryan[[34]](#footnote-34)** from “CivilNet.am” new site underwent attack. She called the police and later reported that on Babajanyan street a person in civilian clothes hindered her journalist’s activity and her “iPhone 6s” cell phone was stolen.

In relation to this incident a criminal case was filed under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal code at Yerevan Nor Norq unit of the RA Police. Measures have been taken to identify the person who hindered her activity and witnesses of the incident. Through examination of the video-materials data have been obtained about women who witnessed the perpetration against the journalist[[35]](#footnote-35).

Ani Grigoryan’s case was attached to the case of **Vrouir Tadevosyan**, public radio producer (see below about the incident) and to other cases filed in relation to incidents of violence that took place in Avan. The pre-investigation is conducted in one proceeding. According to the prosecutor’s office, within the scope of this case charges were brought against one person under Articles 185.2.3 and 164.3 of the RA Criminal Code. The pre-investigation is current.

**On April 21,** two more journalists from “CivilNet.am” suffered from the police actions. In an interview with “Aravot.am” **Tatoul Hakobyan** said, “We were taking photos, the policemen pushed me a little far from the incident site, for some time did not allow to take photos. I consider it a failed attempt to hinder journalist’s activity, because I continued to work after that”[[36]](#footnote-36). On the same day, on April 21, one of the red berets strongly hit **Alina Nikoghosyan,** journalist from “CivilNet.am”, on the back, when she was videotaping the apprehension of the demonstrators at the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Amiryan Street[[37]](#footnote-37).

In relation to the aforementioned two cases, via the inquiry by the RA prosecutor’s office additional information and factual data have been obtained, which were sent to the pre-investigating bodies to prepare materials in a defined manner.

On November 16, 2018, a decision was made in terms of Tatoul Hakobyan’s case not to conduct criminal prosecution based on the absence of corpus delicti in the actions of the RA policemen. On the same day a decision was made to stop the proceeding of the criminal case on the grounds of the perpetrator being unknown.

**Alina Nikoghosyan’s** case was attached to the cases of **Anatoly Yeghiazaryan, Hambardzoum Papoyan, Armen Petrosyan, Naira Boulghadaryan and Narek Kirakosyan,** which are introduced below. During the pre-investigation of the criminal case investigated under Articles 164.3, 308.1 and 309.2 of the RA Criminal code decisions were made to recognize these journalists as victims.

**On April 22,** at night, on Garegin Nzhdeh square in Yerevan, the policemen beat up **Anatoly Yeghiazaryan,** output editor from radio “Liberty”[[38]](#footnote-38). According to the radio-station, the incident took place when Yeghiazaryan, who was returning home from work tried videotape with his phone how nearly five dozens of policemen are trying, via exerting force, to disperse the peaceful demonstrators. Noticing that their actions are being videotaped, 6-7 policemen attacked Yeghiazaryan and beat him up, although he introduced his journalist’s ID and informed several times that he was from radio “Liberty”.

The Special investigative service filed a criminal case in relation to this incident under Articles 164.3, 308.1 and 309.2 of the RA Criminal Code. Anatoly Yeghiazaryan was recognized as a victim and was interrogated and send for a forensic examination. Search, investigative and other judicial activities are being undertaken to identify persons who committed the prima facie crime, and to find out the case circumstances. As of the end of the year, no progress has been recorded in this case.

**On April 22,** at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebouni streets, as a result of special means used by the policemen against the demonstrators, injuries were caused to cameramen **Hambardzoum Papoyan and Armen Petrosyan**[[39]](#footnote-39)from Gyumri “GALA” TV Company. The policemen also exerted violence against Armen Petrosyan. The citizens provided first aid to the fainted journalist and took to hospital in an ambulance.

 During the pre-investigation of the criminal case at the RA Investigative Committee investigated under Articles 164.3, 308.1 and 309.2 of the RA Criminal code decisions were made to recognize these journalists as victims.

**On April 22, Liana Yeghiazaryan,** correspondent from “Radiolur” program of the Public radio, got an injury as a result of special means used against the demonstrators by the policemen at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebouni streets[[40]](#footnote-40). She managed to get to the Public radio building, where the ambulance crew helped her and advised to go to hospital.

During the pre-investigation of the criminal case at the RA Investigative Committee investigated under Articles 373.1 and 309.3 of the RA Criminal code, a decision was made to recognize Liana Yeghiazaryan as a victim. On September 25, 2018, Levon Yeranosyan, former commander of the RA police troops, was engaged as a defendant and charges were brought against him under Article 309.2 and .3 of the RA Criminal Code. The pre-investigation is current.

**On April 22, Artak Khoulyan,** correspondent from “Shantnews.am”, who was covering protests in Erebouni district, informed that he was hit by stones, then tazed[[41]](#footnote-41).

**On the same day, on April 22,** “Factor.am” news site informed, that when conducting his legal professional activity in Erebouni administrative district, via using stones and fists a group of persons in masks exerted violence against **Hovhannes Sargsyan**[[42]](#footnote-42)**,** cameraman of the media outlet.

The prosecutor's office made a decision to investigate the aforementioned two cases under Article 225.2 of the Ra Criminal code (Mass disorder) within one proceeding. Within the scope of the filed criminal case Artak Khoulyan and Hovhannes Sargsyan were recognized as victims and send for forensic examination.

In relation to the criminal case of “Shantnews.am” correspondent Artak Khoulyan and “Factor.am» cameraman Hovhannes Sargsyan, charges are brought firstly against six, and then against seven persons. The pre-investigation is current.

**On April 22,** in the republic square in Yerevan, a police officer in black mask attacked **Naira Boulghadaryan,** journalist from radio “Liberty”, hit her on the hand and dropped the camera not allowing to videotape[[43]](#footnote-43). The live-streaming showed the video how the policemen were running, and the journalist’s camera falls on the ground while recording.

During the pre-investigation of the criminal case at the RA Investigative Committee investigated under Articles 164.3, 308.1 and 309.2 of the RA Criminal code, a decision was made to recognize **Naira Boulghadaryan** as a victim.

**On April 22,** in Avan administrative district of Yerevan, persons in masks beat up **Vrouir** **Tadevosyan**, Public radio producer. Seeing that he is videotaping, persons in civilian clothing came up to him, asked what he was videotaping, seized “iPad Air 2” type tablet and “Samsung Galaxy J7” cell phone, beat him up with batons, broke “Nissan Tiida” model car, while causing property damage.

Within the scope of the filed criminal case, the person hindering professional legal activity of the Public radio staff was identified, he was found and interrogated. Based on the collected evidence, the person born in 1983 was charged under Articles 185.2.3 and 164.3 of the RA Criminal Code[[44]](#footnote-44).

Later, the tablet and cell phone belonging to Vrouir Tadevosyan were returned to him through a taxi driver, after which some Harout apologized via phone for the incident. As Vrouir Tadevosyan insists, the cell phone is not his, but a model older, and the contents of the tablet was deleted. Tadevosyan reported the incident to the police[[45]](#footnote-45).

 As we have already mentioned, **Vrouir Tadevosyan’s** and “CivilNet.am” journalist **Ani Grigoryan’s** cases are merged with other cases of violence in Avan. The pre-investigation is conducted in one proceeding.

**On April 22,** the policemen hindered the activity of **Gayane Asryan,** journalist from **“**Media.am”[[46]](#footnote-46)**.** During the clash between the demonstrators and policemen on the intersection of Erebouni and Artsakh streets in Yerevan, she was hit a policeman in black mask. The reason was that the journalist witnessed and recorded that the policemen are throwing dazzle grenades on the demonstrators and were beating them up. “He pulled my hand back and hit me on the back with his elbow, then holding by my clothes took me to the police cordon; I was telling him that I am a journalist, but he was not listening to me”, said the journalist. Later, after reaching the police cordon, one of the fellow officers said there was an order to remove all the journalists from that area, but for what reason, they did not inform.

In relation to the incident with “Media.am” journalist **Gayane Asryan,** a decision was made to reject the filing of the criminal case because of the absence of corpus delicti.

**On the same April 22,** in the evening, at the intersection of Sayat Nova and Mashtots Avenue, a policeman hit **Aza Sargsyan,** correspondent from Public radio, trying to hinder live-streaming[[47]](#footnote-47). As a result of examination of the video-recording, the law-enforcement came to the conclusion, that it contains sufficient factual data to file a criminal case; besides that, the incident was not reported.

***Cases of violence during the post-revolutionary period***

**On June 25,** free-lance journalist from “Fact” daily Narek Mirzoyan spread a statement on his Facebook page, that during the protest in Jermuk, the staff of the “Lydian Armenia” company hindered his professional activity, tugged, insulted and threatened him**[[48]](#footnote-48)**. “I informed the policemen that an incident took place, but they did not take any actions on site” said Narek Mirzoyan to “Armtimes.com”**[[49]](#footnote-49)**.

On the same day, the journalist received a notification from “Lydian Armenia” that the company would bring a motion to the pre-investigating bodies to file a criminal case against him. “Lydian Armenia” blamed Narek Mirzoyan in instigating protests against the company, in blocking roads, qualifying it as a crime. As of the end of the year, no criminal case was filed against the journalist.

**On September 12,** in Shatin community of Vayots Dzor province, Syune Hambardzoumyan and Knar Manoukyan from “Zhoghovurd” daily were subjected to violence[[50]](#footnote-50). Tigran Khoudoyan, one of the candidates to the Shatin village mayor in 2017 LSGB elections, who enjoyed the support of the RPA and later acted as a supporter of “Civil contract” party, lost to independent Arthur Stepanyan. Not being able to live with the loss, his supporters regularly organized protests.

 To get familiar with the situation the newspaper employees visited Shatin, where several of the residents attacked them, seized the journalist’s ID from one of them, hit on the hand of another journalist who was videotaping tugged them. The newspaper found out their names – Shirak Harounyan, Never Hovhannisyan, Zvart Smbatyan, Zhanna Khoudoyan, Geghanoush Yeghoyan. The police department of Vayots Dzor province did not give a chance to the journalists to report on the incident.

On September 14, the RA Prosecutor General’s office sent the publication by “Zhoghovurd” daily to the Vayots Dzor province prosecutor’s office to prepare materials as stipulated under Articles 180-181 of the RA Criminal procedural code, and to take measures to settle the issue[[51]](#footnote-51). The criminal case filed on September 20 under Article 164.1 of the Criminal code based on the materials prepared at the police department of Yeghegnadzor, was sent to the Vayots Dzor province department of the Investigative Committee on September 24 to decide further actions. Based on the case-related evidence, on November 27, the body in charge of proceeding brought charges against four residents of Shatin village in Vayots Dzor province under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal code. The pre-investigation is at the final stage.

**On September 23,** on the day of snap elections to the Yerevan City council, at the polling station 8/05, chairperson of the territorial commission Norik Yeranyan hit on the hand of **Diana Davtyan,** journalist from “1in.am” news site, telling her “take your microphone aside”[[52]](#footnote-52). In an interview with CPFE, the journalist informed that besides that, one of the persons escorting Arthur Manoukyan[[53]](#footnote-53), NA parliamentarian from PAP, hindered videotaping by cameraman **Samvel Poghosyan** via pulling him by the shoulder.

Upon the task by Yerevan City prosecutor’s office, on September 25, the publication about this was sent to Yerevan department of the RA police. During the preparation of the materials they found out information about the circumstances of hindering the activity of cameraman Samvel Poghosyan from the same site. According to the proceeding body, no corpus delicti was identified in the actions of the persons that would hinder professional activity of the journalists. On October 3, a decision was made to reject the filing of the criminal case because of the absence of corpus delicti.

1. ***Pressure on media outlets and their personnel***

*In 2018, in total 67 cases of pressure against media outlets and their personnel were recorded, which is less by 46 as compared with the previous indicator. 33 out of 67 were exerted by public officials or public bodies, 8 - by politicians, 13 – by citizens, 6 – by media outlets, 5 - by businessmen/private companies, 1 - by a judge, and 1 - by a religious organization.*

 *During the year, 13 new court cases were taken over a proceeding with engagement of media and journalists. They all are under Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil code, i.e. insult and slander.*

*This section of the report also includes developments and solutions relating to the cases of various types of pressure recorded during the previous years. Below we introduce all the details in chronological order.*

 **On January 11,** journalist Arthur Hovhannisyan brought a lawsuit to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) against the RA Ministry of Health (“Aravot daily” Ltd was recognized as a third party)[[54]](#footnote-54). On January 15 the case was taken over a proceeding.

The reason for the claim is the information published on the “Moh.am” site of the ministry under heading “One should not rely on falsification: there was no attempt of vaccination at Aygabats school in Shirak province”.

On December 11, 2017, Arthur Hovhannisyan gave a press conference as a journalist at “Noyan Tapan” media center in relation to the information he had learned the previous day, according to which at Aygabats school in Shirak province the attempt to vaccinate 13-year-old girls with “Gardasil” vaccine against human papilloma virus failed: the parents “invited out” the medical personnel. On the same day, the Ra Ministry of Health published the aforementioned information on its official website. The claimant thinks, that publication contains insult and slander addressed to him.

 On May 17, 2018, the first case-related court session took place[[55]](#footnote-55). On the same day, the new Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan sent a motion to court so that the Headmaster Hripsik Houroyan is summoned to court[[56]](#footnote-56). Court sessions took place on July 23 and November 2. As of the end of the year, no day is assigned for the next session.

**On January 12,** the RA Appellate court held the hearing of the complaint by Hripsime Jebejyan, journalist from “Aravot.am” news site against the decision made on November 17, 2017 by Yerevan Malatia-Sebastia administrative districts court of general jurisdiction.

We should remind that on May 14, 2017, on the day of elections to the Yerevan City council, at the polling station 7/46 in Malatia-Sebastia district, Arayik Gevorgyan, committee member representing “Armenian revival” party, insulted the journalist from “Aravot.am” and said threatening expressions to her[[57]](#footnote-57). In relation to this incident, Hripsime Jebejyan reported to the Malatia unit of Yerevan police department, however, the filing of a criminal case was rejected “because of the absence of corpus delicti”. The journalist turned to the prosecutor’s office of Malatia-Sebastia administrative district challenging this decision, but she was rejected by the prosecutor in the capital.

 With the assistance from Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Hripsime Jebejyan turned to the Malatia-Sebastia administrative districts court of general jurisdiction challenging the decision to reject filing of a criminal case and claiming to task the body in charge of proceeding to continue the investigation of the criminal case. The rejected the complaint reasoning the absence of the fact of hindering the journalist’s professional activity. Hripsime Jebejyan turned to the upper instance. On January 26, the Appellate criminal court rejected her complaint. On March 29, Hripsime Jebejyan turned to the Cassation court. On May 25, the Cassation court rejected to take her complaint over a proceeding, related to the rulings made by the Appellate and first instance courts.

 So, going through all the three court instances and exhausting all the domestic remedies, Hripsime Jebejyan and supporting her Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression failed to restore the violated rights of the journalist. This impunity opens wide doors for the similar new violations.

 **On January 15,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Arabkir and Kanaker-Zeytun administrative districts) held the hearing of the complaint by Daniel Ioannisyan, program coordinator of “Union of informed citizens” NGO, against the decision the Investigative Committee to stop the criminal case filed in relation to illegal collection of confidential personal and private family information and disseminating it through media

 We should remind that on March 25, 2017, “Iravunk.com” site published an article under heading “Interesting episodes from civil activist Daniel Ioannisyan’s biography”, which reveals information about personal life and family of Daniel Ioannisyan. That information is available only to the police and the Investigative committee. Based on the report by Ioannisyan, a criminal case was filed on April 25, under Article 144 of the RA Criminal Code. On August 7, the case was closed. Daniel Ioannisyan challenged this decision by the Investigative Committee to RA Prosecutor General, but the prosecutor’s office rejected. On November 1, Daniel Ioannisyan turned to Arabkir and Kanaker-Zeytun administrative districts court of general jurisdiction in Yerevan.

 On April 9, 2018, the court rejected Daniel Ioannisyan’s complaint against the decision by the Investigative committee to close the criminal case. On May 14, Daniel Ioannisyan brought a complaint to a higher instance against the decision by the court of general jurisdiction. The Appellate Criminal court held sessions on this case on June 5 and 20. On July 9, the Appellate court rejected Daniel Ioannisyan’s complaint against the decision by the court of general jurisdiction. The claimant brought a complaint to the Cassation court, but the latter has not taken the case over a proceeding yet. A motion has also been submitted to the Investigative Committee to take additional criminal-judicial actions. The Investigative committee met the motion and is taking such actions.

**On January 17,** the RA Appellate Civil court continued the hearing of the complaint against the ruling from August 11, 2017, by Yerevan Ajapnyak and Davitashen administrative courts of general jurisdiction on the case Zhirair Sefilyan, member of the “Founding Parliament” initiative vs. “Armenia TV” CJSC, which is part of “PanArmenian Media Holding”, Vahe Ghazaryan, author and emcee of “Sur ankyun” (sharp angle) TV program and journalist Nelly Harutyunyan from the same TV company.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was a video shown during the “Sur ankyun” program via “Armenia TV” on June 12, 2016, several days before Zhirair Sefilyan’s arrest, in which the information contained in it is considered slandering by the claimant (details in CPFE 2016, 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) site, section “Reports”).

On January 25, the Appellate court rejected the complaint. On February 28, a complaint was brought to the RA Court of Cassation against this ruling, which, on June 18 was taken over a proceeding. As the CPFE was informed by the lawyer of the “PanArmenian Media Holding”, there are no developments in this case.

**On January 17,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) continued the successive court session on the case Ghevond Papoyan vs. “Pastinfo” news agency and Julietta Hakobyan.

We should remind that the reason for the claim is the article published on March 1, 2017, on “Pastinfo.am” site under heading “Old lady complained against the lawyer demanding the paid money back: the lawyer responds”, and disseminated over Facebook. The claimant demands refutation of the information, which, according to him, is slander and claims AMD1mln (details in CPFE 2017 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) section “Reports”).

On January 31, the court decided to meet the claim partially: to oblige respondent Julietta Hakobyan refute the slandering information published on “Pastinfo.am” site, the rest of the claim was rejected. On March 1, the ruling came into force.

**On January 18,** the Appellate civil court took over a proceeding journalist Siranush Papyan’s complaint against ruling from November 29, 2017, made by Yerevan Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts court of general jurisdiction on the case Siranush Papyan vs former RA Chief of Police Vladimir Gasparyan.

We should remind that on April 24**,** 2016in Tsitsernakaberd, memorial to the victims of Armenian Genocide, Vladimir Gasparyan, RA Chief of Police told the journalists that they are “turning yellow, losing their color…” To the remark by Siranush Papyan, journalist from “1in.am” and “Lragir.am”, that the police regularly speak of the reforms, but the society does not see them, the chief of police responded, “I do not see a woman in you.”

The journalist turned to court with a claim of reimbursement for the damage to honor and dignity, as well as to charge him with hindering professional activity and demonstrating gender discrimination. The lawyer from the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression acts as Siranush Papyan’s advocate in court. The court decided to reject Siranush Papyan’s claim (details in CPFE 2016 and 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) site, section “Reports”).

In 2018, the Appellate court held a session on this case on April 19, and on May 3 the court rejected Siranush Papyan’s complaint against the ruling from November 29, 2017 by the court of general jurisdiction. The claimant turned to the RA Court of Cassation, which in August 3 refused to take the case over a proceeding.

Exhausting all the measures domestically, with the assistance from the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, on December 29, 2018, Siranush Papyan brought a claim to the European Court of Human Rights.

**On January 19,** the Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) held the first court session on the case Karo Yeghnoukayn vs. “Iravunk Media” LTD, founder of “Iravunk” newspaper (with the claim of compensation for damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult).

The reason for the lawsuit is the following expression published in “Bambasank” (rumors) section of the “Iravunk” newspaper, issued on September 14, 2017: “Karo Yeghnoukyan, detained in relation to the case of the armed group that captured the PP regiment, now is seeking ways to be deported from Armenia in return to his refusal from the status of a “political prisoner”, thus avoiding criminal charges. However, according to our course, the US Embassy does not seem like being excited with the idea of supporting Yeghnoukyan.”

 Case-related sessions took place on April 10, June 12, September 25, November 6, and on November 19, the court decided to reject Karo Yeghnoukyan’s claim.

**On January 24,** Lori province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Vanadzor), held the successive court session on the case teacher Susanna Sargsyan vs. Shushanna Grigoryan, correspondent from **“**Hraparak.am” site.

We should remind, that the case is being re-examined at the court of first instance. The reason for the claim were articles under heading “Headmaster of Vanadzor School 8 was dismissed from work[[58]](#footnote-58)” and “The teacher from Vanadzor received AMD 12mln for forced outage[[59]](#footnote-59)” published on “Hraparak.am” website respectively on October 4, 2013 and December 5, 2013. On September 23, 2015, the court decided to meet Susanna Sargsyan’s claim partially: Shushanna Grigoryan should apologize publicly in writing to plaintiff Susanna Sargsyan, as well as to levy AMD 55000 from her in favor of Susanna Sargsyan. The rest of the claim was rejected. Both the plaintiff and the respondent turned to the Appellate court. On February 11, 2016, the Appellate court decided to reject Susanna Sargsyan’s claim, and to meet Shushanna Grigoryan’s claim. The ruling by the Lori province court of general jurisdiction on September 23, 2015 to meet the claim partially was overturned, and in that part the case was sent to the same court for re-examination (details in CPFE 2016 and 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”).

 Case-related sessions were held on May 17, July 4, 19, September 5 and 27 and November 22. The next session is on January 17, 2019.

**On January 26,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction, seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts, held the first court session on the case Armen Mosikyan, director of Byureghavan city out-patient hospital, vs. “Zhoghovurd newspaper editorial” Ltd, founder of “Armlur.am” news site. The claim was brought on September 4, 2017, but it was returned twice to eliminate drawbacks.

 We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the article published on August 4, 2017 on “Armlur.am” site under heading “Earned money transporting corps: charges brought against the director of the MC.” In particular, the claimant challenges the expression “It is not excluded that director Mosikyan gave a chance for free treatment to his relatives, and the citizens who really needed free treatment, were left to the whim of fate.” The plaintiff claims public refutation of information blemishing his honour, dignity and business reputation, and a payment of AMD 2million as a reimbursement for slandering.

 Case-related sessions were held on April 23, July 18, and on August 1 the ruling was made, with which the claim was rejected. Moreover, the court referred to the following position by the ECHR: “freedom of press presumes certain degree of exaggeration, even instigation by the journalist.” The court has also stated that it is unrealistic to bring evidence about evaluating judgement, and such a claim by itself might violate the freedom of expressing opinion, which is a fundamental right protected by Article 10 of the European Convention.

**On January 28,** the editorial of “Medialab.am” site received a serious threat from a user on Facebook social net named “Hayk Berman Ohanyan”. The reason is the caricature published on the media outlet on the same day about corruption risks in the army and buying flowers for AMD 7 million by the RA Ministry of Defence in December of 2017. The threatening person made a remark, that “Medialab.am” might have the fate of French “Charlie Hebdo” periodical which underwent terroristic attack in January of 2015.

On January 31, with the initiative of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, nine media organizations made a statement on this incident claiming to find and sanction the person who threatened “Medialab.am” site editorial.

On February 5, the US Embassy in Armenia also condemned the threat addressed to the editor-in-chief of “Medialab.am”[[60]](#footnote-60).

On February 6, at the RA prosecutor’s office a criminal case was filed under Article 137.1 of the Criminal code (Threat to murder, to inflict heavy damage to one’s health or to destroy property). For pre-investigation, it was sent to the RA Investigative Committee[[61]](#footnote-61). On February 9, it was taken over a proceeding. Marianna Grigoryan’s representative, human rights defender Arthur Sakounts’s motion to assign a forensic examination of the text and symbols was met.

 From the Vanadzor office of Helsinki Civil Assembly they informed the CPFE, that the results of the forensic examination are ready, and the pre-investigation of the case at the Investigative committee is at the final stage. At the same time the Center of applied psychology of YSU gave an expert conclusion on forensic psychological examination of Marianna Grigoryan, editor-in-chief of “medialab.am” site, that she was under tension which can be connected with the threat. Then the VOHCS brought a motion to the investigator to engage Hayk Ohanyan, user under the nickname “Hayk Berman Ohanyan” as a defendant, however, the motion was rejected on December 21.

**On January 29,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Ajapnyak and Davitashen administrative districts) took over a proceeding the lawsuit by Socrat Hovsepyan, Aygestan village mayor in Ararat province vs. “Armenia TV” CJSC, founder of “Armenia” TV Company.

The reason for the lawsuit was the program “Duty office” broadcast on December 17, 2017 via “Armenia” TV, during which it was said that village mayor Socrat Hovsepyan, through abusing his power, removed and sold the gas pipelines that belonged to the village. The plaintiff claims to oblige the respondent to apologize publicly for disseminating ungrounded information, far from reality, defaming the honor, dignity and business reputation, and AMD 3mln as compensation.

 The case-related first session was on June 25, which did not take place, because the judge as changed. On August 22, the case was moved to another court and was taken over a proceeding on August 31. The initial court session took place on November 16 and December 4. The next court session day is not assigned yet.

**On January 29,** Syunik province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kapan) held the successive court session on the case Gayane Avagyan vs. Hovakim Karapetyan (the “Semi-open window” program on ATV is recognized as a third party).

The reason for the lawsuit was the information voiced during the program on May 29, 2017. Namely it was mentioned that “Gayane Avagyan, when she married Arthur Karapetyan, was pregnant and she made an abortion. She had a sexual intercourse with another man in presence of the child.” The plaintiff claims refutation of slandering information, public apology and a payment of AMD 800000 as compensation.
 Court session on this case took place on March 15, May 21, and on August 27 the case was sent from Syunik province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kapan) to seat in Goris. No further developments in the case happened.

**On February 5,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) held the successive court session on the case Koryun Atoyan, Parouyr Kalantaryan, Lyuba Mehrabyan and Mihrdat Harutyunyan vs. Norik Sargsyan. “Aravot” daily” Ltd. and “Hraparak” daily” Ltd. are recognized as case-related third party.

We should remind that the reason for this claim were publications by Norik Sargsyan on April 15, 2016 in “Hraparak” daily under heading “Open letter to K.Atoyan, Rector of Yerevan State University of Economics” and on June 15, 2016 in “Aravot” daily under heading “Where the dog’s head is buried. The claimants consider insulting and slandering the following expressions in the letter: “In 2010-2013, L.Mehrabyan Head of the Chair of economic history and law, currently law and political science at the ASEU (he never had legitimate status in that position) committed legal violations of various nature towards me, professional discrimination, forced labor, and falsifications” (details in CPFE 2016 and 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”).

Court sessions on this case took place on May 31, September 25 and December 4; the next session is on March 11, 2019.

**On February 13,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) continued hearing of the successive session on the case parliamentarian of the NA 6th convocation Ara Babloyan, owner of “Arabkir medical complex – health institute of children and teenagers” Ltd. vs. “Hraparak daily” Ltd.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the article published in that daily newspaper on February 12, 2015 under the heading “Arabkir center – a “favorable” foci for hepatitis C”, which introduced the complaint by people treated in that medical center who, after treatment there, travelled to Belgium and there they found out that they are vectors of hepatitis C. According to them, they got the infection at the “Arabkir” MC.

The plaintiff claims to refute the information defaming his honor and dignity, and compensation of AMD 2mln.

During the trial, the plaintiff waived the claim. On February 28, the court decided to close the civil case.

 **On February 14,** the Shirak province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Gyumri) held the first court session on the criminal case Arthur Margaryan and Alla Baghdasaryan, employees of “Tsaig” TV Company vs. Petros Elbakyan, who hindered their legal professional activity on November 5, 2017.

We should remind that on November 5, 2017on the day of elections to the local self-governing bodies, in the yard of the polling station 30/08 located at the secondary school of Marmashen village in Shirak province**,** Petros Elbakyan, resident of Marmashen, came up to “Tsaig” cameraman Arthur Margaryan and demanded to stop videotaping. When Arthur Margaryan continued his work, Petros Elbakyan pushed aside the camera intentionally to impede the videotaping. In relation to this case, on November 8, a criminal case was filed at the Prosecutor’s office of Shirak province. Charges were brought against Petros Elbakyan under Article 149.1 of the RA Criminal Code (Hindrance to implementation of the right to elect, to the work of election commissions or to the implementation of the authority of the person participating in elections).

 A case-related court session also took place on February 20. On February 23, the court decided to find Petros Elbakyan guilty and fined him for AMD 700000 in favor of the RA State budget.

**On February 14,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) continued the court session on the case Vahe Makaryan, correspondent from “Hraparak”, vs. former NA parliamentarian Roubik Hakobyan.

 We should remind that on December 7, 2016, parliamentarian Roubik Hakobyan, after exerting violence against Vahe Makaryan, in the hall of the NA, as well as in other interviews and posts, said insulting expressions addressed to the journalist, calling him a hooligan, ignorant and criminal. In relation to this incident, the journalist brought a lawsuit to court claiming to protect his honour and dignity. (see details in CPFE 2016 and 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”).

Case-related court sessions took place on June 4, September 13, December 3, and on December 18 a decision was made to resume the trial of the case. A court session is assigned on February 27, 2019.

**On February 16,** Manoushak Mkrtchyan brought a lawsuit to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Ajapnyak and Davitashen administrative districts) vs. “Kentron” TV Company and D. Tovmasyan, investigator of the Abovyan city investigative unit of the RA Investigative committee.

The reason for the lawsuit is the issue of the program “Tracking crime” on December 17, 2017, in which the person who murdered two people provided certain information to the law enforcement bodies about another case closed in 2013. Namely he mentioned that one of the two murdered persons, Samvel Alikhanyan, had killed Mamikon Asatryan upon the order by Manoushak Mkrtchyan[[62]](#footnote-62).

 With the lawsuit brought to court, Manoushak Mkrtchyan claims free time on TV for the claimant or her representative to refute the information blemishing her honor and dignity.

 On February 23, the court decided to return the lawsuit. On March 14, Manoushak Mkrtchyan again brought a lawsuit to court. On March 16 it was taken over a proceeding. A court session took place on June 11, and on September 26 the court decided to close the case as the claimant waived the claim.

**On February 19,** at the Yerevan municipality they hindered professional activity of Ruzanna Stepanyan and Susanna Poghosyan, correspondents from radio “Liberty” and “A1+” TV company respectively[[63]](#footnote-63).

The journalists came here upon the invitation of Zarouhi Postanjyan, head of “Yerkir Tsirani” faction, who intended to show them a number of problems. Namely, that after the incident during the council meeting on February 13, they forbade the service car of the faction to enter the municipality parking lot. Zarouhi Postanjyan also introduced the fact of some people playing cards during the working hours in one of the offices.

The activity of the journalists was intervened by Arthur Gevorgyan, Head of Information and PR department. In the beginning, he did not allow Zarouhi Postanjyan to continue communicating with the correspondents in the administrative building, then with the help of the police forbade the journalists to go to the council member’s office and made them leave the building, while referring to some internal regulation that neither the council members nor the media representatives knew about.

With the initiative of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, nine media organizations made a statement demanding from Mayor Taron Margaryan strictly to sanction Arthur Gevorgyan. However, the municipality does something different: it sends official letters to “A1+” TV Company and to radio “Liberty” expecting clarification on what measures have been taken to sanction the journalists and cameramen who videotaped at the Yerevan Municipality on February 19.

In relation to this incident, Zarouhi Postanjyan sent a letter-complaint to RA Prosecutor General, which was sent to the RA Investigative committee to prepare materials. A decision was made to reject the filing of the criminal case and not to prosecute Arthur Gevorgyan because of the absence of corpus delicti. The leader of “Yerkir Tsirani” complained against this decision to the RA Prosecutor General, which was also rejected.

On April 12, Zarouhi Postanjyan brought a complaint to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction. On June 11, the court rejected Zarouhi Postanjyan’s complaint reasoning that it was groundless. After this, on June 26, Postanjyan complained to upper instance – to Appellate criminal court. On August 31, this instance met the complaint and a criminal case was filed at eh Investigative committee. However, on December 27, the IC made a decision to close the proceeding of the criminal case. Zarouhi Postanjyan appealed against this decision to the RA Prosecutor General.

**On February 20,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) held the successive court session on the case Murad Muradyan, former minister of nature protection, parliamentarian from NA RPA faction, vs. “Skizb Media Center” Ltd. founder of “1in.am” news site, claiming to oblige to apologize publicly and to refute.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the article under heading “Our parliamentarians’ “pusher” sons and Eurasian powerlessness” published on “1in.am” site on June 8, 2017, which was about the arrest of parliamentarian from RPA faction Murad Muradyan’s son, who was suspected for selling drugs in Belarus[[64]](#footnote-64) (details in CPFE 2017 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) site, section “Reports”)

On March 5, the court decided to meet Murad Muradyan’s claim partially: to oblige the “Skizb Media Center” Ltd. to refute information discrediting the claimant’s honour and dignity, and the rest of the claim was rejected. AMD 4000 was levied from “Skizb Media Center” Ltd. in favor of Murad Muradyan as a payment for the state due. On December 7, he case was sent to the court archive.

**On February 26,** the“Armenian TV and radio-transmitting net” CJSC brought a claim to Tavush province court of general jurisdiction vs. “Ijevan Studio” Ltd. with a claim to levy AMD 2,599,550.

 This debt was generated from the money not paid by “Ijevan studio” to ATVRTN for the broadcasting of TV programs. In an interview with CPFE, Naira Khachikyan, Director of “Ijevan studio”, stated that until 2015 she regularly made all the payments, however when in 2016, as a result of the policy conducted by the state in this field the studio was left out of the digital broadcasting process and continued to operate in the analogue mode while losing its audience and the advertisers, it happened to be in a financial difficulty and stopped the payments.

On February 28, the claim was taken over a proceeding. Court cases on this case took place on May 8, July 31, November 6. The next session is on February 19, 2019.

**On February 28,** Vahe Makaryan, journalist from “Hraparak” daily, asked NA RPA faction parliamentarian, singer Shushan Petrosyan about the initiative of providing stone tufa to reinforce the positions in the Armed forces, and said that it turns out we do not have a Ministry of Defence in Armenia, when regularly they try to help the Army with the people’s resources. In reply, Shushan Petrosyan warned the journalist, saying “Tour questions is a very bad one; do you have suspicions about our army?” When the journalist said he did not suspect, Shushan Petrosyan responded, “Then ask a question typical to an Armenian guy”[[65]](#footnote-65).

**On March 2,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Ajapnyak and Davitashen administrative districts) continued the successive court session on the case Gayane Manoukyan, editor of the “Usarmenianews.com” site in Los Angeles, vs. Lilit Hovakimyan, owner of “4news.am” news site and Lt.Col. of Police Davit Perikhanyan.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the article with heading “Treacherous act by Gayane Manoukyan, friend of Azerbaijani media” published on the website on January 21, 2017, which particularly stated, that the given person gave an interview to the Azerbaijani “Haqqin.az” website, and that she creates troubles within Armenia. The plaintiff considers the information in the article as insulting and slander and claims to oblige refutation as well as compensation – AMD2mln for slandering, and AMD1mln for insulting (details in CPFE 2016 and 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) section “Reports”).

Court session on this case took place on April 11, May 14, June 8, and on June 22 published the ruling according to which Gayane Manoukyan’s claim was rejected and AMD 120000 was levied from her as a state due, and AMD300000 in favor of Lilit Hovakimyan, owner of “4news.am” site, as a payment to the advocate.

 On July 25, the claimant brought a complaint to the appellate court, which was rejected on August 15, after which again a complaint was brought, which was taken over a proceeding on October 29. The court session is assigned for January 16, 2019.

 **On March 7, “**Mikshin” Ltd brought a lawsuit to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Malatia-Sebastia administrative district) vs. “Zhoghovurd newspaper editorial” Ltd claiming refutation of slandering information and AMD2mln as compensation. The reason for the dispute was the article published on “armlur.am” news site on February 14, 2018, under the heading “VIDEO: protest in the park near the government building: the letter will reach the President’s office” [[66]](#footnote-66), in which the statements “when conducting metrological activities, the company calculated several extra square meters on each apartment, thus taking in total almost USD500,000 from the public employees”, “the company conducted the construction activities with low quality materials” are considered inconsistent with the reality by the claimant.

On April 23, Yerevan court of general jurisdiction, (seat in Arabkir) took the case over a proceeding. A court session took place on July 19, and on August 2, the ruling was made, according to which the claim was rejected. The court stated that the circumstances mentioned by the claimant were not substantiated by evidence, and the journalist acted according to the principle of pluralism.

**On March 7,** upon the report by “Aravot.am” news site, Ijevan police unit filed a criminal case against Naira Khachikyan, director of “Ijevan studio”. Charges were brought under Articles 179.1 (Squandering or embezzlement) and 325.1 (Forgery, sale or use of forged documents, stamps, seals, letter-heads, vehicle license plates) of the RA Criminal Code

 In an interview with CPFE, Naira Khachikyan stated that only “Aravot.am” news site informed about the filing of the criminal case, whereas there was no information about it on the “police.am” site. According to Naira Khachikyan, that case is related to the program of teaching handicraft conducted jointly with the Ijevan employment center in March of 2015.

People who participated in the course, received AMD 25000 each, and Naira Khachikyan received AMD440000, including VAT, through wire transfer to the TV Company. As Naira Khachikyan said, within the scope of the criminal case, participants of the course were called for interrogation and threatened to tell they did not participate in the course, and on that base, within the scope of the criminal case she was charged with forgery of signatures.

 On July 2, the Tavush province department of the Investigative committee closed the criminal case filed by Ijevan unit of the RA police against Naira Khachikyan based on absence of legal grounds.

**On March 13,** the European Court of Human Rights communicated the complaint by 16 citizens vs. Hovhannes Galajyan, journalist from “Iravunk” newspaper. It refers to the provisions of three articles of the European Convention – Article 8 (Right to respect for family and family life), Article 14 (Prohibition of discrimination) and Article 17 (Prohibition of abuse of rights).

 We should remind that on May 17, 2014, an article was published in the “Iravunk” newspaper under heading “They are serving the interests of international homosexual lobbing: black list of enemies to the nation and the state”, in which there was a “black list” of 60 people, with hyperlinks to their facebook pages, and a call was made for “zero tolerance” towards them, stop any contact, stop employing them and remove from public service.

 16 citizens turned to Yerevan Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts court of general jurisdiction against “Iravunk Media” Ltd and Hovhannes Galajyan with a claim to compensate for the damage incurred to honour and dignity. On October 30, 2014, the court fully rejected the claim. The claimants’ complaints to the Appellate civil and Cassation courts were also rejected, after which they turned to the ECHR.

**On March 15,** in Kanachut community of Ararat province, they hindered the legal professional activity of journalist Gayane Zargaryan, founder of “Fnews.am” website[[67]](#footnote-67). The journalist tried to take a photo of a new construction belonging to parliamentarian Alik Sargsyan, former RA Chief of Police, for which she was persecuted. Two young men came out of that territory, who first punched the car of the videotaping team, and then followed them in a black Niva from Kanachut to Yerevan, trying to cause an accident. The journalist videotaped all that incident.

On March 16, a criminal case was filed in relation to this incident at the Ararat province investigative department of the RA Investigative Committee, under Article 164.1 of the RA Criminal Code[[68]](#footnote-68). On June 12 the case was closed because of the absence of corpus delicti.

**On March 15,** Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Avan and Nor Norq administrative districts) the successive court session was held on the case Narine Abrahamyan vs. journalist Kristine Aghalaryan.

 We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit is the article under heading “Meghri medical center vs. SRC” published on the “Lurer.com” site, in which referral is made to Narine Abrahamyan’s happening in the hot spot of a number of incidents and scandals during the professional activity. In particular, the article mentioned that she has undergone internal investigations many times, however she was not dismissed from work, but just was subject to administrative punishment. Later, being appointed as the head of the Kapan local tax inspection service, she started to come to work under alcohol intoxication, behaved disrespectfully with the personnel, missed the work without any reason[[69]](#footnote-69).

Case-related court sessions took place on May 14, August 17, November 9; the next one is on February 11, 2019.

**On March 17,** they closed the criminal case filed in relation to hindering professional legal activity of Karine Simonyan, journalist from radio “Liberty”, which happened in Mghart village of RA Lori province.

We should remind that on December 1, 2017, during the demonstration in front of the former municipality building of Mghart community in relation to the operation of the cold mine of the village, H.D., a resident of Mghart, hit the loudspeaker instead of answering the journalist’s question.

Based on the report by Parliamentarian Mane Tandilyan, a criminal case was filed under Article 164.1. During the preinvestigation H.D. and Karine Simonyan brought applications that they have reconciliated. In her letter, the journalist asked to stop criminal prosecution of the defendant, as she had no complaint or claim from him.

**On March 19,** during the court session on the case “Environmental right” non-governmental organization vs. RA Ministries of nature protection and Energy infrastructures and natural resources held at the RA Administrative court, they restricted professional activity of Knar Khudoyan and Monika Yeritsyan, journalists from “Epress.am» and “Ecolur.org” news websites respectively[[70]](#footnote-70).

Judge Argishti Ghazaryan forbade the journalists to videotape the open-door court session, in case when neither the claimants, nor the representatives of the respondent ministries were against that. Ghazaryan said, that videotaping “will constrain the running of the session, from his perspective”. After the second motion by the claimant, the judge permitted the journalist only to do audiotaping.

**On March 20,** during the open-door court session on the case “Union of informed citizens” against Ministry of Foreign affairs held at the Administrative court they restricted the work of Gohar Hakobyan, journalist from “Aravot.am” news website, who was in the courtroom to cover the session[[71]](#footnote-71).

Claimant’s representatives Daniel Ioannisyan and Edgar Hakobyan were for the coverage of the session by “Aravot.am», however the representative of the respondent was against, stating that during the session confidential evidence will be introduced. Daniel Ioannisyan recommended an intermediary solution – to take photos of the part of the session during which no confidential evidence is published.

The court decided to reject the motion by the claimant to cover the court session, and to hold the session behind the doors. Whereas after the session, Daniel Ioannisyan made a statement that no confidential document or data was discussed[[72]](#footnote-72).

**On March 22,** the Appellate Civil court started the re-examination of the case Gevorg Mkrtchyan vs. “News AM” Ltd, founder of “News.am” news website.

 We should remind that the reason for the claim was the article under the headline “Ridicule at the Chamber of advocates-2: retribution continues” published on March 18, 2016 on “News.am” website[[73]](#footnote-73).The article says that advocate Gevorg Mkrtchyan gave evidently false testimony. “During the trial he stated, that on that day, on November 30, he was at the CoA, as he was to participate in a training course, whereas there was no training on that day”, said the publication. On April 11, 2017, the court of first instance decided to meet Gevorg Mkrtchyan’s claim partially: to oblige “News AM” Ltd to publish a refutation and to levy AMD50000 in favor of Gevorg Mkrtchyan as a compensation of intangible damage.

“News AM” Ltd brought a complaint against this ruling to the Appellate Civil court, which was taken over a proceeding on June 27, and on August 3 the court decided to overturn the ruling by the court of first instance and send the case to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction (seat in Shengavit administrative district) for full scope examination. ON October 18, that court took the case over a proceeding (details in CPFE 2016 and 2017 annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”).

 Case-related court sessions took place on August 23, November 27; the next session is on February 14, 2019.

 In 2018, four more court cases by the same claimant continued vs. “NEWS AM” Ltd. claiming refutation of slandering information and monetary compensation for intangible damage.

 In relation to the first case (“Victory of pndukism”: Armen Soghomonyan, beaten up by the managers of the CA was interrogated as a defendant”[[74]](#footnote-74) article published at 17:06, on June 23, 2017), court sessions took place on May 8, November 27; the next one is on February 14, 2019.

 In relation to the second case (“If they think Atanesyan and Soghomonyan will take back their claims, then they are terribly wrong: Lusine Sahakyan”[[75]](#footnote-75), published at 18:31, on June 23, 2017), court sessions took place on June 4; the next is on March 15, 2019.

 In relation to the third case (“It is just disgrace and evident illegitimacy: Tigran Atanesyan was invited to interrogation as a suspect”[[76]](#footnote-76), published at 15:36, on June 23, 2017), court sessions took place on November 2; the next is on February 25, 2019.

In relation to the fourth case (“Five persons charged in the case of attacking Atanesyan and Soghomonyan”, published at 17:46 on June 26, 2017, the information by the Investigative committee, at end of which the editorial made a quote from the previous materials[[77]](#footnote-77)) court sessions took place on April 10, December 18; the next is on April 16, 2019.

**On March 27,** Shirak province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Gyumri) held the first court session on the case “Tsaig” Ltd, founder of “Tsaig” TV company in Gyumri vs. “Shant” Ltd. founder of “Shant” TV company with the claim to stop actions by the latter that violate the rights. Case-related third party is National Committee on Television and Radio.

Reminder: on December 6, 2017, “Tsaig” Ltd brought a lawsuit, the reason for which is conducting operations by “Shant” TV Company not stipulated by the license, which has national coverage in Gyumri, in particular broadcasting local commercials different from the headquarter office TV-product, paid reportages and other programs. The claim by the “Tsaig” TV Company is to stop the broadcasting of “Shant” TV company in Gyumri, the content of which is different from the programs stipulated by the license and broadcast nationwide.

Court sessions on this case took place on September 17, October 9, December 5; the next session is on January 10, 2019.

**On April 11,** during the protest by the members of “Armenian relief front” and “Reject Serzh” initiative in front of the RPA head office, as a result of explosion of a primer the clothes and the camera of Hovik Grigoryan, cameramen from “[Aysor.am](https://www.aysor.am/am)” news site, were damaged[[78]](#footnote-78).

**On April 11,** after the session of the RPA SB, the questions by one of the journalists “Do you think that the citizen voting for RPA a year ago has not regretted?” irritated RPA Press secretary, NA Vice-Speaker Edward Sharmazanov. He responded, “Are you a coffee cup reader, or a journalist? Regretting is not a political category. Do not ask such amateur questions to the Vice-Speaker of the NA…”[[79]](#footnote-79)

***Cases of pressure during the revolution***

**On April 14,** a group of protestors with Nikol Pashinyan at the head, intruded into the Public radio building, broke the door of the broadcasting studio and demanded to go on air immediately[[80]](#footnote-80).

By the decision of the investigator from RA Special investigative service persons have been arrested within the scope of the criminal case “in relation to actively participating in mass disorders and illegal assemblies” filed under Articles 225.1 and .2, 251.1 of the RA Criminal code. On April 20, they have been detained, then on April 24 were released as a result the change in the political situation.

**On April 16,** representatives media learning in front of the Shirak municipality building that evacuators were brought in front of the Shirak province police building, came to videotape. Several people, quite probably the drivers of the evacuators, attacked the journalists and cameramen with insulting expressions: “Get away from here”, “You’ll regret, if a photo of these vehicles appears somewhere.” They even attempted to hit one of the female journalists, which was prevented by the cameramen from “Shant” TVC[[81]](#footnote-81). The policemen present there did not intervene during all that time.

**On April 16,** as a result of special means used by the police on Baghramyan Avenue, the camera and the live-streaming device of Vrezh Margaryan, cameraman from “Factor.am”, was damaged[[82]](#footnote-82).

**On April 18,** Narek Kirakosyan[[83]](#footnote-83), correspondent from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, was chased by the order of Hunan Poghosyan, First Deputy Chief of RA Police, for taking the photo of the armored equipment located on Baghramyan Avenue. However, the policeman did not manage to reach and catch the journalist.

 During the pre-investigation of the criminal case investigated under Articles 164.3, 308.1 and 309.2 of the RA Criminal code at the RA Special investigative service, a decision was made to recognize Narek Kirakosyan as a victim.

**On April 21,** in the morning, in the Norq 7th micro-district of Yerevan, during hustle at the march by Nikol Pashinyan and his supporters, the video-camera of the Factor.am was damaged[[84]](#footnote-84).

**On April 21,** Arakel Movsisyan, former parliamentarian from RPA, who organized the blocking of the road of people travelling to Yerevan from Etchmiadzin and neighboring communities, also hindered the work of Artak Hambardzumyan, reporter from radio “Liberty”[[85]](#footnote-85). To the journalist’s question why he was blocking the roads not allowing the cars to move towards Yerevan, he answered, “It is my village, why did YOU come here.” Later when the journalist said that the car of the videotaping crew had also stuck, as Arakel Movsisyan had blocked the road, he first tried to deny that, then confirmed saying, “I want and do it. You do that, don’t you? Get out of here.”

***Pressure during the post-revolutionary period***

**On April 24,** in the “Tsitsernakaberd” memorial in the capital, where the journalists tried to ask questions to the high-rank officials about the revolution in the country and the current situation, they faced disrespectful, negligent and insulting attitude[[86]](#footnote-86).

So, the journalists asked questions to the acting Minister of Defence Vigen Sargsyan about his future steps. In reply, he said, “Don’t you realize where we are? Go by!”, “Your behavior is unclear to me, it is not the right place. I can say that you do not understand the place.” The journalists were not able to get comments from a number of famous RPA politicians, as their security personnel pushed and hindered the media representatives’ activity, did not allow them to approach and ask questions to high-rank officials.

**On May 1,** in the NA, parliamentarian from RPA Sedrak Saroyan refused to answer the questions by the journalists, pretending he is offended from them. “You are not good people. I do not want to talk to you, nor communicate with you, because you are not good people, you did not let me go and get treated”[[87]](#footnote-87).

**On May 1,** Leader of the political party “Prosperous Armenia” Gagik Tsaroukyan reprimanded the journalists[[88]](#footnote-88). In reply to the question by Hripsime Jebejyan, reporter from “Aravot.am”, about his relation to March 1, 2008 events, Tsaroukyan in particular said, “Well, aren’t you ashamed of asking that question?” In terms of the question about the apprehensions in the country, he responded, “A journalist writes empty things about that issue…”

**On May 5,** Ararat and Vayots Dzor provinces court of general jurisdiction took over a proceeding the lawsuit by Arayik Zalyan, Asia Khachatryan’s representative, claiming public refutation of information considered slander, and compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity[[89]](#footnote-89). The respondent is Garnik Isagoulyan, leader of the “National Security” party; as third are recognized the founders of “Aravot” daily, “Araratnews.am”, “Operativ.am”, “168 zham” newspaper, “Henaran.am” news site.

The claimant challenges the idea expressed on March 28 by Garnik Isagoulyan, advisor to the Resident representation of the Republic of Artsakh in Armenia during the press conference in “Hayeli” club: “Asia Khachatryan is not something new to us. It is unverified information that our so-called freedom-loving girl, during her frequent visits to Tbilisi, along with her friends has been to Baku several times. Through Georgia it is much easier to travel to Azerbaijan without any clear notes in the passport.” The plaintiff claims proofs from Isagoulyan that she has been to Baku several times, also claims refutation and AMD half a million compensation.

 Case-related court sessions took place on August 28, September 19, October 22. The next session is on February 6, 2019.

**On May 7,** the RA administrative court made a decision to start a new hearing of the case “CHAP” LTD, founder of “GALA” TV Company, vs. Gyumri tax inspection. This case has a history of 11 years. The decision to hear it again at the RA administrative court was made after decision on May 4, 2017 at the European Court of Human Rights and overturning of the ruling at the RA Cassation court on April 7, 2018.

The representative of “CHAP” LTD Karen Toumanyan with a counterclaim demands invalidating the AMD 25,212,700 act by the tax bodies in 2007 (in fact AMD 25,116,700 was levied from the founder.) The court should find out whether the administrative act was substantiated. Moreover, the dispute should be heard in a criminal domain, as the matter is about misuse of big money, which was not taken into consideration by the three RA court instances starting 2007, and this is what the European Court of Human Rights drew attention to[[90]](#footnote-90).

 On August 16, the first court session was held on the case “CHAP” LTD, founder of “GALA” TV Company vs. Gyumri tax inspection.

During the court session, the SRC insisted on its claim to pay the money. According to advocate Karen Toumanyan, this claim was like a joke, as the money was paid long time ago, but the state body was saying it did not want the money but was insisting on the claim. The administrative court made a decision to interrogate a number of people as witnesses, including Grigor Amalyan, former ATRC chairperson, whose reports were taken as bases by the tax authority[[91]](#footnote-91).

On November 21, the court decided to consider the proceeding of the claim RA State Revenue Committee vs. “CHAP” LTD on the part of levying the money closed and the issue of court costs settled.

The trial continues to recognize the SRC act null and void. The next session is on February 5, 2019.

**On May 11,** after the RPA board meeting, Republican parliamentarian Shushan Petrosyan demonstrated noteworthy behavior, when the journalists wanted to ask her opinion about the new ministers. “Very nice, see what a nice weather!” said Shushan Petrosyan. Then she waved to the journalists, saying “OK? There will be a new scandal, won’t it?...New caricatures… you will feel satisfied, right, kids?” The journalists reminded her that it was live streaming. Petrosyan clarified that she returned from abroad at night and did not manage to follow the political situation. In terms of what they discussed during that day’s session, she mentioned, “A lot of good things. See, if you had become Republicans, probably you could have known, as well.” Then she added, “Live streaming, they are cool, awesome reportage, kids, its witty…”[[92]](#footnote-92).

**On May 17,** in front of the Yerevan municipality, during the protest organized against the Mayor, several supporters of Taron Margaryan insulted the journalists: “You are instigators, blackmailers, I have recorded you, you wanted to hit me, you are asking provoking questions; stand up for the truth, it is not nice when a journalist is biased. It is sad, that everything goes toward blackmail and insult; if the journalist does not blackmail, he/she will not get a salary”[[93]](#footnote-93).

**On May 28,** the journalists asked Hrayr Tovmasyan, president of the RA Constitutional Court, if he was going to resign, moreover that part of the public demands his resignation. Hrayr Tovmasyan replied, “Macedonian said – I do not answer stupid questions. Sorry”[[94]](#footnote-94).

# On May 31, when answering the journalists’ question in the Parliament, Vardan Ghoukasyan, parliamentarian from NA “Tsaroukyan” faction, considered all the publications that criticized him as orders: “You turn white into black, and vice versa, you do that and your clients; unless the media field is cleaned, the country will not be on the right track.”[[95]](#footnote-95) He also turned to the journalists, remembering the following words, “You are making a daredevil out of a coward, and a virgin out of a whore.”

**On June 6,** Sisak Gabrielyan, reporter from radio “Liberty” made a facebook posting, that it is already two times, that they are being threatened and insulted in Stepanakert[[96]](#footnote-96). “Hey man, you are a Turk, get the hell out of here, “Liberty” has no place here”, said a guy from inside a car. Sisak Gabrielyan informed the CPFE, that Haik Khanoumyan, parliamentarian from the Republic of Artsakh reported to the police, where the journalist gave an explanation. The police did not find any corpus delicti in the incident. The editorial decided not to turn to the law enforcement instances.

**On June 18,** RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan made a post on his Facebook page addressed to TV Companies: “Certain TV Companies, in fact making use of the unlimited opportunity of the freedom of expression, have decided to conduct anti-state preaching. This is probably one of the cases, when some people again and again confuse good manners of the authorities with weakness or naivety. Do not do that! Simply don’t!” Although the Prime Minister’s words do not have a concrete addressee, it can be qualified as pressure on media outlets.

**On June 19**, Samvel Haroutyunyan, head of the State committee on science under the RA Ministry of education and science, turned to Yerevan City court of general jurisdiction against Daniel Ioannisyan, program coordinator of the “Union of informed citizens” NGO with a claim of AMD2mln compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was the posting**[[97]](#footnote-97)** by Daniel Ioannisyan on his facebook page on June 12, and based on that the interview published on June 13 on “Tert.am” site (“The minister of ES should also answer the question, to what extent the friendship between him and Samvel Haroutyunyan impacted on the decision to appoint the father: D. Ioannisyan”)**[[98]](#footnote-98)**. “Pan-Armenia Media Group” CJSC, as legal owner of “Tert.am” site, is engaged as a case-related third party. On June 26, by the court decision the case was taken over a proceeding.

#  The first court session took place on October 22, then on October 12. The next session id on February 11, 2019.

**On June 20,** Aram Abovyan and Karine Abovyan brought a lawsuit against “Lori TV” Ltd claiming refutation of slandering information and public apology for insulting, as well as levying compensation for slandering and insult.

The reason for the lawsuit was the open letter “Don’t seize my share of sun from me”[[99]](#footnote-99) by a resident from Stepanavan, made public on May 25 through “Lori TV”, in which the author blames the author Aram Abovyan for building a house very close to his. The court took the case over a proceeding on June 22. Case-related court sessions took place on August 13, October 1, 25 and November 15. On November 30 the court rejected the claim.

**On June 20,** in the NA, journalist Pailak Fahradyan asked parliamentarian Andranik Karapetyan: “Have you enjoyed Manvel Grigoryan’s canned meat?” The parliamentarian responded to the journalist with “Hey you, Fanny Adams” expression[[100]](#footnote-100). During the break of the session, in reply to the request by the journalists he comments on the incident saying, that he perceived Pailak Fahradyan’s question as an insult, and apologized to the journalist[[101]](#footnote-101).

**On June 20,** in an interview with “Aravot” newspaper, former commander of DA Samvel Babayan blamed the media for seeing corruption facts, keeping silence and tolerating it, saying, “As you were feeding from them”[[102]](#footnote-102). This generalized blame addressed to all the media outlets by this politician, according to the CPFE, is nothing more than slander and an attempt to exert pressure through blackmail.

**On June 21,** during the protest organized in front of the Yerevan Gold market a case of impeding the work of Tatev Danielyan and cameraman Karen Chilingaryan from radio “Liberty” was recorded. During the coverage of the protest, a woman working in the market hit the journalist’s microphone and the phone, and threatened her[[103]](#footnote-103). A man exerted pressure on the cameraman, trying to impede the videotaping. In an interview with CPFE, Tatev Danielyan stated that the editorial decided not to turn to the law enforcement with this issue.

**On June 27,** Margarit Davtyan, producer of the “Health resort” program on “Kentron” TV, sent an open letter Gagik Tsaroukyan informing that on April 20, for unknown reasons, without substantiation, the broadcasting of the successive “Health resort” program was stopped in the middle, then the broadcasting of the program was stopped at all. “At the TV company they told me that Gagik Tsaroukyan personally forbade the broadcasting of the program. No more reasons or substantiations were made. I am deeply sure that without warning and reasoning dismissal of employees in such a manner is simply a slap on the face of the media representatives, to put it mildly”, says the public letter[[104]](#footnote-104). Gagik Tsaroukyan responded to the letter. It turned out that he did not have information about closing of the program, and proposed a new cooperation. The journalist did not agree to return.

**On July 9,** the Appellate court rejected Narine Ghalechyan’s (correspondent from radio “Liberty”) complaint against the decision by the Gegharkunik province court of general jurisdiction related to the hindrance of the journalist’s professional activity in Tchambarak on April 2, on the day of 2017 parliamentary elections.

We should remind that on April 2, 2017, at the polling station 20/24 in Tchambarak Narine Ghalechyan’s (journalist from radio “Liberty”) work was hindered[[105]](#footnote-105). She noticed a person in front of the voting booth watching the voting. To the journalist’s question why he came up to the booth, the person replied “not your business”, and then he cursed the journalist, demanded the telephone and demanded her to leave the polling station. In relation to the filed criminal case, the Gegharkunik province court of first instance met the claim re exerting pressure on the journalist and fined the person for AMD500000, but it rejected the journalist’s claim, stating in the decision that the journalist’s activity was not hindered. Grounds for that was the fact that the journalist did not leave the area after the incident and continued working. By the way, that person was Vazgen Adamyan, candidate for Tchambarak mayor who became one after the elections.

 On October 2, the journalist’s representative turned to the Cassation court, however the latter returned the claim. The claimant plans to turn to the ECHR.

**On July 21,** Tirair Mouradyan, journalist from “Union of informed citizens” NGO made a post on his facebook page informing that the program coordinator of the same NGO Daniel Ioannisyan removed his article from “Sut.am” site and later uploaded the edited version without advance coordination with him[[106]](#footnote-106). Tirair Mouradyan expressed suspicion that there was pressure on Daniel Ioannisyan or maybe blackmail, and he turned to the media organizations asking to pay attention to this type of censorship.

 Chairperson of CPFE Ashot Melikyan responded to discussions over facebook in this relation, and in particular expressed bewilderment, that the government representative, before giving an interview, asked Daniel Ioannisyan for and received a promise of an objective and comprehensive material, which means, that the program coordinator took an groundless commitment via bypassing the journalist, as neither the journalist, nor the “Sut.am” site gave a reason to that official to challenge their impartiality.

In relation to this incident Ashkhen Mousheghyan, executive director of “Union of informed citizens” NGO wrote a clarification letter: “…These actions by the program coordinator contradict the strategic goals of the organization. I assure, that the incident has been thoroughly investigated within the organization and necessary conclusions have been made to prevent similar future manifestations.”[[107]](#footnote-107)

Nevertheless, after the incident Tirair Muradyan left the organization.

**On August 8,** the complaint by RA second president Robert Kocharyan vs. “Beginning media center” LTD, founder of “1in.am” claiming public refutation of slandering information and compensation was taken over proceeding.

The reason for the claim was the article under heading “Grigor Grigoryan testified against Kocharyan: the latter can be detained”[[108]](#footnote-108) published on June 7 on “1in.am” belonging to the LTD. Then came the 2 publications in the same media outlet (author Sargis Artsrouni) on June 23 and 24: “Robert Kocharyan’s panic: the second president on the way to prison” [[109]](#footnote-109) and “Bloody symbol of anti-revolution – Robert Kocharyan” [[110]](#footnote-110). Later, on June 28, another analytical article by the same author was published in “1in.am” – “Kocharyan-Sargsyan, beneficiaries of bloody 20 years” [[111]](#footnote-111).

According to the claimant, the given articles contain information damaging Robert Kocharyan’s dignity and honor, as publicly introduced facts are inconsistent with the reality. Moreover, this claim was returned twice, reasoning the incompleteness of the documents.

Case-related court sessions were held on October 8, November 2, 16, December 14 and 17. The next court session day is not assigned yet.

By the way, on October 16, the claimant’s representative brought a motion to court asking to apply a measure ensuring the claim and to arrest the property and funds of the “Beginning Media Center” Ltd, as well as t forbade the respondent to publish any article related to the claimant’s name until the end of this court case.

On October 17, the court rejected the motion to ensure a measure of ensuring the claim.

**On August 17,** the residents of Yeghvard town hindered professional activity of Knarik Haroutyunyan, journalist from “A1+” TV Company and cameraman Samvel Poghosyan. The video-team responded to the alarm-call and visited “Agricultural mechanization and electrification science-research institute” CJSC located in that town. 30 families had illegally settled down in one of the buildings of the company. “After talking to the authorized representative by the company owner we went to listen to the residents and to understand what made them illegally intrude into somebody’s private area. All our efforts to get some clarification failed. Some of the resident stood in front of the entrance and banned our movement. They refused to give any explanation; all our questions remained unanswered: “Get your cameras and go away from here, people should not know anything, there is no question to be answered”, the residents said[[112]](#footnote-112). They made us turn off the camera and stop videotaping in that area”, said Knarik Haroutyunyan, journalist from “A1+” to CPFE.

**On August 21,** the expression made by Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, Minister of Diaspora, that “there are two-three media outlets, which need to come to their senses”, was considered as pressure by some journalists. “There is a matter of statehood, when you with your actions do harm, I will not allow it; let the public see and assess what problems arise in Diaspora because of your articles”, said the minister[[113]](#footnote-113).

Later, the journalists asked Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to comment on the minister’s words, to which he replied, “I do not accept casting stones at somebody for some criticism and urge everyone to take criticism constructively, because I personally see an opportunity in any criticism to find our mistakes and to correct them”[[114]](#footnote-114).

**On August 24,** during the press conference by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan it was announced that it was already decided which journalists would ask questions. As a result, questions were asked only by journalists from “H1” and “Armenia”. Narek Kirakosyan, journalist from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, informed the CPFE about it.

**On September 11,** Tehmine Yenokyan, journalist from “lragir.am” made a post on her facebook page that the employees of “Lydian Armenia” company separated her telephone conversation from the live program broadcast by her colleagues and then published it and wrote insulting expressions addressed to the journalist. She also stated that for days some people were conducting “operative-intelligence” activities close to her house, recording her going in and out[[115]](#footnote-115).

Tehmine Yenokyan reported about this to the police. On September 25, the journalist received a letter from Jermuk police unit of the RA police Vayots Dzor department, which informed that based on the publication a criminal case was filed under Article 140 of the RA Criminal Code; the journalist was recognized as a victim. Later, on September 30, the journalist was called to the police station for interrogation. After that the journalist’s neighbor gave a confession testimony that s/he had videotaped the journalist’s house and gave it to someone named Osyan.

**On September 17,** Department 6 of the RA Police and employees of the Special investigative service conducted a search at the editorial office of “Yerevan.today” news site. They were looking for wiretapping equipment; also the computers were checked to find out how the site received and published the YouTube link of the wiretapped telephone conversation between NSS Director Arthur Vanetsyan and Head of SIS Sasoun Khachatryan two days before it was spread over the Internet. According to the official clarification, the search conducted at the editorial office in no way was related to the journalistic activity, but was aimed exclusively at ensuring multilateral, objective and full investigation of the criminal case of wiretapping[[116]](#footnote-116).

In this respect the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, along with partner organizations made a statement, which said that without serious substantiations the incident can be “considered as interference with the activity of the media outlet and can threaten the protection of information sources.” Therefore, the authors of the document demanded from the law enforcement bodies to return the seized equipment to the editorial office as soon as possible, to publish the main results right after the expertise is over, and during the pre-investigation to consider the violations highlighted by the site editor[[117]](#footnote-117). The incident was also condemned by “Journalists without borders” international organization.

On November 9, the CPFE sent a written inquiry to the Investigative committee to find out why the return of the equipment is delayed, when they would do it and whether after the examination the IC is ready make the results public. On November 14, the Investigative committee sent an answer saying that the conclusion of computer-technical examination is not ready yet, and after the “examination if no information within the interest of the investigation is found, the aforementioned equipment will be returned to the owners.” The seized equipment was returned to the editorial office on December 28.

The editorial office made a statement, saying they will not open the computers and use them, unless they receive the conclusion by the investigating body, and the specialists fully study the equipment.

**On September 20,** in the yard of the National Assembly, before the event of 100th anniversary of founding the Parliament, Mihran Poghosyan, parliamentarian from NA RPA faction, demonstrated insulting attitude towards the journalists: via waving his finger Poghosyan threatened the journalists, saying, “Think twice and ask normal questions.” Then the parliamentarian did not like other questions by the journalists, and he responded like this, “Ask other questions, your questions are pointless” and so on[[118]](#footnote-118).

**On September 21,** on the Northern Avenue in Yerevan, when answering the question by the journalists, whether he had any relation to Robert Kocharyan, Gagik Tsaroukyan, leader of the “Prosperous Armenia” party demonstrated disrespect to the journalists by saying “You should not uselessly take the chance and pointlessly ask the same question every time.” Then Tsaroukyan instructed the journalists what questions to ask[[119]](#footnote-119).

**On September 23,** on the day of snap elections to the Yerevan City council, at the polling station 7/50, Hripsime Jebejyan, journalist from “Aravot”, videotaped a citizen who was voting outside the booth[[120]](#footnote-120). The voter’s daughter did not like that and she tried to hinder the journalist’s work via holding her by the elbow and saying, “Why are you videotaping my dad?” The journalist informed that voting is a public process, and the media has the right to cover the whole process. Later the lady, who had left the polling station, came back and tried to find out the journalist’s name from the Committee secretary, and left after she learned it.

Taking into consideration that the incident prima facie contained features of hindering the powers of the media representative participating in the voting, on September 25, upon the task by the Yerevan City prosecutor’s office, the incident-related publication was sent to the relevant Yerevan city police units to prepare materials stipulated under Articles 180-181 of the RA Criminal procedural code[[121]](#footnote-121).

On October 1, Hripsime Jebejyan was called for interrogation to the Malatia unit of RA police. To the investigator’s question “What trace did it leave on you?” Jebejyan mentioned, that the journalist did not feel protected at the polling station[[122]](#footnote-122).

The body I charge of proceeding came to the conclusion, that the citizen did not try with any action to prevent or hinder the journalist’s activity; the latter continued to videotape without the mentioned citizen attempting to hinder her. Based on the aforementioned, on October 4, 2018, a decision was made to reject filing of a criminal case.

**On September 24, “**Forrights.am” site informed that “Word of life” Evangelical church in Armenia turned to the RA National Security Service to file a criminal case on the bases of instigating religious hostility, taking into consideration the publications by “Dukhov Hayastan” Facebook page and “Blognews” news site. The press secretary of the church Armen Lousyan said that “in August “Dukhov Hayastan” fake page was opened on Facebook, in which regularly fake information is spread, anti-state campaign is conducted and religious hostility is instigated, especially against the “Word of life” Evangelical church in Armenia, it shepherds and the church members. “Blognews” news site and its editor-in-chief Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan did it with evident intent, ascribing “Dukhov Hayastan” fake page to “Word of life” church, introduced as if is conducting anti-state campaign” said Lousyan[[123]](#footnote-123).

**On September 26,** “Politik.am” site published news about the Head of SRC Davit Ananyan, in particular mentioning that he wanted to conclude a transaction of AMD350mln with his acquaintances: “According to rumors, Davit Ananyan, after being appointed to the position, increased the size of the amount for the required audit up to AMD350mln and did everything so that the procurement is conducted by “PHP Audit” CJSC[[124]](#footnote-124) registered under the names of his acquaintances”. By the way, when publishing this information, the website was based on the circulated rumors, in reply to which the Head of the SRC refuted the news on his Facebook page considering it a slander, which was blemishing his honor and dignity[[125]](#footnote-125). The Head of the SRC also draw attention of the law enforcement bodies to the fact that this publication may contain features of false denunciation.

**On September 26,** “News AM” LTD brought a lawsuit against Sona (Sirush) Haroutyunyan, correspondent from “1in.am” news site[[126]](#footnote-126). The reason for the lawsuit is the post on the facebook page, where the journalist linked “News.am” site to Robert Kocharyan’s name. The founder of the “News.am” claims AMD200,000 from the journalist as a compensation, as well as to publish a refutation, public apology, and to oblige the journalist to publish the court decision on her Facebook page.

According to the journalist, the following prehistory played a role in this case: on August 28, she wrote an article “ARFD candidate for Yerevan Mayor was formerly charged with the murder of the first mayor of Yerevan” referring to Mikayel Manoukyan’s past, ARFD candidate to the city council[[127]](#footnote-127). ARFD responded to the article: “Mikayel Manoukyan is being slandered: clarification by ARFD”, where the journalist and “1in.am” blamed in violating the norms of ethics, in publishing false and unilateral information[[128]](#footnote-128).

On October 4, Ararat and Vayots Dzor province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Vedi) returned the case, as the documents were not complete. On October 15, the claim that was brought again, was again returned. After all, on November 1, the claim was brought again and was taken over a proceeding on November 15. The court session day is not assigned yet.

**On September 26,** “News AM” LTD brought a lawsuit against “Dareskizb” LTD, founder of “Haykakan zhamanak” daily[[129]](#footnote-129). The reason for the lawsuit is the article published on August 21 by “HZh” under the heading “Ararat, Armnews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media, fakes: which media outlets were “bought” by Kocharyan” [[130]](#footnote-130). According to the claimant, with a number of expressions in the publications about “News.am”, as well as with the heading of the article damage was caused to its business reputation. “News AM” LTD brought a claim of compensation of AMD200,000 to the founder of “Haykakan zhamanak”.

 Because of the documents being incomplete, the Yerevan court of general jurisdiction returned the claim twice and after all on October 26 took it over a proceeding. The first court session is on January 11, 2019.

 **On October 16,** at a briefing with journalists, NSS Director Arthur Vanetsyan stated, that there was a media outlet, which taken AMD 3-4 million for writing an article about him and pays a loan: “I am not suing, so that they do not say there is pressure on the media”[[131]](#footnote-131). However, such a blame by the head of the special service may also perceived as pressure on media.

 **On October 18,** during a conversation with journalists on the day of opening the “Mining” firm, PRP leader Gagik Tsaroukyan did not like the journalists’ questions, and he afforded insulting expressions[[132]](#footnote-132): “Look here, it’s been a year you are giving PRP to Kocharyan; [everyone defends his/her own interests](https://www.multitran.ru/c/m.exe?t=6415159_1_2&s1=%EA%E0%E6%E4%FB%E9%20%F1%E0%EC%20%E7%E0%20%F1%E5%E1%FF), the main decision-maker is the people. I am saying it again: I have never dealt with, and do not deal with, I deal with “Prosperous”, you can have a look at each list separately, parliamentarians, persons. Every field, any deal, whatever I did, one should not be ungrateful… You are ungrateful; there was no one among you to say “Good for you, Mr. Tsaroukyan”. The journalists prompted that their job is not to protect Tsaroukyan, to which Tsaroukyan responded, “I do not need protection, go and protect your owners, from who you receive money, whose orders you fulfil. You should be fair, you are mothers, women, a family, you are bringing up children. In your hearts you should be honest with your conscience”. Gagik Tsaroukyan said to one of the journalists, “Why are you that offended from Tsaroukyan”[[133]](#footnote-133).

**On October 19,** Ararat and Vayots Dzor provinces court of general jurisdiction took over a proceeding the claim by “Lydian Armenia” company vs. journalist Tehmine Yenokyan claiming a compensation of AMD1 million for expressions discrediting the business reputation of the company made during her public speech via live-streaming on her Facebook page and in the mineral water drinking hall of Jermuk city on August 12, and to oblige her to refute the slandering information in the same place through a live public speech and on her Facebook page.

 As of the end of the year, a court session day is not assigned yet.

**On October 19,** Hrair Melkonyan, assistant to Sasoun Mikayelyan, RA NA parliamentarian, sent a letter to the prosecutor of Kotayk province and informed that on October 18 on “FIP.am” (former “sut.am”) a recording was put, which is a violation of telephone conversations[[134]](#footnote-134). At the Kotayk province investigative department of the RA Investigative Committee a criminal case was filed under Article 146.1 of the RA Criminal code against Rafayel Afrikyan, journalist from “FIP.am” site, in relation to which on Facebook his complaint was expressed by Daniel Ioannisyan, founder of the site, program coordinator of “Union of informed citizens” NGO. The IC clarified, that irrespective of the fact that the criminal case was filed on the fact of violating the confidentiality of telephone conversations, the main subject matter of the investigation was to find out the fact of possible abuse of the administrative resources during the pre-election period. On December 3, however, the criminal case was closed because of absence of corpus delicti.

 **On November 12,** businessman Vahe Hakobyan brought a lawsuit to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction vs. “Union of informed citizens” NGO, “Syuniac yerkir” Ltd. Armday.AM (“Armday.am”) Ltd claiming to oblige public refutation and apology through respectively **“**Fip.am”, “Syuniacyerkir.am”, “Armday.am” sites for information considered slander, which were spread via the same platforms. The plaintiff also claims AMD 2 million for the damage caused to his honor and reputation.

 The reason for this lawsuit is the information about former Governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan published on “Fip.am” on October 23, according to which through foundations he had funded his and his wife’s businesses.

 On November 22, the court returned the lawsuit, because of mistakes in the documents. As of the end of the year a new lawsuit was not brought.

 **On November 20,** staff of the department 6 of the RA Police visited the editorial office of “Aysor.am” site and brought a notice, with which they asked to provide the “copy of the video-recording of the interview by Silva Hambardzoumyan given to “Aysor” news service on 02.11.2018”[[135]](#footnote-135). In a reply letter “Aysor.am” stated that on the day mentioned in the notice by the Police, November 2, business woman Silva Hambardzoumyan did not give an interview to “[Aysor.am](https://www.aysor.am/am)” site, but a press conference was convened at “Hayatsk” club in which several dozens of media outlets participated. Hambardzoumyan’s press conference was covered by almost all the media outlets, and the recording is available through.

# On November 22, RA Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan brought a lawsuit to Ararat and Vayots Dzor provinces court of general jurisdiction vs. Boris Tamoyan (editor of “politik.am”) with a claim to oblige public refutation of information considered slandering and to pay a compensation for damage caused to honor and dignity

# We should remind that on October 28, RA Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan made a statement over Facebook, that although the government attaches great importance to free media, he was going to bring a lawsuit vs. “politik.am” for slandering[[136]](#footnote-136). The site, which published an article under heading “Deputy Prime Minister Avinyan smoked marijuana in the Government”[[137]](#footnote-137), before the Deputy Prime Minister’s statement, published a second article with the same contents, being surprised why they do not turn to court (“Avinyan is afraid: marijuana brought a headache for him”, October 27, 2018), and the third one (“A surprise is waiting for Avinyan in court: he has to undergo examination” October 29, 2018) was published after the statement.

#  The deputy Prime Minister has also mentioned that the compensation would be directed to the payment of tuition fees of students with high performance at the departments of journalism.

# On November 26, Tigran Avinyan’s claim was taken over a proceeding. The court session day is not assigned yet.

 **On November 23,** PARA TV made a statement about the statements made by the Minister of Diaspora Mkhitar Hayrapetyan[[138]](#footnote-138) and Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan[[139]](#footnote-139) according to which “at PARA TV the program with their participation were censored for political purposes, and that is why they were not broadcast”. The media outlet clarified, “The reality is that the “Hard Talk” program with Arsen Torosyan was out of format, i.e. it was not consistent with the expectations of the audience, which were formed within the context of the previous programs… In terms of Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, as well as programs with participation of political analyst Menua Harutyounyan, which were shot during the successive two days, we should mention that they are not edited yet, and nobody has seen yet, therefore the suppositions about them, that some people did not like them and forbade their broadcasting, are nonsense.” The media outlets also urged the ministers to stop pressure on the editorial[[140]](#footnote-140).

**On December 7,** a representative from Chief criminal investigation department of the RA Police visited “News.am” editorial and claimed to provide evidence proving the contents of certain publications[[141]](#footnote-141), namely, publications about live-streams by RPA Vice-President Edward Sharmazanov, including articles titled “They have started to look for people who would give testimony against our candidates: Sharmazanov gave names” and “RPA supporters are invited to the police for explanatory conversations: Sharmazanov”. After the intervention by the advocates, the police employee gave two letters, in which the aforementioned publications are quoted, and they asked to provide “specific or additional other facts.”

 We should remind that according to the “RA Law on media”, only the court can demand to disclose the source, moreover only in case, if it is necessary to solve grave or especially grave crimes.

Referring to this incident, the CPFE and nine media organizations called on to the new authorities to take measures to keep media outlets away from illegal police actions and to create more favorable conditions for free operation of journalists and media outlets, irrespective of their political affiliation.

**On December 7,** PRP member Kajik Gevorgyan, made a post on Facebook, stating that “many of the journalists behave non-professionally and spread misinformation typical to yellow press”[[142]](#footnote-142). The reason for Kajik Gevorgyan’s concern was the information stated at the press conference and recorded by “Akanates” (witness) observer mission, which was published on “Aravot.am” that “at polling station 16 NA parliamentarian Nahapet Gevorgyan’s son, who was running on the PRP list, provided construction materials for the repair works of the church in Armavir city.”[[143]](#footnote-143)

From the political part they have also turned to “Aravot.am” and claimed to publish a refutation. The editorial did not publish the refutation, offering to turn to the observer mission.

**On December 9,** on the day of snap elections to the NA, PRP leader Gagik Tsaroukyan reprimanded the journalists, “So far I have not seen journalists who would ask correct questions, political questions”[[144]](#footnote-144).

**On December 9,** on the day of snap elections to the NA, at the polling station 10/49, the chairman of the commission did not allow Narek Kirakosyan, correspondent from “Haykakan zhamanak”, to enter the polling station to cover the process of counting the votes[[145]](#footnote-145). The journalist informed the Chairperson of CEC Tigran Mukouchyan about the situation. Only after the intervention by the latter the journalist was registered as a media representative and allowed to enter the polling station.

 The publication about this was sent from the prosecutor’s office at Yerevan Erebouni and Noubarashen administrative districts to the Erebouni police unit with the task to prepare criminal-judicial documents. During that period, Narek Kirakosyan informed the police about not having a complaint, based on which the case process was stopped.

**On December 9,** on the day of snap elections to the NA, Hripsime Jebejyan, journalist from “Aravot.am” site, before working at polling station 10/33, as is required, turned to the secretary and the committee chairperson to get registered, however the latter demonstrated disrespectful attitude to the media representative[[146]](#footnote-146).

 The publication about this was sent from the prosecutor’s office at Yerevan Erebouni and Noubarashen administrative districts to the Erebouni police unit to check the described circumstances and to find out if there was any crime in them. On December 14 the police sent a letter to the editorial asking to provide full information about the incident, as well as “information about the source that provided the respective information.”

 In an interview with CPFE, Hripsime Jebejyan said, that all the factual data about the incident are included in the publication, and only the court can demand to disclose the source of information, therefore the editorial did not answer the letter.

**On December 9,** on the day of snap elections to the NA, at polling station 31/26 in Gyumri they hindered the activity of Anahit Simonyan, journalist from Journalists’ “Asparez” club. Namely, the members of the committee did not allow to take photos and always argued with her. After all, the photographer took the photo of a person’s ID who introduced as an observer, about who there was no information on the CEC site.

**On December 18,** to accredit the correspondent from “Armday.am” news site at the Government, they required annual financial statement of a founding legal person from the editorial office. Such a requirement for accreditation is not stipulated either by the “Law on media” nor in the order of accrediting journalists in the government. It means, publishing annual financial statement and accreditation at public bodies are in no way interconnected processes.

 Later, the Prime Minister’s press secretary made a clarification statement specifying the requirement of Article 12 under heading “Transparency of financial sources” of the “Law on Media”[[147]](#footnote-147). However, supervision over implementation of this is not the function of the government’s press secretary. Accordingly, this is abuse of power and pressure on media outlet.

 **On December 25,** businessman Vahe Hakobyan brought a lawsuit against “Hayeli” press club claiming to oblige the respondent to pay a compensation of AMD 3 million for the damage caused to honor and dignity, as well as to publish a refutation. The lawsuit was not taken over a proceeding yet. By the end of the year, neither “Datalex.am” nor the plaintiff nor the respondent was able to clarify what was the reason for the lawsuit.

1. ***Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information***

 *During the 2018, the CPFE recorded 98 cases of violating the right to receive and disseminate information. Only if five of the cases a lawsuit was brought to court.*

*As compared with the previous year, the number of cases of violating the right to receive and disseminate information has increased by 36.
 Facts recorded during the period in question, as well as new developments of the previously recorded cases are introduced below in chronological order.*

**On January 8,** “Union of informed citizens” NGO, brought a lawsuit to the RA administrative court against Yerevan City Hall. The reason for the lawsuit is the incomplete reply to the written inquiries sent to the City Hall on October 24 and November 15, 2017, by the claimant’s representative Edgar Hakobyan, director of the “Art of Law” advocacy office, and on October 9, 2017 by Tatevik Kerobyan, former executive director of the organization. The NGO asked to provide information whether the External design and advertisement department of Yerevan City Hall considered the dashboards with the content “Called and conscripted for one purpose” as a social commercial: if yes, then is it based on a certain document. The City hall gave an incomplete answer to the inquiry.

On January 15, the case was taken over a proceeding. Court sessions took place on June 14 and November 29. Ono December 12, a decision was made by which the claim by the “Union of informed citizens” NGO was met partially. The court obliged the Yerevan City hall to provide information whether External design and advertisement department of Yerevan City Hall, when considering the dashboards with the content “Called and conscripted for one purpose” as a social commercial in December of 2016, made any decision and whether the fact of considering it a social commercial was based on any written document.

**On January 11,** the Mayor of Yerevan, Taron Margaryan, after introducing two drafts at the government session, invited a press-conference in the other part of the building, in which participated journalists only from TV companies and certain websites[[148]](#footnote-148). The other journalists accredited in the governement, who were working in the news room at that moment, inquired from Zoya Barseghyan, Head of the Information and PR department, how come only part of the media representatives participated in the briefing by the Mayor. Zoya Barseghyan responded, that the list was prepared by Arthur Gevorgyan, Head of the Information and PR department of the City Hall and recommended to contact him. However, the latter was out of reach and did not clarify the reason for discrimination.

**On January 11,** Tirair Mouradyan, journalist from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, sent a written inquiry to Georgi Kutoyan, director of the RA National Security Service to receive information. The journalist wondered whether the RA president Serzh Sargsyan was out of Armenia during the first 5 days of January 2018. The NSS gave an answer through violation of the 5-day period defined by the law, moreover they rejected providing the information, reasoning that it contains private life data and violates the confidentiality of private life. Whereas this argument could be considered acceptable, if it were about a private citizen, and the information about a high official, moreover about the leader of the country, are of public importance, and the interest by the media is quite justified.

**On January 12,** the RA administrative court held the first session on the case Tehmine Yenokyan, journalist from “Lragir.am” vs. RA Special investigative service.

We should remind that on December 1, 2013, the journalist was covering the peaceful demonstration on the over-ground passage on Arshakunyats Avenue. After the demonstration, 5 people in civilian clothes, who introduced themselves as police officers, apprehended the journalist and the demonstrators to the Shengavit police unit of RA police. This incident was reported to the authorized body and materials have been prepared. On June 26, 2017, Tehmine Yenokyan’s representative, advocate Aramazd Kiviryan turned to Special investigative service, asking to provide copies of those materials, but the SIS refused to provide them. The journalist brought a lawsuit to court and claimed to oblige SIS to provide the asked information.

Court sessions on this case took place on April 11, October 17, and on November 3 the Administrative court closed the case.

**On January 17,** the RA Administrative court held the successive session on the case “Investigating journalists” NGO vs. the Corrections department of the RA Ministry of Justice.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the incomplete reply to the inquiry sent by “Hetq” electronic periodical to the Corrections department of the RA Ministry of Justice on May 15, 2017. The media outlet expected to get information about food prepared in all the corrections institutions, about non-consumed food and waste created thereof, about the contracts signed with the company that disposes the food waste, and about persons who refuse the food (details in CPFE 2017 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”).

On February 8, the investigation of the case was resumed; on April 17 a court session was held, and on May 10 the RA Administrative court partially met the claim by the “Investigating journalists” NGO. By the court ruling the Corrections department was obliged to provide the copies of the log-books (lists) of inmates who refused food, based on the example of 1-2 corrections institutions (initially by the inquiry it as expected to receive such information from all the institutions). The rest of the claim was rejected. Besides, AMD 2000 was levied from the respondent in favor of “Investigating journalists” NGO as advance paid state due, as well as AMD 40000 as a payment to the claimant’s representative.

**On January 29,** Daniel Ioannisyan, coordinator of the programs of “Union of informed citizens” NGO, sent a written inquiry to Yerevan City Hall, asking for information about the number of boys and girls born in Yerevan maternity hospitals in January 2018 according to days.

 The City Hall refused to provide the information stating that it is outside their jurisdiction. On March 2, Daniel Ioannisyan brought a lawsuit to the RA Administrative court against Yerevan city hall with a claim to oblige to provide information. On March 12, the case was taken over a proceeding. Court sessions took place on June 20, October 17; the next session is on January 8, 2019.

**On January 30,** Daniel Ioannisyan, programs coordinator of “Union of informed citizens” NGO, sent a written inquiry to Edward Nalbandyan, RA Minister of Foreign Affairs, asking for information about when the minister’s ex-advisor Rouben Tatoulyan had diplomatic passports. The inquiry was replied on February 12, through violation of the 5-day period defined by the law. It was stated in the reply, that provision of information is rejected based on confidentiality and not being subject to be made public. Daniel Ioannisyan sent a second inquiry, clarifying that the information is subject to provision, but was rejected again.

**On February 2,** the RA Administrative court held the successive court session on the case Levon Barseghyan, Chairperson of the Board of Council of Journalists’ “Asparez” Club vs. Grigor Grigoryan, director of “Armenian museum of history” SNCO.

We should remind that on May 10, 2017, Levon Barseghyan sent a written inquiry to Grigor Grigoryan wishing to receive some information about the museum. However, the director of the SNCO did not reply to the inquiry, thus violating the RA “Law on freedom of information” (details in CPFE 2017 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Report”).

Court sessions on this case were held on March 5, April 12, September 10, November 21; the next session is on January 14, 2019.

**On February 8,** Souren Deheryan, Chairperson of the “Journalists for the Future” NGO sent a written inquiry to Arthur Gevorgyan, Head of the information and PR department of Yerevan City Hall, asking for information about the number of musical and art schools under the City Hall, about the increase in payments, number of attending children, as well as about the amount of money reimbursed from the 2018 state budget for the pupils.

 Souren Deheryan received the reply to the inquiry through violation of the 5-day period defined by the law and only after he made a post on “Facebook” social net about not replying to the inquiry, while tagging Arthur Gevorgyan’s personal and City hall pages.

**On February 8,** “Union of informed citizens” NGO sent a written inquiry to Ashot Manoukyan, RA Minister of energy infrastructures and natural resources, for information.

Daniel Ioannisyan, the program coordinator of the organization, wondered what studies the State Committee on Water Economy was conducting to find out the expediency of building the Yeghvard reservoir, and whether discussions were held in that respect.

 The Ministry refused to provide information, based on its not being subject to publication. Ioannisyan sent a second inquiry. On March 5, the Ministry provided the requested information.

**On February 8,** Suzan Simonyan, correspondent from “Factor.am” news website, sent a written letter to Mery Harutyunyan, Head of the information and public relations department of the RA president’s staff, asking for information about the people who were awarded amnesty by the order of the RA president. The staff of the president gave an incomplete reply[[149]](#footnote-149). In particular, they mentioned the number of inmates who were awarded amnesty, but they did not provide their names, reasoning that it contains information related to private life.

On march 13, “Factor information center”, founder of “Factor.am”, brought a lawsuit to the RA Administrative court against Mery Harutyunyan, Head of the information and public relations department of the RA president’s staff with a claim to oblige to provide information. On March 20, the lawsuit was taken over a proceeding. The first court session is on April 23. Later sessions took place on June 11, July 24, November 29. On December 17, claimant, “Factor information center” NGO, turned to the court informing that the requested information was given to the state archive and asked to close the case. Based on that, on December 18, the court closed the case.

**On February 12,** Alina Nikoghosyan, correspondent from “Civilnet” news site, sent a written inquiry to Artsvik Minasyan, RA Minister of Nature protection. The journalist wondered if the ministry did any research about the leakage from Teghut tailing to Shnogh river. She also wondered when environmental researches were conducted in the tailing section of Teghut mine. The written inquiry remained unanswered.

**On February 27**, Astghik Karapetyan, journalist from “Iravaban.net”, sent a letter to the Ethics Commission of High-rank officials, asking why the commission did not publish its decisions on the official website. They gave a belated reply, on March 30, and according to the journalist, incomplete.

On May 22, journalist sent a second letter to the Commission asking clarify based on which law they were rejecting the provision of information, the answer came on May 25 and again it did not have anything to do with the asked questions.

**On March 5,** Narek Kirakosyan, correspondent from “Haykakan zhamanak” newspaper, sent a written inquiry to Michael Minasyan, Ambassador of Armenia to Vatican, to receive information. The journalist wondered if the information about his application to the RA president for the resignation from the post of the RA Ambassador in Vatican, as well as whether the Republican party of Armenia would recommend him for the position of the Prime Minister were consistent with the reality. The journalist’s inquiry remained unanswered.

**On March 5,** Souren Deheryan, Chairperson of “Journalists for the Future” NGO, sent a written inquiry to Davit Tonoyan, RA Minister of Emergency situations, asking for 2017 statistics on the elevators used on the territory of Armenia, in an Excel file format attached to the letter. The Head of the NGO also wondered when was it the last time examination was conducted on the elevators in the high-rise apartment buildings; elevators manufactured in which country were being used in Yerevan. The written inquiry remained unanswered.

**On March 12,** Hakob Aslanyan, correspondent from “Tert.am” news website, sent a written inquiry to Anoush Danielyan, press secretary of the RA Minister of labor and social affairs, asking for information about the procurement by the ministry in the field of postal services. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On March 14,** Sona Davtyan, correspondent from “Araratnews.am” news site, sent a written inquiry to Karapet Gouloyan, Governor of Kotayk province, to receive information. The journalist wondered, by which law the municipality claims AMD 3mln from Karine Mouradyan, who lost her house during the 1988 earthquake in Spitak, for privatizing the compartment-lodge. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On March 23,** the “Union of informed citizens” NGO brought a lawsuit to the RA Administrative court against Ashot Manoukyan, RA Minister of Energy infrastructures and natural resources, with a claim to oblige to provide information. The program coordinator of the organization Daniel Ioannisyan sent a written inquiry to the minister asking for the administrative list of the encrypted information. However, the ministry rejected, saying it contains secrets.

 On June 12, the initial court session took place. Although the respondent’s representatives spoke against the claim, they stated they would again discuss the matter of providing or not the requested information. Later court sessions were held on September 27, December 6. The next session is on February 28, 2019.

**On March 29,** initial court session was hold on the case “Union of informed citizens” NGO vs. Traffic police, with the claim to receive information.

We should remind that still on June 1, 2017, the “Union of informed citizens” NGO sent an inquiry to the traffic police expecting to receive information on which percentage of the cars registered in RA is right-wheeled. The provision of that information was refused, reasoning that it contains confidential information, after which the organization brought a lawsuit to the administrative court with a claim to recognize the refusal illegitimate. The case was taken over a proceeding on December 8, 2017. The case-related sessions were held on June 21 and September 27. The next session is on February 28, 2019.

**On April 7,** the RA Administrative court held the successive session on the case “Union of informed citizens” NGO vs. RA Ministry of Foreign affairs, with the claim of providing copies of sections that refer to the tariff provisions in the draft Armenia-EU association agreement not signed in 2013.

We should remind the following: in reply to its inquiry made on December 20, 2014, the non-governmental organization was rejected by the ministry with the reason of confidentiality, and turned to court. The latter met the claim obliging the respondent to provide the document. Based on the complaint by the MFA, the Appellate administrative court overturned the ruling by the court of first instance and the case was sent for a new hearing. It was conducted from October 4, 2017 until June 18, 2018. On July 10, the ruling was published, according to which the claim by the “Union of informed citizens” NGO was met reasoning, that the requested document is not subject to encryption, as the ministry in no way was able to prove the fact of its being confidential. The MFA was obliged to provide the requested copies to the NGO, AMD 4000 was levied from the ministry in favor of the NGO as a compensation for the state due paid for the claim.

**On May 1,** Tehmine Yenokyan, reporter from “Lragir.am” news site, sent a written inquiry to the Yerevan City Hall expecting to receive a number of clarifications related to procurements. Not receiving an answer, on May 7, the journalist again turned to Yerevan City Hall, requesting within 5 days to answer the following question: “How much money was spent during the last five years on planting of greenery, procurement and planting of flowers?” Tehmine Yenokyan also asked for information about the procurement procedure, winners of the tenders, main terms and conditions of the contracts concluded with them, while highlighting the grounds for their selection.

 On May 15, the City Hall gave a belated reply, saying that all the information about it was put on the website. However, the journalist was not able to find there the information she needed and again, on May 25, she sent an inquiry to the City Hall, considering the previous answer incomplete and unreliable. According to Tehmine Yenokyan, the reply by the City Hall was not consistent with the requirements of the RA government Decree 1204-N, according to which if more than one question is asked by the applicant, it is necessary, through successive numbering, to give reliable and full answers to all the questions. On June 4, the journalist again received an incomplete, dissatisfactory reply from the City Hall.

**On May 14,** Grisha Balasanyan, journalist from “Hetq” electronic newspaper, turned to the RA Prosecutor’s office with the request to get information about the facts recorded in the 2017 reports of the RA Chamber of Control (now Chamber of Audit). On May 21, a belated reply was received, which however, was not complete. On May 22, an additional inquiry was made, and on May 25 the RA Prosecutor General’s office informed that the answer would be provided within 30 days. On June 22, a complete answer was given.

**On May 16,** Tirair Mouradyan, journalist from the “Union of informed citizens” NGO, sent a written letter to Gagik Haroutyunyan, Chairperson of the Supreme Judicial Council, and did not receive an answer for almost a month. The inquiry was about a number of issues related to the appointment of judges. On June 12, only after the posting on the Facebook page[[150]](#footnote-150), on June 15, the SJC replied to the journalist.

**On May 16,** Narek Kirakosyan, correspondent from “Haikakan zhamanak” daily, sent an inquiry to the RA Government about the costs related to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s visit to Sochi on May 13-14, and the answer came on June 7, with the violation of the 5-day period defined by the law.

**On May 21,** it was announced in advance, that the oath-taking ceremony of the new government members and the Prime Minister would be held behind the doors. However, several minutes before the ceremony the Prime Minister invited the journalists through Facebook. As a result, many journalists did not manage to be present at the oath-taking ceremony: the media was not informed that they should consider Facebook as a source of information.

**On May 24,** Aghavni Soukiasyan, reporter from “Lurer.com” site, sent a written letter to the RA Ministry of Diaspora to check out for what reasons Minister Mkhitar Hayrapetyan did not serve in the RA Armed Forced. First, the Ministry refused to answer the question, then they expressed the wish to answer verbally. Only 20 days after the persistence by the journalist, on June 9, through violating the 5-day period defined by the law, they gave a written answer.

**On May 29,** Narek Kirakosyan, reporter from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, sent an inquiry to Yerevan City Hall, asking for information about how much damage was caused to the community during the days of “velvet revolution” and how much money was allocated to restore the flowery areas. The journalist’s inquiry remained unanswered.

**On June 1,** Narek Kirakosyan, reporter from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, sent an inquiry to the First Deputy-Prime Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, asking for information about the costs of the visit to Dushanbe, and did not receive any answer. After the phone calls to find out what happened to the inquiry and demands to provide clarifications, the Public relations and information department of the government said that the inquiry was readdressed to Ararat Mirzoyan’s office on the same day. However, until June 11, the inquiry did not reach there, and on that day, they informed that the letter was registered at the general department. The answer to the inquiry was received on June 22, through violation of the terms defined by the law.

**On June 4,** Gevorg Tosunyan, journalist from “Civilnet.am” new site, sent a written letter to the RA Ministry of education and science to receive information. The journalist wanted to find out the ministry’s attitude towards teachers’ membership in trade unions. The journalist’s question remained unanswered.

 On the same day, Gevorg Tosunyan sent a written letter to RA Government with the following question: “The former government, with the RA anticorruption program, planned to allocate money to three fields: what is the attitude of the new government’s position about this?” The government as well, left the journalist’s question unanswered.

**On June 11,** Ani Mkrtchyan, journalist from Journalists’ “Asparez” club, sent an inquiry to Artsrun Igityan, head of the Akhouryan community in Shirak province, about the organization of road-construction activities in the settlements included in the community, about envisaged costs and the results of the conducted tenders. The answer to the inquiry came on June 22, through violation of the 5-day period defined by the law, for which they apologized.

**On June 13,** Narek Kirakosyan, journalist from “Haykakan zhamanak”, while at the parliament, verbally asked Artak Zeinalyan, the Minister of Justice, whether in case of applying the accumulative system of pension the “mandatory” component is anti-constitutional. He said he would not be able to answer that question, as he had promised to give an exclusive interview to another media outlet on that topic. This answer by the minister can be considered as discrimination in terms of providing information, as giving an exclusive interview to one media outlet cannot impede answering a specific question by another media outlet.

**On June 22,** Gevorg Tosounyan, journalist from “Civilnet.am” news site sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defence with the following contents: “How much money did the Ministry of Defence allocate to YVU during the last four years?” Through violation of the law, almost two months later, on August 17, the journalist received the reply, with which the provision of the information was rejected. Namely, the MoD stated that the journalist asked for pre-investigation data, when criminal case was filed several days before the inquiry was sent. “In fact, on the next day after the inquiry was sent, they could inform me as if I was asking for pre-investigation secret and they would not provide it, but three days later they asked for additional time for the reply and after that they violated all the defined periods, made me wait, violated the law and gave me such an answer”, said the journalist to the CPFE.

**On June 28**, Narek Kirakosyan, journalist from “Haykakan zhamanak”, sent a written inquiry to the staff of the RA government asking for information about “Household of houses in Kond” SNCO. Two months later, on August 22, the government staff informed that they had not received the inquiry, but before that they had confirmed that the answer was being prepared. On August 23, the journalist sent the same inquiry, but received no answer either.

**On July 9,** Seda Ghoukasyan, journalist from “Hetq” electronic periodical, sent a written inquiry to MFA, asking to inform whether the members of the previous government, former Prime Ministers Karen Karapetyan and Hovik Abrahamyan, Arman Mkrtoumyan, former President of the Cassation court, former members of the Security Council Vigen Sargsyan, Armen Gevorgyan, Vladimir Gasparyan, Edward Nalbandyan, former Director of the NSS Georgi Koutoyan, former NA parliamentarians have handed in their diplomatic passports to the consular department[[151]](#footnote-151). The journalists question was not properly answered. In the same inquiry letter, the journalist asked for information as to how many diplomatic passports were registered as of June. To answer this question, the ministry asked for some time; however, after that it provided the information through violating the defined period, i.e. on August 25.

**On July 30,** the “Freedom of information center” NGO sent a letter to the Ministry of territorial administration and development about the activity of one of the restaurants built on the shore of Lake Kare at the foot of mount Aragats. The question was answered incompletely, which did not satisfy the NGO.

**On July 30,** Hasmik Hambardzoumyan, journalist from “Aysor.am”, sent a written inquiry to the RA Prosecutor General’s office related to March 1 criminal case, however she did not receive an answer. In an interview with the CPFE, the journalist stated that she did not receive any clarification from the prosecutor’s office related to delaying the answer or not providing the answer; they only said that the investigators are overloaded.

**On July 31,** the “Freedom of information center” NGO turned to the Ministry of Finance with request to receive information about grants and subsidies provided to NGOs from the RA state budget during 2017 and 2018. According to the NGO, the answer was incomplete.

**On August 6,** Seda Ghoukasyan, journalist from “Hetq” electronic periodical, sent a written letter to Sasoun Mikayelyan, Board director of “Civil Agreement” party, asking him a number of questions about the future activities of the CA. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On August 15,** the “Freedom of information center” NGO turned to the Ministry of Diaspora with a request to receive information about grants and subsidies provided to NGOs from the RA state budget during 2017 and 2018. The NGO considered the ministry’s answer as an ungrounded refusal, as the expected information did not contain state/service-related, nor bank and commercial secret, as the agency substantiated. Later, on September 6, the NGO turned to the ministry asking for a full reply to the inquiry made on August 15. This time no answer was provided at all, without any substantiation.

**On August 20,** the RA Administrative court took over a proceeding the claim by “Union of informed citizens” NGO vs. RA State committee on science, on behalf of its director Samvel Haroutyunyan. The claimant requires to oblige the committee, within a five-day period, to provide the information claimed by the NGO program coordinator Daniel Ioannisyan in a letter H-1629, from July 2, the administrative list of information subject to encryption at the RA State committee on science, except for the parts containing state or service-related secrets. Case-related court session took place on October 25; the next session is on January 22, 2019.

**On August 28,** Narek Kirakosyan, journalist from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, turned to the RA Government, asking to provide the list of award-takers on the occasion of September 21. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On August 28,** Nelly Babayan, journalist from “Aravot.am” news site, sent an inquiry to “Sanitek” Company about the problems of waste disposal. No answer was received from the company; instead, the journalist was invited to a press conference on September 14.

**On September 9,** the “Freedom of information center” NGO turned to the Ministry of Defence asking for information about benefactions and donations by the MoD during 2017 and 2018. The inquiry remained unanswered.

In nine cases out of all the inquiries sent during July-September, the “Union of informed citizens” NGO received belated answers. Two inquiries were sent to the Ministry of territorial administration and development, two were sent to the Ministry of Emergency situations, one inquiry was sent to each of the following agencies – Government staff, Ministries of Culture, Defence, Health and Justice.

**On September 18,** RA President Armen Sargsyan visited the National Archive with selected media outlets. Narek Kirakosyan, journalist from “Haykakan zhamanak” daily, informed the CPFE about this. The journalist stated this was not the first time that discriminatory attitude is manifested by the presidential office.

 **On September 24,** Haykouhi Barseghyan, independent correspondent from “Ankakh.com” site and “Ankakh” daily, sent an inquiry to the Traffic police for statistical data about traffic accidents. The journalist informed the CPFE, that after sending the inquiry, she called the TP several times, and every time they promised to send the answer on time, and they did so for a month.

 On October 31, through violation of all the stipulated periods, Haykouhi Barseghyan received the answer, which was already old and useless.

 **On October 2,** the NA session started without live broadcasting, the sound could not be heard even for the journalists sitting on the balcony; it was only visible, that the parliamentarians were voting through raising their hands. When the journalists had the chance to enter the conference hall, the voting was already over, and the parliamentarians were exchanging insults. “Hetq.am” raised an alarm about this[[152]](#footnote-152).

# On October 10, “Mediamax” news agency introduced the first[[153]](#footnote-153) part of its story of inquiries remaining unanswered, and on November 16 it introduced the second part[[154]](#footnote-154). Even after the 30-day period was over, the media outlet did not receive answers to the inquiries sent to the NSS and to the Government staff about the funds returned to the state budget.

# On October 18, the “Freedom of information center” sent an electronic inquiry to the Prime Minister’s staff asking for information as to how many service cars had been withdrawn from the RA public agencies during June1 to October 18, 2018. The answer was incomplete.

 **On October 20,** “Factor.am” site spread information according to which the Prime Minister’s staff gave incomplete answers to the questions by the editorial office related to the award weapons of the officials[[155]](#footnote-155). The answer did not include the names of the award-takers, type of the firearm and the amount they were procured for.

 **On November 6,** the “Freedom of information center” sent an electronic inquiry to the RA Ministry of Sports and youth Affairs requesting information about the results of the inspection conducted by the law-enforcement bodies at the Center for implementing youth events SNCO. On the same day the NGO turned to the RA Ministry of Sports and youth Affairs requesting information about grounds for the liquidation of the Center for implementing youth events SNCO. Answers to both inquiries were belated, on November 20, besides, the NGO qualified them as “groundless”.

 **On November 6,** the “Freedom of information center” sent an electronic inquiry to the Gyumri City Hall, requesting information about the budget of the 3rd quarter of the municipality and the detailed information about the budget implementation. On the same day, the NGO sent inquiries with the same contents to municipalities of Ararat, Armavir and Vayots Dzor, as well as to Gavar and Armavir City halls. Late answers were given by the Armavir, Vayots Dzor municipalities and Gavar city hall, and answers from Ararat municipality and Gyumri and Armavir city halls were incomplete.

 On the same day, the NGO sent an inquiry to the “Public relations and information center” SNCO of the RA Government and to the Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction. In the first case it asked for information about the staff list, and in the second case about the budget, salaries, scientific publications, list of staff with scientific degrees as of September 1, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. The SNCO replied through violation of the defined period, and the reply from the university was incomplete.

 **On November 29,** Seda Ghoukasyan, journalist from “Hetq.am”, sent an inquiry to Edward Aghajanyan, acting head of the RA Prime Minister’s staff, requesting for an agreement to take photos of the Prime Minister’s office. A reply was received in the name of Armen Khachatryan, Deputy Head of the Department of information and public relation of the Prime Minister’s staff, which did not have a successive number, a date and it refused the journalist’s request: with “…taking a photo is not expedient” groundless reasoning. The journalist wrote the second letter on December 14, and on the 21st she received the same reply as in the first one: “…taking a photo is not expedient”[[156]](#footnote-156).

 **On November 30,** Tirair Mouradyan, journalist from “Hetq.am”, sent an inquiry to 17 ministries about the property in the ministers’ offices. In case of 4, the journalist’s right to receive and disseminate information was violated. The Ministry of emergency situations did not answer the inquiry at all; the Ministries of Labor and social affairs, as well as Diaspora gave belated replies, after the Facebook post by the journalist; the Ministry of defence requested a 30-day period after which it did not reply to the inquiry.

 **On December 10 and 11,** the “Freedom of information center” NGO sent an inquiry to the RA Ministries of Labor and social affairs, Health, Nature protection, Emergency situations, Foreign affairs, Education and science, Energy infrastructures and natural resources, sports and youth affairs, Finances, Defence, Diaspora, Economic development and investments, Transport, communication and IT, to municipalities of Kotayk, Vayots Dzor, Syunik, Lori, Shirak, Armavir and Gegharkunik, to Yerevan City Hall, SRC, Food safety inspection body, Real estate cadaster, Urban Development and Nuclear safety committees, State food safety service, Police, State control service asking to provide statistical data about inquiries for information from agencies during 2016 and 2017, and 1st-3rd quarters of 2018, including how many of the inquirers were common citizens, how many were NGO representatives and how many were journalists. The answers of all the 29 inquiries were incomplete.

***OTHER INCIDENTS RELATED TO THE ACTIVITY OF THE JOURNLISTS AND THE MEDIA OUTLETS***

**On January 31 and on February 1**, three criminal cases were filed at the Kapan unit of the RA Police against Samvel Aleksanyan, editor of “Syuniac yerkir” newspaper. On February 5, the Investigative committee decided to merge all the three cases and investigate in one proceeding.

Two of the criminal cases were filed under Article 182.1 of the RA Criminal Code (extortion), based on the reports by a resident and three school directors in Kapan. One criminal case was under Article 140.1 of the RA Criminal Code (“Forcing a person into sexual relations or committing sexual, including homosexual acts”) based on the report made by Mania Tsatryan to the police, according to which there was a time the editor committed an act of sexual harassment against her.

In his turn, on February 19, Samvel Aleksanyan brought a lawsuit to the Syunik province court of general jurisdiction against Mania Tsatryan with a claim to refute slandering information and to pay a compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation. On February 22, the lawsuit was taken over a proceeding. The case-related initial court session took place on March 23, May 11, June 29, July 20; on August 27, the case was moved from Meghri seat to Kapan seat; on the 31st, the case was taken over a proceeding; on November 13 the initial court session was held. The next session is on January 29, 2019.

 By the way, in 2017, the Governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan brought a lawsuit to the Syunik province court of general jurisdiction (seat in Meghri) against “Syuniac ashkhar” LTD. founder of “Syuniac yerkir” newspaper. The reason for this lawsuit with a claim of refutation and compensation for damage incurred to honor and dignity is the article published on “Syuniacyerkir.am” site on September 19, 2017, under the heading “Vahe Hakobyan lied: the information stated in the declaration and his financial flows do not match, which speaks of possible corruption.” Case-related court session took place on February 2 and March 12, May 15.

On August 3, already former Governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan brought a new lawsuit on the same matter to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction vs. Samvel Aleksanyan and “Noyan Tapan” Ltd to refute slandering information, to apologize for insulting for publishing the final part of the court ruling on [www.noyan-tapan.am](http://www.noyan-tapan.am) and [www.syuniacyerkir.am](http://www.syuniacyerkir.am) news sites and on Facebook page, and to pay a compensation for intangible damage incurred through insult and slander.

On August 14, the lawsuit was taken over a proceeding; initial court sessions took place on November 23 and December 21. The next session is on February 13, 2019.

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123. [**http://forrights.am/2018/09/24/%D5%AF%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D6%84%D5%AB-%D5%AD%D5%B8%D5%BD%D6%84%D5%A8-%D5%A4%D5%AB%D5%B4%D5%A5%D5%AC-%D5%A7-%D5%A1%D5%A1%D5%AE%D5%9D-%D5%A4%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%AD%D5%B8%D5%BE-%D5%B0%D5%A1/**](http://forrights.am/2018/09/24/%D5%AF%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D6%84%D5%AB-%D5%AD%D5%B8%D5%BD%D6%84%D5%A8-%D5%A4%D5%AB%D5%B4%D5%A5%D5%AC-%D5%A7-%D5%A1%D5%A1%D5%AE%D5%9D-%D5%A4%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%AD%D5%B8%D5%BE-%D5%B0%D5%A1/) [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. [**http://politik.am/%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A8-%D6%81%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%AF%D5%A1%D6%81%D5%A5%D5%AC-%D5%A7-350-%D5%B4%D5%AB%D5%AC%D5%AB%D5%B8%D5%B6%D5%AB-%D5%A3%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%AE%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%84/**](http://politik.am/%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A8-%D6%81%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%AF%D5%A1%D6%81%D5%A5%D5%AC-%D5%A7-350-%D5%B4%D5%AB%D5%AC%D5%AB%D5%B8%D5%B6%D5%AB-%D5%A3%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%AE%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%84/) [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. [**https://www.facebook.com/davit.ananyan.9/posts/1869517433138991?\_\_xts\_\_[0]=68.ARDX\_cgIbcdk3vdQfuAGa24B8TFmTcD171nJSb2gBKsVqm4nX7vBuB-4MhjNLlglZ1ss-JdSLo1nVh0Xb4TcnMG51wH5yL0snlb\_zITotPCyp21z2QLtpdHQjGpGH\_MFvzBI8zMx7xy8tdfT4mTJncF0mUZLBZTp-MVj7nRZPelPv3tEFC**](https://www.facebook.com/davit.ananyan.9/posts/1869517433138991?__xts__%5b0%5d=68.ARDX_cgIbcdk3vdQfuAGa24B8TFmTcD171nJSb2gBKsVqm4nX7vBuB-4MhjNLlglZ1ss-JdSLo1nVh0Xb4TcnMG51wH5yL0snlb_zITotPCyp21z2QLtpdHQjGpGH_MFvzBI8zMx7xy8tdfT4mTJncF0mUZLBZTp-MVj7nRZPelPv3tEFC) [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. [**https://www.1in.am/2433433.html**](https://www.1in.am/2433433.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
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129. [**http://armtimes.com/hy/article/145184**](http://armtimes.com/hy/article/145184) [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
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132. [**https://www.aravot.am/2018/10/18/987866/?fbclid=IwAR3JLk7aP2S1gcW5-9Cb-SLKNfinrqRCBozZkb-G6gBf-XJ6IMCc7C7unaU**](https://www.aravot.am/2018/10/18/987866/?fbclid=IwAR3JLk7aP2S1gcW5-9Cb-SLKNfinrqRCBozZkb-G6gBf-XJ6IMCc7C7unaU) [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. [**https://youtu.be/MNYewpVL\_kM**](https://youtu.be/MNYewpVL_kM) [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. [**http://www.investigative.am/news/view/ionnisyan-parzabanum.html**](http://www.investigative.am/news/view/ionnisyan-parzabanum.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
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136. [**https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10216665131410636&set=a.2606631294992&type=3&theater**](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10216665131410636&set=a.2606631294992&type=3&theater) [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. [**http://politik.am/%D6%83%D5%B8%D5%AD%D5%BE%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B9%D5%A1%D5%BA%D5%A5%D5%BF-%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A8-%D5%B4%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%AD%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%A1-%D5%A7/**](http://politik.am/%D6%83%D5%B8%D5%AD%D5%BE%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B9%D5%A1%D5%BA%D5%A5%D5%BF-%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A8-%D5%B4%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%AD%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%A1-%D5%A7/) [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. [**https://www.facebook.com/MkhitarHayrapetyanOfficial/photos/a.459539081177894/585681881896946/?type=3&theater**](https://www.facebook.com/MkhitarHayrapetyanOfficial/photos/a.459539081177894/585681881896946/?type=3&theater) [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
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140. [**http://armtimes.com/hy/article/149056**](http://armtimes.com/hy/article/149056) [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. [**https://www.aravot.am/2018/12/07/998802/**](https://www.aravot.am/2018/12/07/998802/) [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. [**https://www.facebook.com/QajikGevorgian/photos/a.258884608063563/265873874031303/?type=3&theater**](https://www.facebook.com/QajikGevorgian/photos/a.258884608063563/265873874031303/?type=3&theater) [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. [**https://www.aravot.am/2018/12/07/998617/**](https://www.aravot.am/2018/12/07/998617/) [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
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148. [**http://armtimes.com/hy/article/128662**](http://armtimes.com/hy/article/128662) [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. [**https://factor.am/38226.html**](https://factor.am/38226.html)

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150. [**https://web.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1734949346583461&set=a.190479901030421.47498.100002052385109&type=3&theater**](https://web.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1734949346583461&set=a.190479901030421.47498.100002052385109&type=3&theater) [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. [**http://hetq.am/arm/news/91820/agn-n-khusapum-e-pataskhanel-harcin-nakhkin-pashtonyanery-handznel-en-divanagitakan-andznagrery.html**](http://hetq.am/arm/news/91820/agn-n-khusapum-e-pataskhanel-harcin-nakhkin-pashtonyanery-handznel-en-divanagitakan-andznagrery.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/93593**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/93593) [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
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156. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/99444?fbclid=IwAR2UnwSFa\_IL\_Gtdb8N0vbRbv5GJfGAF6I3DlQ04qJG-32XBcqg2hkq8wQk**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/99444?fbclid=IwAR2UnwSFa_IL_Gtdb8N0vbRbv5GJfGAF6I3DlQ04qJG-32XBcqg2hkq8wQk) [↑](#footnote-ref-156)