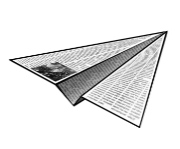
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**COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

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

**2019 First Half 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 the first half of 2019.*

*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 mass media personnel,*

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

*- materials from court cases with media involvement,*

*- materials disseminated by the partner journalist organization,*

*- publications by the mass media.*

***BRIEF SUMMARY***

The reports by international organizations published in the first half of 2019 demonstrated an essentially different assessments of the freedom of expression in Armenia. Thus, on April 18, Journaists without Borders recorded an unprecedented progress in Armenia in its *World Press Freedom Index 2019:* Armenia improved its position by 19 points, ranking the 61st as compared to the former 80th position. And already on June 5th Freedom House Human Rights Organization published *Freedom and the Media 2019: A Downward Sprial* report, according to which, as compared with the situation in 2017, there was no progress recorded in the Armenian media, even though the forces that had come to power in the country “are more inclined to embrace media criticism, than their predecessors.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The first half of 2019 witnessed an unprecedented rise in court cases with the involvement of journalists and the media. The number of such cases equals 56, whereas the same period of the last year saw 10 cases. Moreover, one of the cases in 2019 is a financial-economic dispute, the other two were cases on the violation of getting information and the remaining 53 were based on insult and slander under article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code. This is probably due to the fact that the media, especially the social media, abound in hate speech, fake news and manipulations often proposed as criticism.

Out of the abovementioned 56 new court cases with the involvement of journalists and the media, applications were filed by 19 ordinary citizens, 19 politicians, state officials (including former ones) or state bodies, 7 business people or private companies, 3 NGOs, 2 judges, and 2 lawyers. 2 cases are disputed between media and/or journalists, still in 2 cases media outlets sued state bodies.

In the monitoring period, politicians, state officials, other public figures still tend to go spare, get offended or display contempt and decide “to teach journalists a lesson” when asked annoying questions. This behavior is typical of Gagik Tsarukyan, the President of the “Prosperous Armenia” party, which resulted in two successive statements made by 10 media organizations.

In general, the CPFE recorded 151 violations of rights of journalists and media outlets, including 2 cases of physical violence, 83 cases of pressure on the media outlets and their representatives and 66 violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.

The first half of 2019 was noted by the ownership redistribution of media outlets, TV companies in particular. Previously the new government would take control of the broadcasting sector, make TV companies serve their interests or sell a TV station to loyal entrepreneurs, but now it was not the case: the mass media ownership was redistributed among former state officials without intervention on the part of the new government. A notable example is the split of “PanArmenian” media holding and the sale of the affiliated media to different companies, founded by people related to former state officials.

These processes, as well as the use of the media founded or sponsored by different political powers as tools of propaganda further polarized the news media industry, splitting it into different camps. Therefore, it has become an urgent issue to ensure transparency of the mass media ownership and sources of finance, which presupposes legislative reforms. Within the monitoring period, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, in cooperation with Yerevan Press Club and Media Initiatives Center, completed drafting the new Law On Television and Radio, which provides new mechanisms of not only ensuring transparency in the broadcasting industry, but also modernizing relations therein and triggering competition. The draft was brought before Parliament and opened up for general discussion.

In April, the CPFE introduced three more drafts to three parliamentary factions proposing amendments to the Law on Procurement, Law on the Local Self-Government in the City of Yerevan and the Law on the Protection of Personal Data. They aim at the abolition of unfounded limitations to freedom of information and activities of journalists in the abovementioned laws. The first two of the drafts were tabled for discussion by “Bright Armenia” faction. In the NA session on June 4, the amendments proposed to the Law on the Local Self-Government in the City of Yerevan was adopted at first reading. The other two are under discussion.

Within the monitoring period, the CPFE continued following criminal cases linked to the events in Baghramyan Avenue (#ElectricYerevan), June 23, 2015, in Khorenatsi Street and in Sari Tagh, July 29-30, 2016, accompanied by large-scale violence and hindrances to professional activity of journalists and cameramen. The first case was suspended by the Special Investigation Service on March 4, 2019, on the grounds that “the persons to be involved as defendants were unknown.” On April 2, the CPFE’s lawyer, who protected the interests of the injured or victim journalists, filed a complaint to the RA Prosecutor’s Office, which repealed the decision of the SIS and assigned them to restart the preliminary investigation. With regard to the case in “Sari Tagh” suspended last year, the CPFE supports the victim journalists to appeal the decision of the SIS in court. After the Court of First Instance of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the appeal on April 4, a complaint was filed to the Court of Appeals on May 8th. Investigation is still underway.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

The post-revolutionary year of 2019 commenced with notable rearrangements in the media industry. On January 8, four MPs from the RPA faction of the 6th convocation National Assembly made a statement that they had founded a “Qaryak media” company, that had purchased “Tert.am” LLC, “Armnews” CJSC and “Radio FM 107” LLC making up the “PanArmenian Media Group” and being the founders of “Tert.am” news website, “Armnews” TV company and “Lav Radio” station respectively[[2]](#footnote-2). Later on February 2, “PanArmenian Media Group” announced the termination of activity as a media group[[3]](#footnote-3). A number of changes ensued among the shareholders of the companies constituting the holding. Davit Avetisyan, head of “PanArmenian TV” broadcast in the USA, bought 51% shares of “ATV”. “Panarm Inc.” company got the remaining 49% of the shares. Artur Janibekyan, a media entrepreneur, the founder of the Russian “Comedy Club Production” (known for his close ties with Mikael Minasyan, Serzh Sargsyan’s son-in-law), and his family own 100% shares of “Armenia” TV company and “Radio Jan” radio company.

At the beginning of the year it became known that “H3” TV company was renamed “MO TV”[[4]](#footnote-4). According to the information published in the press and never refuted, this TV company with new content and format just like “The 5th channel” last year is linked to Robert Kocharyan, the second president of Armenia[[5]](#footnote-5).

These processes further polarized the mass media into political camps. The overwhelming majority of the media outlets became tools of propaganda and political strife by serving the interests of their owners. Though mass media in the post-revolutionary period are mainly free from government intervention, they are extremely dependent on political influence. A striking example is the case when Tigran Urikhanyan, an MP from “Tsarukyan alliance” faction, announced the termination of “The moment of the truth” TV program on “Kentron” TV station (linked to Gagik Tsarukyan, the Leader of “Prosperous Armenia” party) and resignation from his deputy mandate. The reason was that Tigran Urikhanyan, the author of the aforementioned program, had had a guest to the program unwelcome for his political leader.

Due to the political influence and various political orders hate speech, fake news, insult, slander and manipulation are widespread on the media and social networks. By reference to the state of the media back on January 15, the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shared a Facebook video wherein mentioning, that a media campaign had started against the incumbent government and 90 percent of the news industry was controlled by the opposition[[6]](#footnote-6).

The PM’s concern was due to the use of manipulative tools against the new government under the guise of criticism. On January 23, during the “Shaping the Future of Democracy” panel discussion at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Nikol Pashinyan announced, that Armenia had achieved an unprecedented freedom of the press. Regarding social networks, the Prime Minister stated that social networks made the revolution in Armenia possible and now he had to tackle fake news via Facebook live videos[[7]](#footnote-7).

Though the PM finds it wrong to implement the power of the government, as it is fraught with violations of the freedom of expression[[8]](#footnote-8), still, at the RA Government session on April 4, he instructed the director of National Security Service to tackle manipulative actions of fake users. This did not rectify the situation though, firstly because the RA legislation did not define the concept of “manipulation”. Besides, intervention on the part of NSS would be pertinent were it about calls for national, racial, religious and other discrimination, war instigation, unrest and violations.

Within the monitoring period, a striking example of provoking unrest and artificially spreading panic in the society by means of information manipulation was the news spread on May 25 claiming that a cameraman representing “PARA TV” was stabbed during a rally organized by Nikol Pashinyan’s supporters[[9]](#footnote-9). As it turned out later, the victim was a sound operator who had not been at the rally venue at all and was subjected to the attack in a different place: the accident was domestic by nature and had nothing to do with his professional activity. Even after the official clarification of the RA police some news agencies and Facebook users refused to edit or change their posts and news.

A number of MPs from parliamentary political bodies came up with various suggestions and initiatives during the spring session of the NA in 2019 on making legislative changes to counter hate speech, fake news, manipulations and applying strict measures of holding transgressors accountable. However, these approaches and ideas met severe criticism from experts and were dismissed for putting the right to freedom of expression at risk.

Members of opposition also reacted to these discussions. Particularly, Arpine Hovhannisyan, a former Deputy Speaker of the NA, posed the following question to the government: “How are you going to counter the news spread via various web applications? Or will the re-issuer, i.e. the mass media become the target…? When considering “fake news”, another important and closely related issue comes to the fore: the state’s responsibility of providing protection against humiliation and slander to retain human dignity[[10]](#footnote-10).”

The state should implement the obligation mentioned by Arpine Hovhannisyan in accordance with Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code, establishing accountability for insult and slander. Evidence shows that almost all the new court cases (53 out of 54) invloving journalists and the media are based on that article. The number of such cases has grown over 10 times compared to the same period of the previous year. In such a state of affairs the judicial system could play a constructive role, but the judicial system is currently in crisis.

Solutions to a lot of the issues of concern are linked with amending and revising the laws that regulate the activities of the media. Thus, the Law on the Mass Media adopted in 2003 is essentially outdated, in particular, the definitions of “mass media outlet” and “journalist” do not meet modern standards and realities, the provisions for their activities are not clearly specified, and it does not incorporate a statement on ensuring transparency of media outlet ownership. The CPFE, in cooperation with partner companies, makes efforts to fill these gaps.

The Law on Freedom of Information also needs to be revised given the new state of affairs, advances in technology and the modern means of communication between a citizen and a state official.

In April, the CPFE introduced three bills to three parliamentary factions proposing amendments to the Law on Procurement, the Law on the Local Self-Government in the City of Yerevan and the Law on the Protection of Personal Data. They aim at the abolition of unfounded limitations to the freedom of information and activities of journalists in the aforementioned laws. The first two of the drafts were tabled for discussion by “Bright Armenia” faction. In the NA session on June 4 the amendments proposed to the Law on the Local Self-Government in the City of Yerevan were adopted at first reading.  With regard to the Law on Procurement, the Government rejected the proposal for ensuring transparency of information on protocol expenses, as well as boarding, lodging and transportation costs for the leaders of the country, namely the RA President, the RA Prime Minister and the Speaker of the RA National Assembly. The executive body observed the need for making legislation amendments not from the perspective of the right to freedom of information, but only from the perspective of security. However, discussions continue on the unfounded limitations in this law and the Law on the Protection of Personal Data.

By contrast, the amendments to the Law on the Structure and Activities of the Government, adopted on May 8th, created favorable conditions for covering the activities of the supreme executive body, as open-door government meetings and their accessibility for the media were secured legislatively (with the exception of cases when matters of state secrecy are discussed).

Within the monitoring period, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, in cooperation with Yerevan Press Club and Media Initiatives Center, completed drafting the new draft Low on “Television and Radio ”. The draft was brought before Parliament and was published on the websites of the aforementioned companies for broad discussion.

The authors of the new draft offer replacing the Current Procedure for Licensing TV Companies (appropriate for the period of analog broadcast, but outdated for the digital era) with a much simpler authorization procedure.

# Besides, the draft provides totally new and favorable conditions for creating digital networks of private broadcasting (multiplexing). By the way, on June 27th, the Commission on TV and Radio for the 4th time announced a competition for licensing of private multiplexing. According to experts, it will most probably have the same outcome as the previous three, which were declared non-complete due to absence of applications. The main reason is, that the current Law on Television and Radio does not provide realistic, attractive conditions and requirements for establishing private multiplexing by businesses, thus failing to boost the industry. The newly proposed draft provides that private multiplexes can be different and cover one or more communities, one or more provinces, as well as the entire country.

This will provide favorable conditions for solving another issue: around 10 TV companies in the provinces, still in analog television broadcasting, will have the opportunity to get involved in the digital broadcasting network or create their own multiplex.

The authors of the draft provide conditions to ensure ownership transparency for private TV and radio companies, implement reforms in the Public Television and Radio Company, develop a “social package” for TV and radio programs and solve a number of other major issues.

The gaps in the Law on Television and Radio became evident on various occasions in the first quarter of 2019. For example, on January 31st Shirak Public TV company was liquidated by a Government decree on the grounds that the company was still making analog television broadcasting, was not able to compete with digital broadcasters and was losing its audience. Whereas, the company was in such condition due to the gaps in the law, which provides that in every province only one broadcaster shall operate in the digital domain, and such broadcaster already existed. The state used this state of affairs against Shirak Public TV to push the company out of the digitization process.

The weaknesses of the current law also became evident on April 1st, in the competition for the Public Radio and Television Board Chairman’s position. In particular, the selection of some members of the competition commission, the procedure set by the Commission on Television and Radio, the fact that, notwithstanding the conflict of interest, some candidates in the competition were members of the Commission on Television and Radio, were factors that made the competition problematic.

In the first half of the year, a number of media agencies were concerned about the notifications from Yerevan Municipality demanding to leave editorial offices within five days. Some news agencies called this a pressure by the authorities. The CPFE initiated an announcement by 10 journalistic NGOs, calling the editorials not to dramatize the situation and demanding the government and the Municipality to find a comprehensive solution to the problem by discussing the matter with the media agency leaders[[11]](#footnote-11). Final regulations on the matter are yet to be made.

By the way, the media were also concerned about a publication by “Factor.am” on May 27th, stating that “My step” faction had discussed the possibility of applying to the NSS to uncover journalists’ sources of information and that of restricting journalists’ access to Room 334 in the National Assembly[[12]](#footnote-12). Later the representatives of “My Step” faction denied such intentions, asserting that it was just one of the members’ subjective opinion.

Within the monitoring period, some Armenian media outlets were worried about the actions of “Roskomnadzor “ Russian state body, which made the Russian web pages of several Armenian news agencies unavailable in Russia. The official justification stated a violation of the Law of Russia on data processing[[13]](#footnote-13). Even more, lawsuits were initiated linked to several articles published by “Aravot.am”. The cases were connected with the publication of names well-known in the criminal world, notwithstanding the fact, that the news agency only delivered the words of the RA Deputy Foreign Minister. “Hetq.am”, “Armtimes.com” and other news agencies came across the same problem, too. At their request the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the Embassy of Armenia to Russian Federation intervened and finally settled the conflict.

Within the half-year period, the Prime Minister of Armenia held two 4.5 to 5-hour press conferences on March 19th and May 8th giving all the participating journalists an opportunity to ask their questions and receive answers. The members of the government continue to be active on social media, but it is not always welcome. In particular, “Aravot.am” voiced a concern about the decision of the RA Minister of Education and Science to answer the journalist’s main question via livestream thus infringing on the right of the reporter to receive and disseminate exclusive information[[14]](#footnote-14). On the other hand, Arsen Torosyan, RA Minister of Health, during the "Tvapatum-2019" Media Conference substantiated why it was important for state officials to be the primary source of information. He claimed it to be a way of tackling fake news.

Nevertheless, in the post-revolutionary period media outlets and journalists continue complaining, that they encounter problems in requesting information from state bodies: delays in providing information, groundless rejections, incomplete or dusty answers, etc. Within June-July of the present year the CPFE registered 66 facts of infringement on the right to receive and disseminate information, which is by 40 excessive of the results in the same period of the previous year. Additionally, the number of various types of repression against the media and their representatives has increased by more than twice (find the details in the corresponding subsection). They include cases, when political figures, officials or other public figures go spare, get offended or display contempt and decide “to teach journalists a lesson” when asked annoying questions.

Particularly, disdain was expressed by Gagik Tsarukyan, the Leader of “Prosperous Armenia” party, Armen Tavadyan, the owner of “5th Channel”, Rubik Hakobyan, a former MP, Gevorg Danielyan, the acting Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council (who subsequently resigned), Serzh Sargsyan, the third RA president, his chief bodyguard, Vachagan Ghazaryan and others. From among the aforementioned persons, Gagik Tsarukyan expressed a disrespectful behavior four times within a month, hence by the CPFE’s initiative 10 journalistic organizations had to make announcements on this matter twice[[15]](#footnote-15).

In the first half of 2019, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression continued to keep a close eye on two widely known criminal cases, “Electric Yerevan” and “Sari Tagh”. On each of the abovementioned cases over 20 journalists were identified as victims. The CPFE’s lawyers protect the interests of 5 of them. The criminal case of “Electric Yerevan” was suspended by the Special Investigation Service on March 4th, 2019, on the grounds that the “persons to be involved as defendants were unknown.” After the decision, Tehmine Yenokyan, who had been identified as a victim, published the photos of dozens of policemen and persons in civilian clothes, who used violence against the journalists covering the protests in Baghramyan Avenue on June 23rd, 2015. This way the journalist was trying to prove the ungrounded nature of the criminal case suspension[[16]](#footnote-16). With the support of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, on April 2nd, three victim journalists, namely Hakob Karapetyan, Gevorg Ghazaryan and Tehmine Yenoqyan, filed a complaint to the RA Prosecutor’s Office against the SIS’s decision. The RA Prosecutor’s Office abolished the decision of the SIS and assigned them to restart the preliminary investigation. The CPFE will continue keeping a close eye on this case and support the journalists.

As for the criminal case of “Sari Tagh”, on April 4th, the Court of First Instance of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the appeal by victim journalists against the decision of the SIS on September 18th, 2018.

This appellate procedure is again initiated by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression. On May 8th, 2019, two journalists were identified as victims: Mariam Grigoryan, a correspondent of “1in.am” news website, and Gevorg Ghazaryan, a freelance photojournalist. With the CPFE’s support they applied to the Court of Appeals, which still had not made a decision as of June 30th.

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

Violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets during the first half of 2019 are introduced according to the following classification by the CPFE:

* physical violence against journalists,
* pressure on the 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 contain facts about violations of the rights of journalists and the media during the first half of 2019, as well as developments related to the incidents that took place during the previous periods.

**On the whole, as it was mentioned, 2 facts about physical violence, 83 cases of pressure on the media outlets and their personnel, 66 cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information were recorded in the first half of 2019.** Below we introduce these data according to quarters and the comparative data of the first halves of 2018-2019 in tables.

**Quantitative data on the violations in 2019 by quarters**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2019, 1st quarter | 2019, 2nd quarter | Total |
| Physical violence against journalists | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 41 | 42 | 83 |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 51 | 15 | 66 |

**Quantitative data on the violations in the first halves of 2018 and 2019**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2018, 1st half | 2019, 1st half |
| Physical violence against journalists | 19 | 2 |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 37 | 83 |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 26 | 66 |

As in previous reports, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression states that the data introduced in the table 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 impediments to 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 the true number of impediments is more than it is recorded in this report. Below we shall introduce more significant facts.

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

*In the first half of 2019 two cases of physical violence against media representatives were recorded, both of which were exerted by citizens. Compared to the same period of last year, which included the events of the Velvet Revolution, when 19 facts of such kind were recorded, it is obvious that the number of violence cases against journalists has reduced sharply, which is also conditioned by certain calm in the domestic political situation.*

*Last year, two more criminal cases filed on incidents of physical violence recorded during the revolution were sent to court, moreover, decision was already made in relation to one case, two cases were suspended, the hearing of one of which was resumed following an appeal, and one case is still in the stage of pre-investigation.*

*Below we shall introduce the cases of physical violence against media representatives recorded in the first half of 2019, as well as the developments of the previous cases in chronological order.*

**On January 14,** journalists Alina Nikoghosyan, Anatoly Yeghiazaryan, Hambardzum Papoyan, Armen Petrosyan, Naira Bulghadaryan and Narek Kirakosyan appealed the decision made by the Special Investigation Service on November 16th, 2018, to suspend the proceeding of the criminal case filed on the incidents of 2018 April on the basis of the perpetrator being unknown.

It is worthwhile to remind that this case concerns the incidents of impeding the professional legal activities of journalists covering the rallies in Baghramyan Avenue, Artsakh, Erebouni and other streets of Yerevan by the RA police and other employees of law enforcement bodies implementing public service, as well as by officials during April 16-23, 2018 through exerting and threatening with violence. (Details in CPFE 2018 second quarterly and annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) site, section “Reports”).

After being rejected, on April 1, several case-related victims filed a suit to the Court of Appeal against the decision of the court of first instance. By the decision of the RA Criminal Court of Appeal of May 10, the appeal was sustained. The prosecutor reviewing the lawfulness of the case-related pre-investigation instructed to resume the proceeding of the case.

**On January 15** the Court of general jurisdiction of Kotayk region held the regular court session on the case of journalist Tirayr Mouradyan vs. Arsen Arzoumanyan, the head of the Kotayk region department of the RA police.

It is worthwhile to remind that on April 20, 2018 Tirair Mouradyan,journalist from “Union of informed citizens” NGOwas apprehended from Yerevan-Abovyan highway although he had showed the journalist’s ID[[17]](#footnote-17).

The pre-investigation found out that Arsen Arzoumanyan, the head of the Kotayk unit of the RA Police impeded the journalist’s professional legal activities through abusing his power for which he was charged under Article 164, Part 2 of the RA Criminal code.

This year court sessions on the case also took place on January 30, February 15, and by the court decision of February 27, Arsen Arzoumanyan was acquitted because of the absence of corpus delicti in his actions.

On April 10 the plaintiff appealed the decision to the Court of Appeal. On April 23 the appeal took proceeding. Court sessions on the case took place on May 14, and during the session on June 5 the Court of Appeal satisfied the appeal and overturned the decision made by the court of first instance of February 27.

Arsen Arzumanyan was charged under Article 164, Part 2 of the RA Criminal Code: a fine of 500,000 AMD was imposed without depriving of the right to hold certain positions or be engaged in certain activities.

**On January 21,** the Court of general jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor regions (based in Yeghegnadzor) held the first court session on the case of physical violence against the journalists who were carrying out their professional obligations in Shatin community in Vayots Dzor region.

It is worthwhile to remind that on September 12, 2018 Syune Hambardzumyan and Knar Manukyan, employees of “Zhoghovurd” daily, were subjected to violence by the residents of Shatin[[18]](#footnote-18). To get familiar with the tense situation after the elections for local self-government bodies, the journalists visited Shatin, where some of the residents attacked them, seized the journalist’s certificate from one of them, hit the other videotaping correspondent on the hand and dragged her. On September 14, the Prosecutor General’s office of the RA sent the publication by the “Zhoghovurd” daily to the Prosecutor’s office of Vayots Dzor region to prepare materials as stipulated under Articles 180-181 of the Criminal procedure code of the RA, and to take measures to settle the issue[[19]](#footnote-19). Based on the evidence obtained, charges were brought against 4 people, Zhanna Isughoyan, Zvart Smbatyan, Geghanush Yeghoyan, Shirak Harunyan under Article 164, Part 1 of the Criminal code of the RA. As a measure of restraint they signed the order not to leave the country.

Court sessions on the case also took place on February 19 and March 14, 2019. On April 5 the court personnel underwent changes, the case took a new proceeding on April 10, after which court sessions were held on May 3 and 10, June 4 and 24, the next session is scheduled on July 9.

**On February 13**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction (based in Kentron and Norq-Marash administrative districts) held the court session on the case of Levon Gasparyan and Julietta Kokolyan who impeded the professional activity of Sisak Gabrielyan and Shoghik Galstyan, a journalist from radio “Liberty” and a correspondent from “Araratnews.am” news website, respectively.

It is worthwhile to remind that on April 2, 2017, on the day of elections to the National Assembly, Sisak Gabrielyan, journalist from radio “Liberty” and Shoghik Galstyan, correspondent from “Araratnews.am” news website were exposed to violence at the campaign office of Hakob Beglaryan, deputy candidate from the RPA, at 15 Roustaveli street in Kond district (details in CPFE 2017-2018 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”). A CPFE lawyer defended Shoghik Galstyan’s interests in court.

On February 5, 2018 the court issued an arrest warrant for Julietta Kokolyan, charged with impeding Shoghik Galstyan’s professional activity[[20]](#footnote-20). The advocate of the defendant periodically informed the court that Kokolyan had health problems and could not appear in court, however, when the court required relevant documents, they failed to submit them.

Before finding Julietta Kokolyan, the court decided to suspend the proceeding of her case and to investigate in a separate proceeding the case of the other defendant, Levon Gasparyan. Court sessions on this case took place on March 15, April 11, June 12, July 2. The next session is scheduled on July 22.

**On March 14,** the employees of cafes in the vicinity of the Opera House which were subject to dismantling by the decision of Yerevan Municipality exerted violence against Narek Aleksanyan, a journalist from “Hetq.am”, when the latter was carrying out his professional obligations[[21]](#footnote-21). One of the employees pulled his arm, while the other one shouted at him: “Get out of my territory”.

**On March 14,** in the vicinity of the Opera House, in the territory of café “Jazzve”, which was subject to dismantling by the decision of Yerevan Municipality, Gevorg Tosunyan, a journalist from “Civilnet.am” news website, was exposed to violence. Gevorg Tosunyan told the CPFE “A woman hit me on the back saying – Why are you standing in front of me?” (see also the comments on the previous link).

**On March 27,** the criminal case against the former commander of the RA Police forces Levon Yeranosyan which was filed in relation to applying special means against the demonstrators and journalists, was sent to the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction with indictment. He was charged under Article 309, Parts 2 and 3 of the RA Criminal Code for applying special means and intentionally implementing actions that were obviously beyond the scope of his powers and caused substantial damage to citizens’ rights and legitimate interests, as well as resulted negligently in grave consequences. Among case-related victims are Ani Keshishyan and Liana Yeghiazaryan, correspondent from “168.am” website and from “Radiolur” program on Public Radio, respectively.

It is worthwhile to remind that as a result of using special means by the police against the protesters on Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan injuries were caused to Ani Keshishyan on April 16, 2018, and to Liana Ghazaryan on April 22 at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebouni streets. (Details in CPFE 2018, 2nd quarterly and annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am), section “Reports”).

Court sessions on the case took place on April 19, May 21, June 11 and 20, 2019. The next session is scheduled on July 9.

**On April 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori region continued the investigation of the criminal case filed on the occasion of impeding the professional legal activities of Narine Avetisyan, editor-in-chief of “Lori TV” TV company.

It is worthwhile to remind that on September 28, 2017, after receiving information that the bridge adjacent to Holy Mother church was being paved in heavy rain, Narine Avetisyan went to that site to cover the activities. When videotaping, Tigran Nazaryan, head of the “Shinplyus” construction company, along with his employees attacked Narine Avetisyan, twisted her arms, slammed her down to the ground, seized her phone and deleted the photos[[22]](#footnote-22).

This year court sessions on the case took place on May 15 and June 18. The next session is scheduled on July 25.

**On May 31,** the Investigative Committee stopped the prosecution of the person involved as defendant in the criminal case filed on the incident of exerting physical violence against Vruir Tadevosyan, Public Radio producer, and Ani Grigoryan, journalist from “CivilNet.am” news website, based on the absence of sufficient combination of evidence and suspended the proceeding of the criminal case on the basis of the perpetrator being unknown.

It is worthwhile to remind that on April 21, 2018 Ani Grigoryan was attacked in Avan district of Yerevan[[23]](#footnote-23). A person in civilian clothes impeded the journalist’s professional activity and stole her “IPhone 6s” smartphone. On April 22, a group of persons in masks exerted violence against Vruir Tadevosyan in the same place. They seized the journalist’s “IPad Air 2” tablet and “Samsung Galaxy J7” smartphone, beat him up with batons, broke “Nissan Tiida” car causing him pecuniary damage.

These two cases were attached and according to the Prosecutor’s office data one person was charged under Article 185, Part 2, Point 3 and Article 164, Part 3 of the RA Criminal Code.

The journalists did not appeal the SIS decision on suspending the case.

**On June 14,** the criminal case filed on the occasion of exerting physical violence against Artak Khulyan, a correspondent from “Shantnews.am” news website and Hovhannes Sargsyan, a cameraman from “Factor.am” news website under Article 225 of the RA Criminal Code was sent to the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction with the indictment charging 8 persons.

It is worthwhile to remind that on April 22, Artak Khulyan, a correspondent from “Shantnews.am”, who was covering protests in Erebouni district was exposed to violence[[24]](#footnote-24). On the same day Hovhannes Sargsyan, a cameraman from “Factor.am” news website was also subjected to violence in the same district[[25]](#footnote-25).

The criminal case on these two incidents was investigated in one proceeding. The case took proceeding in the court on June 19, the first court session is on July 9.

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

*In the period under review, in total, 83 cases of pressure on the media outlets and their personnel were recorded, which is by 46 more than the indicator for the first half of last year. Moreover, 41 and 42 facts were recorded in the first and second quarters of 2019, respectively. In 41 out of 83 cases pressure was exerted by politicians, persons affiliated with them, state bodies and individual officials, in 22 - by common citizens, in 9 - by businessmen or private companies, in 4 - by media outlets, in 3 - by NGOs, in 2 - by advocates and in 2 - by a judge.*

*Besides the facts recorded in the first half of 2019, this subsection of the report also includes developments and solutions related to the cases of various types of pressure on the media outlets and journalists recorded during the previous years. Below we introduce all the details in chronological order.*

**On January 9,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction initiated a proceeding on the lawsuit by actress Ani Yeranyan, demanding public apology from “BlogNews.am” news website, on behalf of editor-in-chief Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan and “Datablog” LLC, on behalf of the head Karen Antinyan. The lawsuit was filed on December 21, 2018, and the cause was the information about Ani Yeranyan’s personal life published on the website, in particular the news claiming “Ani Yeranyan seems to be following in Meline Daluzyan’s footsteps”[[26]](#footnote-26).

The first court session on the case took place on March 15. The next session is scheduled on July 11.

**On January 10**, Zaruhi Postanjyan, the leader of “Yerkir Tsirani” party sent a letter to the RA Prosecutor General appealing the decision by Lusine Haoutyunyan, IC investigator for especially important cases, made on December 27, 2018, due to which the proceeding of the criminal case was filed on impeding the professional activities of correspondents from Radio “Liberty” and “A1+” TV company.

It is worthwhile to remind that on February 19, 2018 the professional activities of Ruzanna Stepanyan and Susanna Poghosyan, correspondents from radio “Liberty” and “A1+” TV company, respectively were impeded[[27]](#footnote-27). (Details in CPFE 2018 annual report, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am), section “Reports”).

In relation to this incident, Zaruhi Postanjyan sent a letter-complaint to the RA Prosecutor General, which was sent to the RA Investigative committee for preparing materials. A decision was made to reject the filing of the criminal case and not to prosecute Arthur Gevorgyan, head of Information and Public Relations Department of Yerevan Municipality because of the absence of corpus delicti. The leader of “Yerkir Tsirani” appealed this decision to the RA Prosecutor General, which was also rejected. Zaruhi Postanjyan sent a complaint to the RA Prosecutor General against this decision, which, too, was rejected. On April 12, 2018, Zaruhi Postanjyan appealed to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction which rejected the complaint reasoning that it was groundless. After this Postanjyan appealed to an upper instance - the Criminal Court of Appeal. On August 15, 2018, the RA Criminal Court of Appeal satisfied Zaruhi Postanjyan’s complaint and reversed the investigator’s decision on rejecting to file the criminal case. However, on December 27, the General Department of Investigation for Especially Important Cases of the RA Investigative Committee ruled not to issue criminal prosecution on the criminal case and to quash the proceeding.

As the Prosecutor’s office informed the CPFE, Zaruhi Postanjyan appealed the investigator’s decision to the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction with a request to oblige the body conducting the proceeding to recognize the violation of her rights. The court satisfied the complaint by the decision made on April 18 and obliged the body conducting the proceeding to recognize Zaruhi Postanjyan as victim and abolish the violation of her rights. The Prosecutor General’s office of the RA filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal against the court decision.

**On January 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Region (based in Gyumri) held the first court session on the case “Tsayg” LLC, founder of “Tsayg” TV company vs. “Shant” LLC, founder of “Shant” TV company. The third party to this case is the National Commission on Television and Radio.

It is worthwhile to remind that on December 6, 2017, “Tsaig” LLC filed a lawsuit, the cause of which, as stated by the plaintiff, was conducting activities not stipulated by the license of “Shant” TV Company, having national coverage, which involved particularly broadcasting local commercials different from the headquarter TV-product, paid reports and other programs. The claim by “Tsaig” TV Company is to stop such activities of “Shant” TV company in Gyumri that are normally typical of regional broadcasters.

Court sessions on this case took place on March 21, October 9, and by the decision made on May 10 the proceeding of the civil case was quashed based on the dispute not being subject to court investigation.

The plaintiff turned to the Court of Appeal on June 10.

**On June 10,** citizen Emma Kirakosyan filed a lawsuit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Public TV Company of Armenia” CJSC with the claim of compensation and elimination of the damage caused to honor and dignity. The cause of the lawsuit is the program “One window” broadcasted on Public TV channel on December 10, 2018[[28]](#footnote-28). The plaintiff states that the program presented “false factual data” about her and demands to refute them publicly, as well as to pay 1 million AMD together with the other defendants- guests of the program Doustrik Grigoryan, Karine Ohanyan, Liana and Irena Petrosyans. According to the plaintiff, nearly all the statements made by the aforementioned guests during the program are “false factual data”.

On January 23 the lawsuit was taken to proceeding. Court sessions on the case took place on April 9 and May 10, the next session is scheduled on July 24.

**On January 11** the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the RA filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the *Zhamanak* daily with a claim of publicly denying the information considered as defamation. The cause of the lawsuit was an article entitled “A Mess in Penitentiary Institutions: Employees Make Money for Opening Doors of Prison Cells”, published in the *Zhamanak* daily on December 12, 2018[[29]](#footnote-29). The lawsuit was taken to proceeding on January 23.

Court sessions on the case took place on April 12 and June 13. The next session is scheduled on September 18.

**On January 11,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court session on the case “News.am” LLC vs. “Dareskizb” LLC, founder of the *Armenian Times* daily.

It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of the lawsuit was an article entitled “Ararat, Armnews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media, Fakes: Which Media Outlets were “Bought” by Kocharyan?” published in *Armenian Times* on August 21, 2018[[30]](#footnote-30). According to the plaintiff, his reputation of a businessman was exposed to damage because of a number of expressions in the publication about “News.am”, as well as because of the heading of the article. “News.am” LLC brought a claim of compensation of 200.000 AMD to the founder of the *Armenian Times*

Court sessions on the case took place on February 28, April 4 and June 19. On June 28 the court rejected the motion by “Dareskizb” LLC on applying limitation period.

The next court session is scheduled on October 31.

**On January 14,** journalist Narek Kirakosyan appealed the decision of the Special Investigation Service on November 16, 2018 to suspend the proceeding of the criminal case filed on the incidents in April, 2008, on the basis of the perpetrator being unknown.

It is worthwhile to remind that on April 18, 2018, Narek Kirakosyan, correspondent from the *Armenian Times* daily, was prosecuted by the order of Hunan Poghosyan, Deputy Chief of the RA Police, for taking a photo of the armored vehicles located in Baghramyan Avenue, Yerevan[[31]](#footnote-31). However, the policeman did not manage to catch the journalist. During the pre-investigation of the criminal case in the Special Investigation Service under Article 164, Part 3, Article 308, Part 1 and Article 309, Part 2 of the RA Criminal code, a decision was made to recognize Narek Kirakosyan as a victim. (The details are available in CPFE 2018 2nd quarterly and annual reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, section “Reports”).

After being rejected a few case-related victims appealed to the Court of Appeal on April 1 against the decision by the court of first instance. The appeal was satisfied with a decision made by the Criminal Court of Appeal on May 10. The prosecutor reviewing the lawfulness of the case-related pre-investigation instructed to resume the proceeding of the case.

**On January 14,** Varduhi Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of “Tiv1.am” news website announced that the website had been closed for already 16 days without notifying the founding staff and the editor-in-chief, all locks in the workplace had been changed, and employees could not even enter to take their belongings and erase personal data from computers[[32]](#footnote-32).

In response to CPFE inquiry in connection with the incident it was stated by the RA Prosecutor’s Office that on January 18, 2019, Edgar Babayan filed an application to the Prosecutor General of the RA, explaining that in December 2018, Varduhi Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of “Tiv1 Media” LLC had stolen the entire property of the company alongside with the other employees and then returned it, causing them pecuniary damage. And on February 2, 2019, Varduhi Simonyan reported to Arabkir Police Department, explaining that Edgar Babayan, head of “Tiv1 Media” LLC, had changed the company entrance and office locks, as a result of which she and other employees were unable to manage their property.

On February 4, 2019 a criminal case was filed on the incident in Arabkir Police Department under Article 322, Part 1 of the RA Criminal code, which was sent to the Investigative department of Arabkir administrative district, Yerevan Investigative Department of RA Investigative Committee. The case is under pre-investigation.

**On January 14,** during an interview in the National Assembly, Gagik Tsarukyan answered a question, asked by Narek Kirakosyan, a journalist from the *Armenian Times* daily: "What do you need politics for?" using “ara” (an Armenian slang word meaning “dude”)[[33]](#footnote-33). Later, the MP asked the journalist to give him the recording, heard his words and said that he had said “ah” and not “ara”[[34]](#footnote-34).

**On January 14**, “24news.am” website posted a report on the incident with Eduard Babayan, who is the former Commander of Gagik Tsarukyan’s (MP and Leader of Prosperous Armenia Party) guards, titled “Tsarukyan’s Guard Syndrome”[[35]](#footnote-35). Accordingly, the website journalist’s questions disturbed Tsarukyan’s surroundings so much that various “emissarie” (representatives of the mass media standing close to Tsarukyan, then a man) repeatedly tried to persuade the journalist not to post the interview. “And after the release of the article, “24news” website was simply attacked by Tsarukyan’s armies of fake accounts who insulted our journalist by using vulgar words”, reported the media.

**On January 15,** the first court hearing, Alvina Gyulumyan against Tigran Hayrapetyan and “Skizb Media Kentron” LLC, took place in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction to retract the slander and demand compensation of one million AMD from Tigran Hayrapetyan.

The cause of the lawsuit was lawyer Tigran Hayrapetyan’s interview with "1in.am", where he spoke about Alvina Gyulumyan’s activities as an ECHR judge, in particular, he said that Alvina Gyulumyan was cunning so that cases against Armenia would not be investigated in ECHR. The plaintiff considered it to be a slander.

The lawsuit was taken to proceeding on September 12, 2018. This year the hearing was on May 14, the next one is scheduled for July 10.

**On January 15,** General Manvel Grigoryan filed a lawsuit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Maxinfo.am” media website demanding 3 million AMD compensation for smearing his honor and dignity. On January 25, the court returned the appeal. On February 19, Manvel Grigoryan again filed the same lawsuit, and on March 4 the court again decided to return the claim. On March 28, the plaintiff appealed that decision to a higher instance court. On April 22, the Civil Court of Appeal decided to leave the decision of first-instance court unchanged, citing the fact that the mentioned website is not a legal entity.

**On January 15,** advocates Lusine Sahakyan, Aramazd Kiviryan, as well as Armen Poghosyan and Armine Poghosyan filed a lawsuit against “Lakmoes.am” and “Skizb Media Kentron” LLC demanding compensation for the damage caused to the honor, dignity, business reputation and the right to personal and family life immunity. The application was accepted on January 30. On February 4, the solicitation of the lawsuit was partially upheld, and "Lakmus" NGO and Elmira Martirosyan were obliged to completely remove the article from “Lakmoes.am”, which was posted on December 3, 2018 at 8:27 pm. The article had the following title: ““Hunters” of Diaspora Armenians’ Snatched Military Doctor’s Son”. “Skizb Media Kentron” company and Arman Babajanyan were also obliged to completely remove the article ““Hunters” of Diaspora Armenians’ Snatched Military Doctor’s Son” published on December 4, 2018 at 10:02 am from “1in.am” website. On February 27, “Lakmus” NGO filed an appeal in the Court of Appeal against the decision to apply the claim, which was rejected on March 20. On April 11, “Lakmus” NGO applied to the Court of Cassation, and on April 30 the application was returned.

The preliminary hearing of the case was held on June 5, and the next one is set for July 1.

**On January 18,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction partially upheld the claim of the RA second President Robert Kocharyan against “Skizb Media Kentron” LLC to publicly refute the information, which is considered to be a slander, and to obtain compensation.

It is worthwhile to remind that at first the reason for filing the lawsuit was the article “Grigor Grigoryan Gave Evidence against Kocharyan, He Can Be Arrested,” which was posted on June 7, 2018 by “1in.am” news website owned by the LLC[[36]](#footnote-36). Then two publications by the same media followed on June 23 and 24 (by Sargis Artsruni), namely “Robert Kocharyan’s Panic. The Second President on His Way to Prison”[[37]](#footnote-37) and “Robert Kocharyan, the Bloody Symbol of the Revolution”[[38]](#footnote-38). Later on June 28, another analytical article by the same author was posted on “1in.am”: “Kocharyan-Sargsyan. Beneficiaries of Twenty Bloody Years.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The author is convinced that “Robert Kocharyan is unique in the history of the Third Republic in a negative sense because he laid the foundations of a monstrous criminal-oligarchic, corrupted system, Russian vassalage, organizing the October 27th bloodshed with the help of the well-known circles of Moscow.”

According to the plaintiff, these articles contain information that smears Robert Kocharyan’s honor and dignity, which does not correspond to the reality. According to the first-instance court’s decision, the LLC must seek Robert Kocharyan’s apology for disclosing defamatory information about him, as well as for smearing his honor and dignity. In addition, the decision mandates the Court to confiscate 400,000 AMD in Robert Kocharyan’s favor as compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The remaining claim of 1.600.000 AMD as a claim for non-pecuniary damage compensation was dismissed.

“Skizb Media Kentron” appealed the decisoin on February 20, 2019. On March 12, the Court of Appeal accepted the appeal. The first hearing was held on June 4. And on June 12, the Civil Court of Appeal decided to dismiss “Skizb Media Kentron” appeal, leaving the first-instance court’s decision unchanged.

**On January 18,** the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Lena Nazaryan refused to give an interview to those journalists who would record videos on the phone. In response to journalists’ complaints, Lena Nazaryan clarified that she was not against short comments, but lengthy interviews to be recorded done with non-professional cameras.

**On January 22,** “Tigran Mets” Publishing House filed a lawsuit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Iravunk Media” LLC demanding 3 845 517 AMD as debt for services and 77,000 AMD as advance payment for the state fee.

On February 1 the application was accepted. The claim securing enforcement, as well as the petition for a simplified procedure, were rejected. The hearing is on July 3.

**On January 24,** journalists Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan filed a lawsuit to the RA Administrative Court against the Public Television and Radio Company Board demanding to repeal Administrative Act No. 46-L of December 25, 2018. The act concerns the termination of the journailists’ employment contracts. On January 29, the application was returned. It was re-filed on February 15 and was accepted on February 22.

Liana Karapetyan also wrote about her attitude and details of her dismissal on Facebook[[40]](#footnote-40).

Hearings were held on April 30 and June 27. The next one is scheduled for July 25.

**On January 24,** the RA Prime Minister’s former advisor Mesrop Papikyan filed a lawsuit in Ararat and Vayots Dzor Court of General Jurisdiction against Boris Tamoyan, editor of "Politik.am", demanding a compansation for the damage of honour and dignity and publicly denying the information which was considered a slander.

The cause of suit was the article “Criminal Authority “Tuy” Paid a Bribe of $ 10,000 to Pashinyan’s Advisor,” posted on the website on January 17, claiming that “According to some news, criminal authority “Tuy” has given $ 10,000 to the Prime Minister’s advisor Mesrop Papikyan so that he wouldn’t have any scarcity of means during the campaign”[[41]](#footnote-41).

On February 5, the lawsuit was proceeded on and the motion to foreclose on the defendant’s property was rejected. The preliminary hearing on the case was held on June 14, and the next one is scheduled for September 24.

**On January 25,** Narek Kirakosyan, a journalist from the *Armenian Times* daily applied to the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, warning that the head of the Prime Minister’s staff Eduard Aghajanyan is showing discriminatory attitude towards the media. “He has not been giving interviews to the *Armenian Times* for several weeks. I asked again yesterday, but he refused, however after refusing, he gave interviews to “Azatutyun” radio station and “CivilNet””, was mentioned in the letter to the CPFE.

**On January 30,** the Civil Court of Appeal dismissed Gayane Manukyan’s appeal against the first-instance court’s ruling dismissing Gayane Manukyan’s lawsuit against "4news.am" news website's owner Lilit Hovakimyan and Police Lieutenant Colonel David Perikhanyan. And it was decided to exact 120.000 AMD as a state fee and 300,000 AMD in Lilit Hovakimyan’s favor as an advocate’s fee.

It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of the suit is the article “A Treacherous Step by Gayane Manukyan, a Friend of Azerbaijani Media,” posted on the website on January 21, 2017. The article said in particular that she had been interviewed by Azerbaijani “Haqqin.az” website and that she was making trouble in Armenia. The plaintiff considers the information in the article insulting and defamatory and demands that it should be denied. They should be obliged to pay 2 million AMD as compensation for slander and 1 million AMD for insult (for details see the “Reports” section of [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website, CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 Annual Reports).

**On January 30,** Konstantin Ter-Nakalian, editor-in-chief from “BlogNews” news website, alerted that he had received a notification to appear in the NSS the next day for interrogation within the scope of a criminal case referring to evoking religious hostility through the media[[42]](#footnote-42).

It is worthwhile to remind that on September 24, 2018, “Forrights.am” website reported that “Kyanqi Khosq” Evangelical Church in Armenia had applied to the National Security Service of Armenia requesting a criminal case for inciting religious hostility based on the publications of “Dukhov Hayastan” Facebook page and “BlogNews” website (For details see khosq.am’s Reports section, the CPFE 2018 Annual Report).

**On January 31,** by the decision of the RA Government, “Shirak Public Television and Radio Company” CJSC was closed out. As justification, it has been noted that the company is currently implementing analog broadcasting and therefore cannot cover a large audience, and digital broadcasting will require prior legislative regulation and significant financial investment, which is not realistic at this time.

Meanwhile, “Shirak” TV has found itself in that situation not because of its own fault, but because of the short-sighted and ineffective policy of the state in this area, which has caused not only Shirak, but also about 10 other local TV stations operating in the provinces to stay out of the digitalization process. On this occasion, 10 journalistic organizations, on the initiative of the CPFE, issued a statement on February 1, calling on the RA Government to reconsider the decision to close out “Shirak Public Radio and Television” CJSC, refrain from drastic steps in the field of broadcasting that did not meet modern requirements, and develop a radical program in the field, based on international experience, taking into account the recommendations of specialized journalistic organizations[[43]](#footnote-43).

Teacher Susanna Sargsyan’s case against Shushanna Grigoryan, a journalist from “Hraparak.am” website, resumed on February 1 at the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Region (based in Vanadzor).

It is worthwhile to remind that the case is being re-examined in the court of first instance. The cause of the lawsuit were articles " Head of Vanadzor School N8 Fired" [[44]](#footnote-44) and “Teacher in Vanadzor Receives 12 Million AMD for Forced Leave”[[45]](#footnote-45) posted on October 4, 2013 and December 5, 2013 on “Hraparak.am” website. On September 23, 2015 the Court decided to partially uphold Susanna Sargsyan’s lawsuit and oblige Shushanna Grigoryan to publicly apologize to plaintiff Susanna Sargsyan in a written form, and to confiscate 55,500 AMD in Susanna Sargsyan’s favor. The other part of the claim was dismissed. Both the plaintiff and the respondent filed an appeal against this decision. On February 11, 2016, the Court of Appeal decided to reject Susanna Sargsyan’s complaint and to satisfy Shushanna Grigoryan’s claim. September 23, 2015 judgment of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Region to partially uphold the claim was reversed, and the case for that part was sent to the same court for a new hearing (details in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 Annual Reports, see [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am), Reports section).

Hearings were also held on this case on March 14, 28, and April 25, the day of the next hearing is not scheduled.

**On February 2,** journalists accredited to the National Assembly were not allowed to enter the Parliament building, where a closed-door session of “My Step” faction was being held, with the participation of the Prime Minister and a number of executive officials. On February 4, 10 journalistic organizations, at the initiative of the CPFE, issued a statement demanding from the NA leadership delegate to assign the competent departments of the NA staff to review the accreditation procedure of the previous parliament and create other favorable conditions for journalists in their activities[[46]](#footnote-46).

**On February 5** at dawn, the car belonging to editorial office of the *Syuniats Yerkir* newspaper was put to fire in Kapan[[47]](#footnote-47). According to the editor of the newspaper Samvel Aleksanyan was taaking revenge because of the professional activity of the newspaper. The editorial released a statement that the case would have been prevented if previous encroachments on the newspaper had not gone unnoticed, referring to former Syunik Governor Vahe Hakobyan and the staff of “Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine” CJSC. “The newspaper, in response to the wishes of thousands of Syunik residents, in particular demanded to identify the owners of Kajaran Plant and restrain the appetite of the gangs that invaded Syunik. Today the heads of the Kajaran Plant have 13 civil lawsuits against Samvel Aleksanyan and Syuniats Ashkharh LLC that is the founder of the newspaper”, the newspaper’s editor said. For other cases related to the newspaper, see section “Other Events” in the report.

**On February 5,** the Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on the case of “CHAP” LLC, founder of “GALA” TV, against “Gyumri Tax Inspectorate”.

It is worthwhile to remind that on May 7, 2018, the RA Administrative Court decided to re-examine the case of the founder of GALA TV Company “CHAP” LLC against Gyumri Tax Inspectorate. This case has an 11-year history. The decision of the RA Administrative Court to review it again was made based on the decision of the European Court of Human Rights on May 4, 2017 and after reversing the verdict of the RA Court of Cassation on April 7, 2018.

In the Administrative Court of Appeal Karen Tumanyan, the representative of “CHAP” LLC, demanded that the tax authorities should annul the act of 25 million 212 thousand 700 AMD of 2007 (25.116.700 AMD was actually exacted from the TV company founder). According to Tumanyan, the court should determine whether the administrative act was justified or not, and the dispute should be investigated in the criminal domain, since it is a matter of abuse of large sums, which has not been taken into consideration in the three judicial instances of Armenia since 2007, and which the European Court of Human Rights has drawn attention to[[48]](#footnote-48).

During the first court hearing on August 16, 2018, the State Revenue Committee upheld its claim to pay the sum. On November 21, the court adjourned the administrative proceeding to dismiss the claim filed by the State Revenue Committee against "CHAP" LLC and dismiss the case as settled.

The ruling of February 22, 2019, upheld “GALA” claim to repeal the State Tax Service’s act of 2007, which obliged “GALA” TV to pay about 26 million AMD[[49]](#footnote-49).

**On February 6** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen Asya Khachatryan against Garnik Isagulyan, Chairman of the “National Security” party (Founders of the *Aravot* and *168 Zham* newspapers and “Operativ.am”, “Henaran.am” and “Araratnews.am” news sites were recognized as third parties) with claims to publicly refute the information that is defamatory and to compensate the damage caused to honor and dignity[[50]](#footnote-50). The plaintiff disputes the NKR Permanent Representative to Armenia Garnik Isagulyan’s opinion expressed on March 28, 2018 during a press conference at the “Hayeli” club: “Asya Khachatryan is familiar to us. It is unconfirmed informatton that during his visits to Tbilisi, our so-called freedom-loving girl has been to Baku several times with her friends. It is easier to pass through Azerbaijan via Georgia without clear passport notes". The plaintiff demands proof from Isagulyan that she has been to Baku several times, seeking a refutation and a half-million AMD compensation. (For details on the CPFE 2018 Annual Report, see khosq.am, “Reports” section).

A court hearing on the case was also held on April 15. May 10 was announced as the day of publication of the judicial act, but the court decided to reopen the civil case. The next meeting is scheduled on August 19.

**On February 11** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted the claim of "News AM" LLC against “1in.am” news reporter Sona (Sirush) Harutyunyan.

It is worthwhile to remind that on September 26, 2018, “News AM” LLC filed a lawsuit against the journalist, which was caused by a post on her Facebook page where Sona Harutyunyan linked “News.am” website with Robert Kocharyan[[51]](#footnote-51). The founder of "News.am" demands from the journalist 200,000 AMD in compensation, in addition to publishing a denial, apologizing publicly, and forcing the journalist to publish the court ruling on her Facebook page.

This year hearings were held on April 23, May 29 and June 26. The next one is scheduled on July 9.

**On February 11,** the next court hearing of citizen Narine Abrahamyan’s case against journalist Christine Aghalaryan was held at the premises of Yerevan Court of First Instance for Avan and Nor Nork administrative districts.

It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of the lawsuit was the article, entitled “Meghri Medical Center against the State Revenue Committee”, published on May 17, 2017 on “Lurer.com” website, which mentioned Narine Abrahamyan in the center of numerous scandals during her career[[52]](#footnote-52).

The next court hearing of this case is scheduled on September 10.

**On February 11** “Nor Serund” NGO filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the *Hraparak* daily, demanding to refute the information considered slander and exacting 500,000 AMD in compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is the article entitled "LGBT Forum will Nevertheless Take Place" published on December 3, 2018[[53]](#footnote-53).

On February 26, the application was returned and re-filed on March 29. On April 10, it was accepted. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on July 2.

**On February 11** former Armavir Governor Gagik Mirijanyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Skizb Media Kentron” LLC to force them refute the information damaging his honor, dignity and business reputation. The cause of the lawsuit was the article published on February 6 in the *Zhamanak* newspaper: “Corruption: Gagik Mirijanyan Managed to Open a Private Clinic in 4 Months”[[54]](#footnote-54).

On February 25, the lawsuit was accepted and a preliminary hearing is scheduled on July 1.

**On February 12,** Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Coordinator of “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO, filed a lawsuit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against blogger Narek Malyan for compensation of damage caused to his honor and dignity (300,000 AMD). The cause for the lawsuit was Narek Malyan’s live-stream on Facebook, where he called Daniel Ioannisyan a liar and urged everyone to add that word every time before Daniel Ioannisyan’s name [[55]](#footnote-55).

On February 26, the application was returned and re-filed on March 18. On March 26, it was brought into proceedings. The first hearing was held on June 11. The next one is scheduled on July 1.

**On February 12,** businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a new lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Syuniats Ashkharh” LLC. The third entity involved in the case was “Chap Chemical” LLC (the founder of “GALA” TV Company) with a claim for compensation of one million drams for damages caused to his honor and dignity and obliging to apologize. The cause of the lawsuit was an article, entitled “The Car of “Syuniats Yerkir” Newspaper Editorial Office was Set on Fire" published on February 5 where the website’s editor mentioned Vahe Hakobyan’s name as a possible organizer of the fire[[56]](#footnote-56).

On February 18, the appeal was returned to the plaintiff, then on April 26 the case was submitted to the court archive.

**On February 13,** Lyova Abrahamyan, head of Sarukhan community in Gegharkunik region filed a claim in the Court of General  Jurisdiction in Yerevan against journalist Narine Hasratyan from the news website “Haykakan Zham” with the appeal of enforcing refutation of information smearing honor, dignity and business reputation. The cause of the suit is an article, entitled “Who Sponsors Head of Sarukhan Community and Hinders Preliminary Investigation?” published on the website on January 10, where village residents complain about the head of their community[[57]](#footnote-57).

On February 22the claim was returned and filed again on March 14 and proceedings were accepted on March 25. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on September 13.

**On February 14,** citizen Erik Eghinyan filed a statement of claim in his favor in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against the news website “Fact-info”, by the appeal of enforcing a confiscation of one million drams, a written apology to him and publication of a refutation. The cause of suit is a post titled “The Prisoner Tried to Commit a Suicide Not Being Taken to Dentist,” published on September 10, 2018[[58]](#footnote-58).

On February 28 the court ruled to return the claim. On March 25 the plaintiff appealed the court decision in the Court of Appeal; on April 25 the appeal was upheld. On June 17 the case was taken into the proceeding of the First Instance Court, the motion to enforce claim provision has been dismissed. The hearing has not been scheduled yet.

**On February 14,** the first hearing on the case of the RA Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan against Boris Tamoyan (the editor of the website Politik.am) was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in the regions of Ararat and Vayots Dzor by the appeal of enforcing compensation of damage caused to dignity and public refutation of information regarded as defamation.

It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of suit are the articles named “The Deputy Prime Minister Avinyan Used Marijuana in the Government” published on October 26, 2018, “Avinyan is Afraid. Marijuana will Cause Him a Lot of Trouble”, published on October 27, “A Surprise is Awaiting Avinyan in the Court. He will have to Undergo Examination”, published on October 29.

Hearings on the case were held on March 25, May 6 and June 14. The delivery of judgment is scheduled on June 3.

**On February 14,** the case investigation of attorney Gevorg Mkrtchyan against the founder of “News.am” LLC news website continued in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan.

It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of suit is the article titled “A Joke in the Chamber of Advocates- 2, Retribution Continues”, published on March 18, 2016. The post informs that attorney Gevorg Mkrtchyan evidently gave false testimony[[59]](#footnote-59) (details in 2016, 2017, 2018 annual reports of CPFE, see in the section of “Reports” of the website [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am))

The next hearing is scheduled on September 10.

4 more lawsuits on the case of the same plaintiff are current in 2019 – cases against “News.am” LLC on the appeal of refuting information regarded as defamation and compensation of non-pecuniary damage.

Hearings on the first of these cases (an article “Victory of Tomfoolery”: Armen Soghomonyan, Beaten by the Officials of Chamber of Advocates, has been Summoned to Interrogation as a Culprit”[[60]](#footnote-60) published on June 23, 2017 at 17:06) were held on February 14 and May 15, the next is scheduled on August 21.

Hearings on the second of these cases (an article “If they think that Atanesyan and Soghomonyan are going to relinquish their appeal, they are absolutely wrong. Lusine Sahakyan”[[61]](#footnote-61) published on 23 June, 2017 at 18:31) were held on March 15, May 20, the next one is scheduled on July 15.

Hearings on the third of these cases (an article “It’s Just a Shame and Open Unlawfulness: Tigran Atanesyan Summoned to Interrogation as Suspect”[[62]](#footnote-62) published on 23 June at 15:36) were held on February 25, March 4, May 21. The next is scheduled on July 8.

Hearings on the fourth of these cases (an article “5 People Charged for the Case of Attack on Atanesyan and Soghomonyan”, a news piece issued by the Investigative Committee, at the end of which the editorial referenced the previous materials [[63]](#footnote-63), published on June 23, 2017, at 17:46) were held on April 16. By the court judgment of Arpil 26 Gevorg Mkrtchyan’s suit was dismissed. The court notes in its conclusion that the expression “on April 27 Tigran Atanesyan and Armen Soghomonyan were attacked by attorney Gevorg Mkrtchyan” in the article titled “5 people were charged for the case of attack on Atanesyan and Soghomonyan” published in [www.news.am](http://www.news.am) news website of the “News.am” LLC on June 26, 2017, is an evaluative judgment, which cannot be estimated as defamation, consequently the appeals are ill-founded and are subject to dismissal. On May 31 the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, the case has been taken into proceedings on June 28.

**On February 15,** the first hearing of citizen Azat Tovmasyan against “ATV” television channel and citizen Sirvard Avoyan by the appeal of recognizing violation of personal and family rights, enforcing refutation of information regarded as defamation and awarding 2 million drams of compensation, was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan. The cause of suit is the accusation made against Azat Tovmasyan during the talk show “Half-Opened Windows” on July 30, 2018. Sirvard Avoyan accuses Azat Tovmasyan of kidnapping his own daughter.[[64]](#footnote-64)

It is worthwhile to remind that the suit was filed on October 3, 2018, but the court returned it on October 17. On November 9 the suit was filed again and the proceedings were taken on the 22th of the same month.

A hearing on this case was also held on My 24, the next is scheduled on September 20.

**On February 15,** the first hearing of citizen Armen Khachatryan against the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Irates* Piruza Meliksetyan was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan with an appeal of public refutation of defamation.

The suit was filed on September 10, 2018, and the cause was an article titled “The Aim is to see a Homosexual Catholicos on Gregory the Enlightener’s Throne, Who will Both Destroy the Church, and Become the End of the Armenian Gene”, published on July 17, 2018 in the website “Irates.am”[[65]](#footnote-65). On September 24 the case was taken into proceedings.

This year hearings on the case were held also on April 10 and May 24, the next one is scheduled on July 9.

**On February 19,** a regular court hearing on the case of “Television and Radio Transmitter Network of Armenia” CJSC against “Ijevan Studio” LLC was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Tavush region. The suit appeals to confiscate 2 million 599 thousand drams of debt from the founder of the television company, which was formed by the sum of money not paid by “Ijevan Studio” for broadcasting television programs. The head of “Ijevan Studio” Naira Khachikyan noted in her conversation with CPFE that she paid all the bills properly until 2015, but since 2016 as a result of the state policy implemented in the sphere, the company had dropped out of the process of digital broadcasting and continued to function in analog signals, losing its audience and advertisers, thus finding itself in a difficult financial situation, thus stopped the payments. The next hearing on the case is scheduled on August 13.

**On February 20,** “Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum-Reservations” SNCO filed a statement of claim in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against *The Armenian Times* daily with an appeal of enforcing a compensation for non-pecuniary damage as a result of publishing information regarded as defamation about an individual and refutation of the information issued. The cause of suit is the article “A Person Beaten, Persecuted and Fired for Giving an Interview. An Employee of 30 Years Loses Shop in Garni”, published on January 17, where the author presented the argument of the head of SNCO and the former head of Museum-Reservation of Garni[[66]](#footnote-66).

On March 4 the court returned the suit for the reason of incomplete documentation. It was filed again on March 21, and on April 1 proceedings were taken. Hearings on the case were held on June 11 and 20. The next one is scheduled on July 23.

**On February 21,** businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a suit in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against the attorney Hovik Arsenyan and the TV channel “Yerkir Media” by the appeal of enforcing refutation and 2 million drams as compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The cause of suit was the question raised by the attorney during the talk show “Yerkri Harts” as to why the former Governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan is not subject to criminal prosecution till now on October 18, 2018. [[67]](#footnote-67)

By the way, Vahe Hakobyan filed suits for the same cause 2 more times – on November 12, 2018 and January 16, 2019, but the court returned them. The third statement of claim filed on March 6 was taken into proceedings. The hearing is scheduled on July 8.

**On February 25,** the Investigative Committee of RA quashed the criminal case initiated for prosecuting the correspondent of Lragir.am Tehmine Yenokyan related to collecting and spreading information about personal life for lack of corpus delicti. On March 22 Tehmine Yenokyan beat the alarm about this matter, reporting some details from the case investigation. [[68]](#footnote-68)

It is worthwhile to remind that on September 11, 2018, Tehmine Yenokyan issued a Facebook post about the fact that the employees of Lydian Armenia company cut the piece of her phone call from the news report, broadcasted live by her colleagues, then published it and wrote offensive notes about the journalist. [[69]](#footnote-69) Tehmine Yenokyan informed the police about it.

This case was investigated from September 2018 to March 2019. The investigative committee of Yeghegnadzor and the Police department of Jermuk interrogated the neighbors of the journalist and received a testimony of confession that Anna Nersisyan had taken photos of the journalist’s house and collected personal data. The photos were handed over through a resident of the same village Hripsime Khachatryan (an employee of Lydian Armenia) to Hovsep Asoyan, who is an employee of Lydian Armenia, too. According to Tehmine Yenokyan, Anna Nersisyan gave a testimony as if she had an aim to show a connection between her and the former head of the Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body Arthur Grigoryan, which could point at Arthur Grigoryan not being objective in regard to Amulsar, so she sent photos of herself and her house to Hovsep Asoyan through Hripsime Khachatryan’s Viber app. Hovsep Asoyan in his turn announced that he was the one managing the page under the fake name of “Vahagn Hovhannisyan”, where he posted the photos and comments.

The initiated case against the defendant Anna Nersisyan as an information collector and the defendant Hovsep Asoyan as an information publisher was quashed on the grounds that the collected and published information was related to Tehmine Yenokyan’s public activities and was not personal. The journalist appealed against this decision accordingly in the Prosecutor’s office, and filed a suit in the court on April 29 with the appeal of enforcing refutation of information regarded as offensive and award of compensation of 1 million drams. On May 15 the statement of claim was accepted into proceedings. The preliminary hearing is scheduled on September 25.

**On February 27,** a regular court hearing of the case, initiated by the head of Aygestan community in Ararat region Sokrat Hovsepyan against the founder of “Armenia” TV Company on the case of Armenia TV CJSC was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan.

The cause of suit is the program “Hertapah Mas”, broadcasted on December 17, 2017, where it was mentioned that mayor Sokrat Hovsepyan, abusing his official position, dismantled and sold the gas pipes, which were village property. The plaintiff appeals enforcing the defendant to public apology for spreading false information smearing honor, dignity and business reputation and a compensation of 3 million drams. Hearings on the case were also held on March 21, April 4, May 29 and June 19. The next hearing is not scheduled yet.

**On February 27,** the hearing on the case of a correspondent from the *Hraparak* daily newspaper Vahe Makaryan against former deputy of the National Assembly Rubik Hakobyan continued in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan.

It is worthwhile to remind that after using violence in the NA hall against the correspondent of the *Hraparak* daily newspaper Vahe Makaryan on December 7, 2016, the National Assembly MP Rubik Hakobyan made offensive remarks against the journalist in various interviews and posts calling him a hooligan, an illiterate and a criminal. Vahe Makaryan filed a suit in the court in relation to the incident by appeal of the protection of honor and dignity (details in the annual reports of CPFE of 2016, 2017, 2018, see the section of “Reports” in the website khosq.am).

The next hearing on this case is scheduled on July 1.

**On March 1,** the journalist from Azatutyun Radio station Gayane Saribekyan posed a question to Gagik Tsarukyan, whether he had been interrogated on the case of “March 1” in 2008. The question aroused Tsarukyan’s indignation. “Little girlie, what do you mean by interrogation? Don’t you feel ashamed? How many times can I explain and say that Tsarukyan has never had any connection with it and can never have? Or you pretend not to understand it. It’s been explained 100 times, and you still ask it for the sake of asking. It’s a shame, I feel sorry for you; a person should think with the brain and decide what question to ask. You’ve come here prepared and have your questions written…. Tsarukyan is pure, a crystal, and not any blackmails, not anything can affect Tsarukyan”[[70]](#footnote-70). Then he continued answering the question of a journalist from Factor.am Mher Arshakyan, whether Prosperous Armenia is responsible for the events of March 1, 2008, in the same style: “Don’t you feel ashamed speaking so ignorantly?”

**On March 4,** Gor Abrahamyan, the advisor to the RA Chief Prosecutor, informed that the media posts about his abduction by the TV host Hamlet Ghushchyan and threats against him have been sent to the Main Department of Criminal Investigation of the RA Police with an assignment of checking the presented circumstances.

On the same day Hamlet Ghushchyan in his conversation with “Hraparak.am”, in answer to the question if it is true that after mentioning the “Lusastgh” vodka on air Aleksanyan’s people beat him up, he said. “What do you mean by beating up? Who is that imbecile to beat me up; they just kidnapped me and took me at night and putting a gun on my forehead told me. “You will say whatever we tell you to”. I have gone through it all, I looked death straight in the eye and I said “Come on, shoot! If you’ve brought me here, then shoot, because God will punish you, even if he doesn’t punish anyone else.”[[71]](#footnote-71)

The Prosecutor’s Office of RA has informed CPFE that a criminal case has been initiated on March 29 in the Main Department of Criminal Investigation of the RA Police on the grounds of features from the 1st section of the articles 38-131 and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd points of the 2nd section of the article 131 (secret or open abduction of a person by means of fraud, abusing trust, violence or threat of using violence (…) by using violence harmful to one’s life or health or by its threat), which has been sent to the Yerevan Investigation Department of the RA Investigative Committee for preliminary investigation and taken into proceedings. A preliminary investigation is being conducted, as well as other necessary investigative and procedural actions are taking place with the aim of clarifying the circumstances of H. Ghushchyan’s announcement and the ones mentioned in the program.

**On March 4** the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan has taken new proceedings on the case of Gagik Tsarukyan against the founder of “Mamul.am” website “Social Media” LLC. For the first time the cause of suit filed on August 13, 2018 were the following articles published in “Mamul.am” website. “Compulsory, but Not Obligatory” “Niva Cars, Work in Stables, Construction Areas, and Gardens: Modern Feudalism in Gas Stations of Tsarukyan’s “Kingdom”[[72]](#footnote-72)” and “Tsarukyan’s Employees were Made to Get Niva Cars at Prices Higher than in the Market by Monthly Payroll Deductions”[[73]](#footnote-73)

The first session was held on April 4. The next one is scheduled on July 15.

**On March 5** a businessman, called Vahe Hakobyan filed a suit in the court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against “Mirror” media club. The plaintiff appealed enforcing the defendant to award 3 million drams as compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, as well as to publish refutation. On March 15 the suit was taken into proceedings. By the way, “Mirror” media club has no information about the suit and in answer to our inquiry the club mentioned that the cause of suit is not clear for them. The plaintiff also refuses to answer our question.

A preliminary court hearing on the case is scheduled on September 5.

**On March 7** the Head of the Standing Committee on Defense and Security Andranik Kocharyan filed a suit for insult in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against the *Hraparak* daily with an appeal to publicly apologize to the plaintiff, to award 1 million drams of compensation and publicly refute information containing defamation.

The cause of suit is the material published in the newspaper and in the eponymous website titled “Who is Andarik Kocharyan in reality?”[[74]](#footnote-74). The author of the article Hasmik Melkonyan wrote that whoever cooperated with Andranik Kocharyan in 1990s either died or lost their memory, and she presented several details from his life in an unfavorable light.

The suit was accepted into proceedings on March 21. On June 11 a preliminary hearing on the case was held, the next one is scheduled on July 1.

**On March 11** a regular court hearing on the case of citizens named Koryun Atoyan, Paruyr Kalantaryan, Lyuba Mehrabyan and Mihrdat Harutyunyan against citizen Norik Sargsyan was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan. “Morning Daily” LLC and “Hraparak Daily” LLC were recognized as the third person in the case.

It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of the suit are the publications by Norik Sargsyan on April 15, 2016 in the *Hraparak* daily, named “An Open Letter to the Rector of the Armenian State University of Economics Mr. K. Atoyan” and the one made in the *Morning* daily on June 15 named “That’s Where the Shoe Pinches”. The plaintiffs found the following remarks in the letter offensive and defaming: “The chair for Economic History and Law, now Law and Political Science of ASUE L. Mehrabyan (he never had a legitimate status in that position) conducted various legal violations, professional discrimination, forced labor and fraud towards me” (details in CPFE annual reports of 2016, 2017, 2018, see the section of “Reports” in the website khosq.am).

The next hearing is scheduled on September 10.

**On March 11** the first hearing on the case of citizen Samvel Hakobyan against “Shamshyan Media” LLC was held in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan with an appeal to refute information regarded as defamation, publicly apologize for the insult and award compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The cause of suit is the post, titled “Emergency in Yerevan: Drunk Driver of Mercedes Introduces Himself as Colonel and Makes Fun of Road Police and Pees. Photo Report, Video”, published in the website “shamshyan.com” on October 5, 2018.

Hearings on the case were held on May 15, June 19, the next one is scheduled on July 12.

**On March 11** Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly Vanadzor Office appealed the decision of Investigative Committee of December 24 on quashing the proceedings of the criminal case initiated by the threats towards the editor-in-chief of “Medialab.am” website. HCAV addressed its appeal to the inspecting prosecutor and the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan. At first, the appeal was dismissed by the prosecutor and then on May 22 by the court.

It is worthwhile to remind that on January 28, 2018 the editorial of Medialab.am website received serious threats on Facebook social network from a user named “Hayk Berman Ohanyan”. The cause was a caricature published in the media outlet on the same day, depicting flowers bought to an amount of 7 million drams by the RA Minister of Defense in December, 2017, and corruption risks in army. The intimidator hinted that Medialab.am could end up as the French magazine “Charlie Hebdo”, which underwent a terrorist attack in January, 2015.

A criminal case about the incident was initiated in the RA Prosecutor’s Office on February 6, 2018 by the features of the 1st section of the article 137 of the Criminal code (threat of killing, causing serious damage to health or destroying property), it was been sent to the RA Investigative Committee to conduct preliminary investigation[[75]](#footnote-75). Marianna Grigoryan’s representative, attorney Arthur Sakunts’ motion to conduct an examination of texts and symbols was granted. Thereafter, HCAV filed a motion to the inspector to involve Facebook user Hayk Ohanyan, bearing the nickname “Hayk Berman Ohanyan” as a case defendant, but the motion was dismissed on December 21.

HCAV is going to appeal the decision of Investigative Committee to quash the proceedings of the criminal case in the Court of Appeal.

**On March 12,** citizen Hayk Mkrtchyan filed a statement of claim in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against “Armnews TV” CJSC, “GALA” television company, “Tert.am” LLC, “Shant” television company, the *Iravunk* newspaper, “Radio Avrorva FM100.7”, “Mirror” club, “Armday.am” LLC, and “Asekose.am” LLC. The cause of suit is the news published in these media outlets about the fact that a 32-year old resident of Nor Nork administrative district Hayk Mkrtchyan paid with counterfeit banknotes. The plaintiff regarded this as defamation and demanded refutation and awarding compensation. On March 14 the statement of claim was returned.

On March 29 Hayk Mkrtchyan filed a statement of claim again in the same court, now against “Armnews TV’’ CJSC with an appeal of refuting factual information regarded as defamation and awarding compensation. On April 15 the statement of claim was returned for the reason of incomplete documents. On May 13 a suit was filed again, on May 22 the claim was taken into proceedings. A hearing has not been scheduled yet.

**On March 12**, businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a lawsuit with the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against Daniel Ioannisyan, the Program Director of the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO. The plaintiff seeks to oblige the respondent to pay 1 million drams in compensation for slander and to apologize.

The cause of lawsuit is the news published on the website “Fip.am” on October 23, 2018, according to which “Vahe Hakobyan, the former Governor of Syunik, founded the “Syunik Development and Investment Fund”, whose funds were raised from Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Plant donations.” According to the source, these funds were directed to organizations and companies, affiliated with Vahe Hakobyan and his wife. Mr. Hakobyan has held senior positions at the Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine for many years and has also been a major shareholder at the “CRONIMET Mining AG”[[76]](#footnote-76).

On March 21, proceedings were brought to the case. The preliminary hearing has been scheduled on July 19.

**On March 15**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan ruled to bring proceedings against “24 News” LLC, the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tigran Seyranyan with regard to the blemish to Ashot Grigoryan’s business reputation. The cause of lawsuit is the video titled “Floater in Yerevan: Who is the “Great Combine” Initiating the Re-launch of Nairit” and posted on the website’s YouTube channel.[[77]](#footnote-77)

The lawsuit was first filed on August 27, 2018, proceedings were brought on September 6, but there was no development. The day of the first hearing has been set on September 3, 2019, after the court ruled to bring proceedings on March 15, 2019.

**On March 16**, the Special Investigation Service filed a suit against the *Zhoghovurd* daily on charges of publishing preliminary investigation secrets[[78]](#footnote-78). Earlier, on March 15, the SIS officially announced that the disclosure of information containing preliminary investigation secrets could lead to criminal liability, hence, requesting the media to refrain from publishing information containing preliminary investigation secrets, “made available” by some unscrupulous participants of the lawsuit as a result of the leak of information. Despite the warning, on March 16, the *Zhoghovurd* daily published an article under the heading “Serzh Sargsyan Would Issue Command 0038. Serzh Sargsyan’s Testimony to ‘March 1’ Case”, which contained excerpts from the records of the interrogation of the RA Third President Serzh Sargsyan as a witness.

Considering that there are crime features in accordance with Article 342 of the RA Criminal Code, the SIS investigator has initiated a criminal case.

The CPFE has been told by the SIS that the case is still in the preliminary investigation stage, with no person involved in it as the accused.

**On March 18**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan held the first hearing of the lawsuit, initiated by citizen Armen Arakelyan against “Asekose AM” LLC for publicly refuting the slanders published on the eponymous website. The cause of lawsuit was the article titled “Moral Character of Monk, Demanding Resignation of Catholicos[[79]](#footnote-79)” and published on August 6, 2018. Additionally, the website expressed readiness to publish the opinion of the other party at the end of the article, but the defrocked Monk Koryun Arakelyan (also known as Armen Arakelyan) preferred to go to court.

The hearing was held on June 17, and the next hearing has been set on October 4.

**On March 18**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan held the first hearing of the lawsuit brought by citizens Marat Grigoryan, Sargis Kelyan, Levon Harutyunyan, Liana Manukyan, Ester Manukyan, Tatevik Boyakhchyan against the *Hraparak* daily with a demand to get a compensation for insult and slander.

The claim was taken to proceeding on December 6, 2018. The cause of the lawsuit was an article titled “Scandal at YSU: New ‘Sashik’ There?” and published on the website as of October 8, 2018. According to a letter, Marat Grigoryan, the Dean of the Faculty of Geography and Geology, is accused of embezzling 50 percent of the salaries of faculty researchers[[80]](#footnote-80). Additionally, the website has also published Marat Grigoryan’s comment regarding the letter, and his comment on the researchers’ refutation of the facts presented in the previous article as of October 19, but that did not satisfy the plaintiffs[[81]](#footnote-81).

The hearing of the lawsuit was held on May 23, but the next hearing has not been scheduled yet. In addition, according to the defendant, the plaintiff has applied to the court requesting to investigate the case without their presence in the future.

# On March 20, the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan held another hearing of the lawsuit of Samvel Harutyunyan, the Chairman of the State Committee of Science of the RA Ministry of Education and Science, against Daniel Ioannisyan, the Program Director of the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO, demanding 2 million drams in compensation for slander.

# It is worthwhile to remind that the cause of lawsuit was the post[[82]](#footnote-82) by Daniel Ioannisyan on his Facebook page as of June 12, 2018, on the basis of which an interview was published on the website “Tert.am” on June 13 (“The Minister of Education and Science Should Also Answer the Question on How His Friendship with Samvel Harutyunyan’s Sons Influenced the Decision to Appoint the Father: D. Ioannisyan”)[[83]](#footnote-83). The “PanArmenian Media Group” CJSC, the owner of the website “Tert.am”, was involved in the case as the third party. On June 26, the court ruled to bring proceedings.

# The hearing of the lawsuit was held on May 16, 2019, and the next hearing is scheduled on August 26.

# On March 22, citizen Emma Kirakosyan filed a lawsuit with the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against “ATV” Television Company LLC, demanding a compensation for defaming the honor and dignity and a refutation of such information. The cause of lawsuit was an episode of the talk show “Half-Opened Windows” as of February 22. The topic is the 20-year-old lawsuit delays, caused by Emma Kirakosyan,[[84]](#footnote-84) , according to the opinions expressed. On April 2, the statement of claim brought proceedings. The hearing has not been scheduled yet.

# On March 27, the General Jurisdiction Court of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Provinces held the first hearing of the lawsuit, brought by Lydian Armenia company against journalist Tehmine Yenokyan.

# The cause of lawsuit is Tehmine Yenokyan’s Facebook livestream in the drinking hall of Jermuk city on August 12, 2018. According to the plaintiff, the journalist used slanderous expressions about the business reputation of the company during the public speech, hence, it demands a compensation of 1 million drams and refutation of the slanderous information in the same place through a public speech: a livestream on Facebook.

# The hearing of the lawsuit was held on June 5, and the next hearing has been scheduled on September 25.

**On April 2**, the first hearing of the lawsuit brought by Alvina Gyulumyan against the “Dareskizb” LLC, the founder of the *Armenian Times* Daily, was held in the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan. The cause of the lawsuit is the article, stating that when Ms. Gyulumyan represented Armenia at the ECHR as a judge, she did her best to delay the hearing of one of the cases regarding the known events in Yerevan on March 1, 2008.

Proceedings were brought to the claim on November 12, 2018. Alvina Gyulumyan demands a refutation by the media without monetary damages.

The hearing of the lawsuit was held on June 7, and the next hearing is scheduled on July 29.

**On April 2**, Sevak Hakobyan, the editor-in-chief of the website “Yerevan.Today”, made a statement, demanding an explanation from the Investigative Committee about what was discovered last year as a result of expert assessment of equipment confiscated from the editorial office on September 17.

It is worthwhile to remind that on September 17, 2018, officers of the 6th Department of the RA Police and the Special Investigation Service conducted searches in the editorial office of the website “Yerevan.Today”. They searched for taps, and also checked the computers to find out how the website received and published the YouTube video link of the tapping of NSS director Arthur Vanetsyan and SIS head Sasun Khachatryan’s phone call two days before it was available online[[85]](#footnote-85). (More details in CPFE 2018 annual report, see the “Reports” section on the website “www.khosq.am”).

On June 17, the website “Yerevan.Today” published an article on the same topic, titled “Hayk Grigoryan, the Chairman of the Investigative Committee, Lies and Avoids Answering”[[86]](#footnote-86). In response, on June 28, the Investigative Committee issued a statement demanding a refutation by the website, as the article “not only presented distorted information on the criminal proceedings of the preliminary investigative body, but also went beyond media ethics and expressed incorrect, inappropriate expressions about the Chairman of the RA Investigative Committee” [[87]](#footnote-87).

**On April 2,** in Yerablur, in response to the journalists’ questions about being released on bail, Vachagan Ghazaryan, the former head of Serzh Sargsyan’s security, said: “Mind your own business, guys, what do you want? I have no time. When the case is over, we will talk[[88]](#footnote-88)“. Later, when one of the journalists asked Serzh Sargsyan whether he was not afraid of being arrested, Serzh Sargsyan sneered, and Vachagan Ghazaryan urged the journalist: “Clear off[[89]](#footnote-89)!”

**On April 2,** in Yerablur, Serzh Sargsyan answered the journalists’ questions mockingly. Later, Mr. Sargsyan’s bodyguards did not let the journalists approach him, and one of the bodyguards rudely pushed one of the journalists’ microphone[[90]](#footnote-90).

**On April 4**, the Secretariat of the European Court of Human Rights informed the CPFE advocate that they had registered the case of journalist Siranuysh Papyan against Vladimir Gasparyan, the Chief of the RA Police, and had given it a number.

It is worthwhile to remind that on April 24, 2016, the Chief of the RA Police, Vladimir Gasparyan, told the journalists at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex that they are “yellowing and fading”. To the observation by Siranuysh Papyan, journalist from the websites “1in.am” and “Lragir.am”, that the police regularly talked about reforms but the public did not see them, he objected saying “and I don’t see a woman in you.”

The journalist filed a lawsuit seeking compensation for the damage to the honor and dignity, as well as for impediments to professional activity and gender discrimination. Siranuysh Papyan’s interests were represented in court by a lawyer at the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression (CPFE) (More details in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 annual reports, see the “Reports” section on the website “www.khosq.am”).

After running out of all instances, Siranush Papyan, with the support of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights on December 29, 2018.

**On April 5**, Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court held the first hearing of the lawsuit brought by citizen Gagik Gevorgyan against Gagik Makaryan, the President of the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia and “H3” TV company. The lawsuit obliges the respondents to refute the slanderous information and pay a compensation of 2 million drams for defamation.

Proceedings were brought to the statement of claim on December 12, 2018. After the April 15 hearing, on April 19, 2019, the case was quashed as the plaintiff had withdrawn the lawsuit.

**On April 8**, PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan, in reference to the transgender’s speech in parliament, criticized it and said that the defect should be kept secret. When Mr. Tsarukyan found the journalist surprised at his statement, he responded in a characteristically disrespectful tone: “Go read, you’ll know what I mean[[91]](#footnote-91).”

**On April 10**, lawyer Georgi Melikyan filed a lawsuit with the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against “Shamshyan Media” LLC and demanded a compensation for non-pecuniary damages caused by the publication of slanderous information about him and a refutation thereof. The cause of lawsuit was the information published on the website “Shamshyan.com” on March 7, which questioned the legality of the plaintiff’s legal activities.

On April 23, the court returned the statement of claim. It was re-filed on May 8 and proceedings were brought on May 21. The hearing has not been scheduled yet.

**On April 15**, Mher Derdzyan, head of the “Under One Roof” housing project, filed a lawsuit with the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against the “Editorial Office of the *Zhoghovurd* Newspaper” LLC and demanded a public apology and compensation of 1.5 million drams for insulting and defaming. The cause of lawsuit was the newspaper’s concern that the project could be a well-thought-out scam[[92]](#footnote-92).

On April 19, proceedings were brought to the statement of claim. The day of the first hearing is scheduled on July 15.

**On April 16**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Shirak Province held the first hearing of the lawsuit of citizen Shoghik Aleksanyan against citizens Mariam Poghosyan, Narine Sargsyan and Asparez Journalists Club to oblige them to refute the slanderous information about her and pay a compensation for damage. The cause of lawsuit is the article, titled “Following Complaints by Gyumri School N18”, published on the website “Asparez.am” on November 6[[93]](#footnote-93). According to Ani Mkrtchyan, the author of the article, the lawsuit is based on Narine Sargsyan’s words, the teacher and deputy principal of the school, published verbatim on the website. Narine Sargsyan, along with her daughter Mariam Poghosyan, claimed in court that they had no objection to the words published in the article, as the journalist quoted their words.

Proceedings were brought on December 26, 2018. The hearing was held also on June 6, 2019, and the next hearing is scheduled on July 4.

**On April 17**, citizen Khachatur Khachatryan filed a lawsuit with the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against “Shamshyan Media” LLC and demanded a public apology and compensation of 1 million drams for the damage to their honor and dignity. The cause of lawsuit was the article, titled “Another Operation Against Drug Addicts in Shirak Province. Two Detainees Recently Granted Amnesty. Deputy Director of RA Ministry of Diaspora SNCO is among Detainees” and published on “Shamshyan.com” website as of March 13[[94]](#footnote-94). On April 29 the court ruled to return the documents to the plaintiff.

**On April 26**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Syunik Province (based in Goris) ruled to apply for a judicial investigation in the civil case of citizen Gayane Avagyan against citizen Hovakim Karapetyan (the talk show “Half-Opened Windows” on “ATV” is recognized as the third party).

The cause of lawsuit is the information shared during an episode of the above-mentioned talk show on May 29, 2017. In particular, it was mentioned that “when Gayane Avagyan married Artur Karapetyan, she was pregnant and did abortion. He had sex with another man in the presence of the child.” The plaintiff demands to refute the slanderous information, publicly apologize and pay 800.000 drams in compensation.

The case was transferred from Kapan to Goris seat of the General Jurisdiction Court of Syunik Province on August 27, 2018.

This year the hearing was held on May 22, and the claim was partially settled by the decision of June 4. Hovakim Karapetyan was obliged to refute the following inaccurate opinion about Gayane Avagyan, expressed during the episode of the talk show: “She came to our house being a month pregnant.” For the rest, the claim was dismissed.

**On May 6**, the “Armenian Progressive Youth” NGO filed a lawsuit against Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, the editor-in-chief of the website “BlogNews.am”, and “SHARK” LLC, the founder of “5 TV”, and demanded to refute the slanderous statement, apologize for the insult and pay a compensation as a means of defending against defamation and blemish to business reputation. On May 17, proceedings were brought to the statement of claim.

According to the information provided by the “Armenian Progressive Youth” NGO, the cause of lawsuit was an episode of the TV show “Face to Face” as of April 5, where Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, the editor-in-chief of the website “BlogNews.am”, stated that the “Armenian Progressive Youth” NGO carried out LGBT propaganda in a Kotayk province school[[95]](#footnote-95).

The following day, the NGO posted on its Facebook page a “Demand for Refutation” addressed at Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan. On April 12, a video was posted on “ADEKVAD” Facebook page, titled “Apology to All Pro-gay, Pro-Azerbaijani “Walkerasts”[[96]](#footnote-96). In the video, Arthur Danielyan, the co-author of #SutNikol (#FakeNikol) initiative, and Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan posted a material as a “refutation”, which was full of hate speech and abusive expressions. Since then, there have been two more similar “refutations” addressed at Grigor Yeritsyan, the NGO President, who is also a member of the Yerevan Council of Elders from the “My Step Alliance” faction.

**On May 14**, Armen Tavadyan, the owner of “5 TV”, showed disrespect in a conversation with “Civilnet.am” journalist Gevorg Tosunyan. In particular, the businessman did not like the journalist’s questions about being summoned and interrogated by the Police in connection with an assault on activist Varges Gaspari: “Who are you? An investigator? You’re too interested!” [[97]](#footnote-97)

**On May 15**, the wife of Armen Harutyunyan, who is a candidate for rector at Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinema, called the editorial office of the news website “Aravot.am” and demanded them to reveal the source of the news about her husband, threatening to turn to the police[[98]](#footnote-98).

**On May 15**, Andrey Ghukasyan, the Governor of Lori, filed a lawsuit against “MIG” TV journalist Karine Vanesyan for insulting him and demanded that she be obliged in the same way to apologize to the plaintiff. The summons sent to the journalist did not specify particularly which of journalist’s posts caused the lawsuit. On her part, the journalist said that she did not insult the governor in any of her social media posts, she merely expressed her opinion about the governor’s activities. On May 17, proceedings were brought to the statement of claim.

**On May 16**, Alexander Sargsyan, former MP and the brother of the third RA President Serzh Sargsyan, showed disrespect for Marine Khachatryan, a journalist at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, outside the court, and in response to her attempt to ask a question he shouted at her: “Go away” [[99]](#footnote-99).

**On May 16**, citizen Lilit Martirosyan filed a lawsuit with the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against “Tesaket” LLC, demanding to oblige the website “Irates.am” (belonging to “Tesaket” LLC) to publicly apologize for the offensive expressions and pay 1 million drams in compensation. The cause of lawsuit was the article titled “Sodomite Directly Talked to Public from National Assembly Rostrum” and published on the website on April 9.[[100]](#footnote-100) On June 3, proceedings were brought to the case.

**On May 18**, the Investigative Committee suspended for the second time the criminal case brought by Daniel Ioannisyan, the Program Director of the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO, against the website “Iravunk.com” for illegally collecting personal and family-related secret information and disseminating it through the media.

It is worthwhile to remind that on March 25, 2017, the website “Iravunk.com” published an article, titled “Remarkable Details from the Biography of Civil Activist Daniel Ioannisyan”, which contained data on Daniel Ioannisyan’s personal life and his family, exclusively known by the RA Police and the Investigative Committee. The criminal case initiated on the basis of Ioannisyan’s report was suspended. Daniel Ioannisyan applied to the RA Prosecutor General’s Office and the Court for appealing the decision of the Investigative Committee to suspend the criminal case, but he was dismissed by both instances, after which he appealed to the higher court against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction, which again dismissed him. The plaintiff filed a complaint with the Court of Cassation and at the same time filed a motion with the Investigative Committee to carry out additional criminal procedures. The Investigative Committee granted the motion and carried out additional criminal procedures. On May 20, the plaintiff filed a complaint against the investigator’s inaction.

**On May 21,** politician Rubik Hakobyan during the “Public Discussion” program on Armenian Public TV Channel used insulting language while talking to the journalist, program’s anchor Petros Khazaryan accusing him of subservience. The former also reproached him for the way of conducting the program trying to teach him “lessons”[[101]](#footnote-101).

**On May 22**, some of the students at Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography restricted the mobility of journalists obstructing their legal professional activity during the protests against the re-election of the rector.

**On May 24**, to the question by Artak Khulyan, a journalist from Radio Liberty, “Will there be any more resignations from Supreme Judicial Council, as it seems this is the prevailing mood”, Gevorg Danielyan, Acting Head of the Supreme Judicial Council, responded in a rude manner demonstrating disrespect for the journalist. “You are not the one to be reported on such matters. Don’t you deem too highly of yourself thinking that probable scenarios should be shared with you? It doesn’t concern journalists, and if there is some probable scenario, nobody will ask you about it, they will just let you know”, said Gevorg Danielyan[[102]](#footnote-102).

**On May 28**, in Sardarapat during the talk with journalists Arthur Khachatryan, Member of ARF Armenia Supreme Body, took an impolite tone with journalists. In particular, to the question of Hripsime Dzebedzyan, a journalist from Aravot.am, “Have the elections under the rule of RPA passed with some violations, in your opinion…? Or there have been some violations which haven’t had an impact…”, then to the notice of another journalist, “Being against, ARF is always for”, Arthur Khachatryan responded, “You’re lying. Who said that there have always been things of that kind?[[103]](#footnote-103)”

**On May 29**, Gagik Tsarukyan, PAP leader, in reply to the statement of one of the journalists that people are not sure that Tsarukyan pays all the taxes, resented, “Those who say so, are evil and envious. People who are not able to create are always jealous of those who are able to do so. Tsarukyan has been checked for several years, but those who should be checked, are not, you see, open your eyes. Having taken some bribe and having practiced the questions, you ask me… if Tsarukyan didn’t pay the taxes, he would have been beheaded”. The journalists asked him who had been given money for asking such questions. Why was he blaming them? He, in turn, pointing at the journalist from Aravot.am says, “This girl”. He also added, “I’ll hold you accountable for such things, my dear girl. Do you have that moral right to tell me that?[[104]](#footnote-104)”

**On May 29**, David Adyan, Head of the Department for Control over Social Sphere of RA State Control Service, filed a lawsuit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the founder and publisher of the *Zhamanak*, “Start Media Centre” LLC. The reason for the lawsuit was an article which came out in the issue of May 9 under the heading, “The “old bird” of Old and New Armenia”[[105]](#footnote-105). The plaintiff demands refutation of the article’s information, a public apology and compensation for defamation amounting to 2 mln AMD, and compensation for the hurled insult amounting to 1 mln AMD. A proceeding was taken based on the claim on June 11.

**On May 30**, Lara Aharonyan, Head of “Women’s Resource Center” NGO laid a claim to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Mirror” club and “Live News Media” LLC demanding compensation for the inflicted harm on name and dignity amounting to 2 mln AMD. The reason for the lawsuit was the video released on April 24 under the heading “Lara Aharonyan, Member of Board of Trustees of Civil Contract Engaged in Child Perversion: Hayk Ayvazyan” in which Hayk Ayvazyan, one of the guests of “Mirror” club assessed Aharonyan’s actvity. The video came out on Hayeli.am and Livenews.am. Hayk Ayvazyan’s view on Lara Aharonyan’s being engaged in propaganda of perversion, including children as well, according to the plaintiff is disinformation and contains defamation which blemishes Lara Aharonyan’s name and dignity.

The statement of the claim, dated May 31, was returned to be amended. It was re-filed on June 24 and proceedings were taken on June 28.

**On May 31**, PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan during the interview with the journalists repeated that Hripsime Dzebedzyan, journalist from Aravot.am would be accountable for the questions she asked him (see May 29). He also suggested those NGOs which made an announcement concerning the previous case, first of all, to call the journalists to order. “To my surpise, I was able to answer her so politely”, said Tsarukyan[[106]](#footnote-106).

**On May 31**, citizen Babken Khazaryan filed a suit against Daniel Ioannisyan, coordinator of “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO with an appeal to refute the information and award a compensation. Proceeding was taken based on the claim on June 10.

The reason for the lawsuit was the announcement made by Daniel Ionnaisyan at Media Centre, on May 22 in which he accused Arthur Vanetsyan, Head of National Security Service of having close ties with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan famous by the nickname “Vstrechi Aper” and Babken Khazaryan nicknamed “Tokhmakhi Babo” mentioning them as “criminal personas”[[107]](#footnote-107).

The representatives of the plaintiff interceded the court for providing measures for the lawsuit since the information targeted at the defamation of name and dignity is widespread in the Media, and having been loaded on the Internet, they proceed to be accessible for wide strata of the society. On June 10, the Court rejected the motion for enactment on securing the claim.

**On June 3**, the participants of “VETO” movement, engaged in the protest, used some insulting words, addressed at Diana Davtyan, correspondent from 24News[[108]](#footnote-108). One of them even threatened, “Be cautious when coming out of the editorial office”. According to Diana Davtyan, some forty minutes after the incident a young man was constantly taking photos of her and her colleague, but he was evidently not a journalist, he had no badge on him. During the coverage of the protest, Narek Galstyan, the editor of the Website instructed the journalist and the operator to halt their activity and called them to the editorial office, which was followed by Diana Davtyan’s dismissal[[109]](#footnote-109). The editor then said that his conduct was motivated by the fact that during her activity the journalist behaved like an activist. Diana Davtyan, in turn, insisted that her dismissal was motivated by the friendly relations between the editor and the head of “VETO”.

**On June 3**, Alina Nikoghosyan, the RA Press Secretary of the Ministry of Health filed a suit against the *Hraparak* newspaper, demanding a public apology and 1 mln AMD as a compensation. The reason was the article published on Hraparak.am, May 9, “The Ministry of Health Disguises the Case and Takes “Lfik” under its Auspices”[[110]](#footnote-110). According to the plaintiff, the article contains insulting words addressed to her. On June 13 the claim was taken to proceeding.

**On June 4**, to the question of accredited in the NA journalists whether his guards participated in the “March 1” events, PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan responded, “I have said it hundreds of times, I have already answered those questions and that’s enough… I have nothing to add”. In response to the question regarding his support for RA Second President Robert Kocharyan, he said, “Stop your provocations…”[[111]](#footnote-111).

**On June 6,** Arshak Hakobyan, Head of the Former RA Chief Police Officer’s bodyguard squad filed a suit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Daniel Ionnaisyan, program coordinator at the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO demanding refutation of defaming information and a compensation. The reason for the suit was the announcement made by Daniel Ionnisyan in Media Center on May 22 in which he accused Arthur Vanetsyan, head of National Security Service of having close ties with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan famous by the nickname “Vstrechi Aper” and Babken Khazaryan nicknamed “Tokhmakhi Babo” finding them “criminal personas”[[112]](#footnote-112). On June 20 the Court returned the statement of the claim.

**On June 10**, Citizen Yura Adyan filed a claim to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Start Media Center” LLC demanding refutation of slander and 2 mln AMD as a compensation. The reason for the suit was the article published in the *Zhamanak* under the heading of “The “old bird” of Old and New Armenia”. The plaintiff demands refutation of the information that he is the uncle of State Control Service officials – the Adyans, that he was considered an “old bird” in sales under the previous authorities, that he had taken part in such tenders which he was not specialized in, and having won the tender, he sold the contract to another company. On June 14 the claim was taken to proceeding.

**On June 11**, Andrey Ghukasyan, Governor of Lori Region, called those who were criticizing his activity in his Facebook post as “Media serving evil spirits”. He, in particular, used insulting words addressed to Narine Avetisyan, Editor-in-Chief from “Lori TV” who demanded an explanation for the Governor’s deed of financially rewarding himself[[113]](#footnote-113).

**On June 12**, Citizen Yura Adyan filed a suit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Aysor.am demanding refutation of slander and compensation in the amount of 2 mln AMD. The reason was an article published in the *Zhamanak* newspaper on May 9 under the heading “The “old bird” of Old and New Armenia”, reprinted by the Website. The claim isn’t yet taken to proceeding but Aysor.am has already published the demanded refutation[[114]](#footnote-114). On the same day, June 12, the above-mentioned citizen with the same content and the same claim filed 2 more suits against News.am LLC and Mitk.am LLC. The reason for the suits is the same. For the first case the claim has not yet been taken to proceedings, the second claim was returned on June 24 to be amended.

**On June 13**, Hayk Sargsyan, NA deputy, filed a suit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Iravunq Media” LLC demanding reimbursement for the inflicted harm to his honor, dignity and good reputation via defamation and insult. The reason for the suit was an article, published in the *Iravunq* newspaper under the heading, “Pashinyan’s Guard, an MP now: “A two-storey house is not a castle for me, it’s just a regular house”[[115]](#footnote-115). On June 25 the claim was taken to proceeding.

**On June 17**, in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction a regular trial on the case of journalist Arthur Hovhannisyan against the Ministry of Health of RA (third person “Morning” newspaper LLC) took place.

It is worthwhile to remind that the reason for the suit filed to Court on January 11, 2018 was an article published in the official website of the Ministry of Health – moh.am, “No Need to Rely on a Lie: No Attempts of Vaccinations at Aygabats Community School, Shirak Region”[[116]](#footnote-116). On December 11, 2017 Arthur Hovhannisyan, acting as a journalist, gave an interview in “Noyyan Tapan” Media Centre on the information he had received the day before, according to which the attempt of vaccinating 13-year-old girls with “Gardasil” failed at Aygabats village school, Shirak Region: the parents “banished” the medical workers. On the same day the Ministry of Health of RA published the above-mentioned information on its official website. In plaintiff’s opinion, those publications contain insult and defamation addressed to him. The next trial is appointed on October 9.

**On June 18**, in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Region the first hearing of the case brought by citizens Susanna Minasyan and Arkadi Boyadzyan against “ATV” LLC demanding 2 mln AMD as a compensation for infringing on the right to private and family life. The reason for it was the regular episode of the talk show “Half-Opened Windows” released on October 1, 2018 which was about flat division dispute between neighbors[[117]](#footnote-117). The next hearing is scheduled on September 10.

**On June 19**, Hayk Sargsyan, NA deputy, filed a suit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Andradardz Press Club NGO demanding compensation for inflicting harm to the honor, dignity and good reputation. The reason for the suit was an article, published in Newspress.am, “Who Presented Hayk Sargsyan with an Expensive Car and for What?”[[118]](#footnote-118)

On June 28 the claim was taken to proceeding.

**On June 21**, Hayk Sargsyan, NA deputy, filed the second lawsuit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Andradardz Press Club NGO, demanding compensation for harming honor, dignity and good reputation. The reason for the suit was the article, published on Newspress.am “Another Expensive Gift: 20-million-AMD Phone Number for Hayk Sargsyan”[[119]](#footnote-119). On June 28, the claim was taken to proceeding.

On the same day Hayk Sargsyan filed 3 more suits to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “Hraparak” LLC/ Hraparak.am demanding compensation for the harm to the honor, dignity and good reputation.

The reason for the suits against “Hraparak”, as mentioned above, was the 22 posts against him and its dissemination via satellites, particularly the published photos in which the deputy took girls to Baghramyan 26[[120]](#footnote-120).

One of the articles, titled “A New Schmeiss in the Parliament” was mentioned, too[[121]](#footnote-121). According to the website, “Hayk Sargsyan is the most odious MP, there are some suspicions that he has played a prominent part in the criminal case on hemodialysis revealed by the State Control Service”. In another article the website stated that Hayk Sargsyan “arranged a debauch” on an airplane on a Yerevan-Moscow flight[[122]](#footnote-122).

The main demand in all three suits is to enforce the defendant to apologize publicly and publish the court ruling in the same newspaper and website, in addition, to pay 500000 AMD compensation for defamation and 300000 AMD for insult in the first case, to pay 300000 AMD for defamation and 300000 AMD for insult in the second case, to pay 600000 AMD for defamation and 300000 AMD for insult in the third case. On June 28 the claims were taken to proceeding.

**On June 19**, PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan once again stood out in the Parliament with his indecent behavior towards journalists. To the question asked by Ruzanna Stepanyan, correspondent of “Liberty” radio station, concerning compliance with the law, he got irritated and responded in an aggressive manner, “You and your entire family should comply with law”[[123]](#footnote-123). Afterwards using his special word-stock Tsarukyan accused the journalist and her colleagues of running some errands and of “talking nonsense”. CPFE once again made an announcement to partners demanding Gagik Tsarukyan’s public apology to those journalists whom he has offended and some guarantee that such behavior will not recur in the years to come. It demanded from the leadership of the NA to consider Gagik Tsarukyan’s behavior in the Parliament towards accredited journalists and assess it in terms of ethics required of deputies[[124]](#footnote-124).

**On June 26**, Anna Karapetyan, MP of the NA coalition “My Step”, was reluctant to answer the questions of journalists making discontented faces[[125]](#footnote-125). When a journalist asked who was supposed to be the Chair of the Constitutional Court: Vahe Grigoryan or Hrayr Tovmasyan, Karapetyan answered with some disdain, “As I have already touched upon that issue, I’m not going to talk about it once again…”. Following publications come to prove that her disdainful conduct towards journalists is enduring[[126]](#footnote-126).

1. ***Violations of the right of receiving and disseminating information***

*During the first half of 2019 CPFE recorded 66 cases when the right to receive and disseminate information was violated, 51 of which in the first quarter, 15 in the second quarter of the year. Only in two cases were claims filed to the Court.*

*The number of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information exceeds that of the previous year by 40.*

*The cases recorded within the monitoring period, as well as new and further developments of the previously recorded cases are introduced below in chronological order.*

**On January 14**, in the RA Administrative Court a regular hearing on the case brought by Levon Barseghyan, Council Chairman of Asparez Journalists Club, against Grigor Grigoryan, director of “The History Museum of Armenia” State Non-Commercial Organization took place.

We should remind that on May 10, 2017, Levon Barseghyan turned to Grigor Grigoryan with a written inquiry trying to receive information about the museum. Yet, the director of the State Non-Commercial Organization has not responded to the inquiry, breaking the RA *Law on the Freedom of Information”* (see the annual reports of CPFE 2017-2018, [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am), “Reports”). Court hearings of this case took place on April 9, June 20, the next one is appointed on October 16.

**On January 14**, Freedom of Information Center turned to State Control Service, asking them to provide the staff list of the organization and the source of its publication. The received answer was incomplete.

**On January 14**, Asparez.am sent an inquiry to Radik Martirosyan, President of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, asking to provide information on the budget of the National Academy of Sciences 2017-2018, staff list, procurement procedures and business trips. National Academy of Sciences didn’t meet the requirement of the RA *Law on Freedom of Information* and did not provide the required information even within 30 days. In response to the additional inquiries and citations of the law by Ani Mkrtchyan, a correspondent of Asparez.am Hrant Matevosyan, an academician and the secretary of the National Academy of Sciences, responded, “Don’t irritate me”[[127]](#footnote-127). Four days after publishing the news, on March 13, the Editorial Office received the response to their inquiries from the National Academy of Sciences, which was, in fact, unsatisfactory[[128]](#footnote-128).

**On January 17**, Panorama.am, a news website, sent an inquiry to the RA Government with the following content “Is the Government Prone to Undertake Any Action to Save the House-Monument of Alexander Mantashev in Tbilisi?”[[129]](#footnote-129)

On January 25, the Government answered that providing the required information entailed additional work so that the answer would be available within 30 days. On February 5, the website received an answer which was, per se, incomplete and did not contain any clear and definite data.

**On January 18**, the Freedom of Information Center turned to the Ministry of Justice of the RA asking when the hearing of the Ministry Committee about removing Mher Yenoqyan’s penalty took place, and asking to provide a copy of the conclusion of the above-mentioned hearing. The answer was overdue, violating the *Law on Freedom of Information* on February 1.

**On January 18**, the Freedom of Information Center turned to the Ministry of Nature Protection asking to provide the nominal list of the minister’s aides and advisors for December 1. The answer was overdue and was received on January 29.

**On January 21**, the Freedom of Information Center turned to the Municipality of Yerevan, asking to provide the list of employees rewarded by the mayor in September-October 2018, in addition designating the amount of the reward payment. The Municipality answered on the same day, referring to its Facebook page which is a violation to the RA *Law on Freedom of Information*. Firstly, the answer was incomplete, besides, if the information was refused to be provided, the grounds for such refusal should be substantiated, and the concrete provision of the law should be referred to.

On January 30, the Freedom of Information Center sent inquiries of the same kind to the heads of Administrative Districts of Yerevan: Nubarashen, Erebuni, Norq Marash, Ajapnyak, Arabkir, Kanaker-Zeytun, Nor Norq, Avan, Malatia-Sebastia, and Shengavit.

On February 13, the Municipality of Yerevan responded to all these letters with some delay, providing the staff list of both Municipality and Administrative Districts, having mentioned the amount of the fee as well.

The Freedom of Information Center sent some inquiries about the reward bonuses on January 29 to the Ministries of Finance; Defense; Health; Education and Science; Justice; Emergency Situations; Territorial Administration and Development; Transport, Communication and Information Technologies; Labor and Social Affairs; Economic Development and Investments; Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources; Nature Protection and to the Office of Human Rights Defender, and to the Fund for Agricultural Development on February 7. The Freedom of Information Center asked to provide the list of the rewarded employees in December 2016, 2017, 2018 and the amount of the bonus. Answers to 9 out of the asked **14** questions were incomplete, 2 of them were received with a 5-day delay according to the RA *Law on Freedom of Information*, and 3 of the inquiries were not answered at all with ill-founded excuses or tacit refusal.

On January 30, the Freedom of Information Center also applied to the State Control Service and “Gyumri Maternity Hospital” CJSC with the same inquiry in relation to the third quarter of 2018. In both cases the responses arrived with some delay from the date prescribed by the law.

**On January 22,** Hasmik Hambardzumyan, a journalist from “Aysor.am”, sent an inquiry to Eduard Aghajanyan, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister asking to provide information about the reasons for the dismissal of Arthur Grigoryan, former head of the Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body. The official response to the inquiry was provided on the next day on behalf of the acting Head of Information and Public Relations Department, however, with the following content: “Artur Grigoryan was dismissed from his office under the Prime Minister’s decision.”[[130]](#footnote-130) According to the journalist, the answer is incomplete.

**On January 23,** the hearing on the administrative case brought by Daniel Ioannisyan against Yerevan Municipality on obliging to provide information was quashed.

It is worthwhile to remind that on March 2, 2018, Daniel Ioannisyan filed a suit to the RA Administrative Court against Yerevan Municipality with a claim of obliging to provide information about the number of boys and girls born in Yerevan maternity hospitals in January 2018.

According to the court, the defendant is not in possession of that information; therefore, the claim is subject to rejection. The case was transferred to the court archive.

**On January 23,** the Freedom of Information Center at the request of Naira Hovhannisyan, a neonatologist of “Gyumri Maternity Hospital” CJSC, sent an inquiry to Gyumri Maternity Hospital asking for information about the grounds of unpaid salaries and terms of provision. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On January 24,** the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO filed a suit to the Court of Appeal, appealing the decision of the Administrative Court, dated December 12, 2018, according to which the NGO’s claim against Yerevan Municipality was partially sustained.

It is worthwhile to remind that օn January 8, 2018, the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO filed a suit to the Administrative Court against Yerevan Municipality with a claim to receive a complete reply to the written inquiries. The NGO asked to provide information on whether the External Design and Advertisement Department of Yerevan Municipality viewed the dashboards with the content “Called and Conscripted for One Purpose” as social advertisement: if so, is it based on a certain document? Yerevan Municipality gave an incomplete answer to the written inquiry.

On February 12, the case was taken to proceeding. The court hearing is scheduled on January 30, 2020.

**On January 25,** Seda Ghukasyan, a journalist from “Hetq.am” reported that in response to the inquiry of the editorial office, the RA Minister of Defense Davit Tonoyan’s office verbally informed that the Minister was not against taking any photographs in his office, and after a month of negotiations one of the staff members informed that the Minister was against. According to the journalist, it took the Ministry an additional 30-day period to respond positively or negatively to the claim of taking photographs.[[131]](#footnote-131) It is worthwhile to remind that the *Law on Freedom of Information* defines that additional time can be required only if additional work is needed to provide the information required.

**On February 6**, according to the decision of the RA Administrative Court the lawsuit of the “Union of informed citizens” NGO against the RA State Committee of Science on obliging to action was rejected.

It is worthwhile to remind that this lawsuit was taken to proceedings on August 20, 2018. The plaintiff required to oblige the Committee to provide information – the list of confidential information items of the given agency subject to classification, with the exception of points containing state or official secrets - within 5 days requested by the written inquiry submitted by Daniel Ioannisyan, NGO program director, on July 2. The Court justified the rejection by the fact that the Committee was not in possession of the requested information. The case was transferred to the court archive.

**On February 20,** “Aravot.am” website sent a written inquiry to the RA Ministry of Education and Science asking for Arayik Harutyunyan’s comment on whether he offered YSU Rector to resign and whether Aram Simonyan was targeted for being a RPA member as claimed by the latter.[[132]](#footnote-132) On the same day, the Ministry of Education and Science verbally responded to “Aravot.am” informing that the Minister was in Georgia and would respond the inquiry after return. However, after his return, the Minister referred to the situation at YSU and specifically the tensions between him and YSU rector through a livestream on Facebook. Gohar Hakobyan, a journalist from “Aravot.am” website, expressed her dissatisfaction as follows: “What is the point of getting a written response to an inquiry if the Minister has given a public response to the question, thus violating our right to material exclusivity? By the way, at the press conferences held at the Ministry of Education and Science, the Minister lately started avoiding answering off-topic questions and leaving immediately after the press conference saying that he would not answer any individual questions.”

**On February 20,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the National Security Service requesting the list of documents in possession of the NSS staff which were declassified during 2018. The NSS gave an incomplete response to the inquiry on February 26. On March 1, FIC sent the second inquiry to NSS, however the provision of information on the ground of preliminary investigation and personal data was rejected, which FIC considers to be ill-founded.

On the same day, February 20, FIC sent a similar inquiry to the RA Police getting an incomplete response on February 22. On March 1, FIC sent the second inquiry which received no response. On April 25, FIC sent its third inquiry with the same request. The inquiry did not get any response, and FIC considered it as a rejection.

On the same day, February 20, FIC sent an inquiry about the declassification of the documents to the RA Prime Minister’s Office, Ministry of Energy Infrastructure and Natural Resources, and Ministry of Defense. The responses to the first two inquiries were received with the violation of the 5-day period provision, defined by the *Law on Freedom of Information”*, while the response to the third inquiry was incomplete.

**On February 25,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to “My Step Foundation,” asking to provide the list of all donors - legal entities and individuals and the size of their donations. The response was received with delay, on March 28.

**On February 25,** “Panorama.am” website sent a written inquiry to “My Step Foundation” referring to the received donations and incurred expenses. The Foundation responded on March 4 with a violation of the 5-day period prescribed by the Law, while the provided information, according to the editorial office, was incomplete.[[133]](#footnote-133)

**On February 28,** at the request of citizen Silva Balayan, the FIC applied to the Agency for State Registration of Legal Entities at the RA Ministry of Justice for receiving information on the office of “Judicial Acts Compulsory Enforcement Service of the RA Ministry of Justice”. The response was received with delay, on March 11.

**On March 1,** Lilit Hovhannisyan, journalist from “24news.am”, sent a written inquiry to the State Revenue Committee asking to provide information on imports and received a response only on April 11, which states that the State Revenue Committee violated the 5-day period prescribed by the *Law on Freedom of Information*. Since she had a deadline for publishing the article, the journalist turned to the Freedom of Information Center, which applied to the SRC on its own behalf and received a response within a 5-day period.

**On March 1,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the “Forensic Medical Scientific-Research Center” SNCO of the Ministry of Health asking to provide the list of the staff and the list of staff members employed in Shirak Region Department of Forensic Medical Examinations for the third quarter of 2014. The response was incomplete.

**On March 13,** Freedom of Information Center applied to the State Revenue Committee asking to provide the list of companies importing petrol, sugar, butter, wheat, flour and bananas for 2016, 2017, 2018. The response was received with delay, on March 25.

**On March 15,** Narek Kirakosyan, a journalist from “Factor.am” sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense asking to provide information on the organization carrying out cleaning services in the MoD administrative building. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On March 19,** Angela Stepanyan, a correspondent from Armavir “ALT” TV Company, sent a written inquiry to the State Water Committee asking to provide information on irrigation water losses in the territory of Armenia for 2012-2018. The inquiry was answered on April 4, and the journalist informed the CPFE: “We got vague information and nothing about the data requested.”

**On March 20,** “Yerkir.am” news website sent an inquiry to the Department of Information and Public Relations of the RA Prime Minister’s Office asking for Nikol Pashinyan’s position about the analyses of the Government Program and Government Structural Reform Plan presented by ARF. The editorial office received the answer with a 20-day delay, on April 10, with the following statement: “The Government implements a program that received the people’s vote and was approved by the National Assembly on December 8, 2018.” According to the editor of the website, the government has a biased attitude towards their media outlet.

**On March 29,** at the request of “ArmDaily.am” online periodical, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Department of Information and Public Relations of the National Assembly to clarify the amount of money allocated from the RA State budget for travel, accommodation and daily allowance for each member of the delegation to the Federal Republic of Germany. The answer was incomplete.

**On April 2,** Freedom of Information Center applied to the National Assembly requesting to provide information about the number of reduced service cars, drivers and the number of unused cars. FIC applied to the Ministry of Emergency Situations with the same request. The responses to both were sent with delay on April 15.

**On April 12**, Ani Mkrtchyan, a journalist from “Asparez.am” website filed a suit to the RA Administrative Court against Shoghik Aleksanyan, the headmaster of “Gyumri Secondary School N18” SNCO with a claim of obliging to answer the inquiry[[134]](#footnote-134). On April 19, a decision was made to move the case to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Region (seat in Gyumri) and took proceedings on May 8.

**On April 15,** Misak Babajanyan, a lawyer from “TK and Partners” CJSC sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Justice requesting to provide information on the selection of an external legal advisor to protect the rights and legitimate interests of the Republic of Armenia in the International Court of Arbitration related to the case of “Lydian U.K. Corporation Limited” and “Lydian Canada Venture Corporation”. In response to the inquiry, the Ministry sent an official letter on April 26, which did not provide the requested information. On May 6 and then on May 21, the Freedom of Information Center sent the same inquiry to the RA Ministry of Justice requesting to provide that information. According to the FIC, the response was ill-founded, as the same person had responded to both inquiry-complaints, thus violating the law.

**On April 17,** the “Investigative Journalists” NGO filed a lawsuit to the Administrative Court against Davit Ananyan, Head of the RA State Revenue Committee, to oblige him to provide information. In particular, the NGO requested to provide the copies of all contracts signed with Taiwanese “Mitac Information Technology” and Chinese “Pax Technology” companies, and in case the contracts contain trade secrets, to provide the copies by hiding the lines containing sensitive information. The SRC asked the Administrative Court to dismiss the lawsuit, since measures were taken towards declassifying secret Government decrees, however, on April 23, the lawsuit was taken to proceeding.

The case hearings were held on May 29 and June 18. The court obliged the SRC to provide the secret Government decree. The next hearing is scheduled on July 17.

**On May 2,** the Freedom of Information Center received a tax invoice from the Departmental Buildings Maintenance and Operation CJSC, which apart from a monthly payment prescribed in the contract, contained also unwritten penalties in the amount of 19016 AMD for 2018. On this occasion, FIC applied to Yerevan Municipality asking to disclose the penalties specified in the tax account as well as to provide information on why penalty invoice for 2018 was submitted to FIC only in 2019. FIC also requested to provide a statement of the grounds on which penalties were applied for delaying payment for several months since FIC had not received the penalty invoice by then. The inquiry remained unanswered.

**On May 7,** the RA Administrative Court dismissed the lawsuit of the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO against Ashot Manukyan, Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources with a claim, obliging to provide information.

It is worthwhile to remind that on March 23, 2018, the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO filed a suit against the Minister, as the Ministry had refused to provide the requested information on the grounds of confidentiality.

The court, considering that after the submission of the lawsuit, the requested information was provided to the plaintiff by the defendant, ruled that the dispute was resolved and the proceedings were subject to dismissal.

**On May 8,** “Civilnet.am” news website sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense asking to provide the list of staff and non-staff advisors and the dates of their appointment. On May 23, the Ministry of Defense, referring to the *Law on State and Official Secrets*, rejected the provision of the requested information. The law, however, does not stipulate that the number of MoD advisors is confidential. However, the Ministry did not provide this information either. The MoD also referred to the 1998 Government Decree (Clause 8 of the Decree №173) which contains information about the deployment, organizational structure and the confidentiality of the number of troops but it does not prohibit the provision of information about the MoD advisors.

**On May 16,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Nature Protection requesting information about the number of official websites created or redesigned for the Department for 2014-2019 and the amount of money spent for this purpose, broken down by years, as well as the sources of received funding. The answer was incomplete.

On the same day, FIC sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the same request and received delayed responses: on June 5 from the Ministry of Finance and on May 27 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On May 20, FIC applied to the State Revenue Committee with the same request. The SRC also answered with delay, on June 14.

**On May 21,** a regular court hearing on the case brought by the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO against Road Police with a claim for information.

It is worthwhile to remind that on June 1, 2017, the “Union of Informed Citizens” NGO sent an inquiry to the Road Police asking to provide information about the percentage of cars with right-hand drive registered in the RA ․ The provision of such information was rejected on the grounds of confidentiality, after which the NGO filed a lawsuit to the Administrative court with the claim to declare the refusal unlawful. The case was taken to proceeding on December 8, 2017.

On June 12, the court satisfied the claim of the “Union of Informed Citizens”.

**On May 30,** at the request of Constant Leon, French journalist from “Radio France International” the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Office of the RA Prime Minister requesting the copies of contracts between the RA Government and “Violia Djur” CJSC, the tender documents package for the public tender call, announced by the RA Government for water resource management in Armenia, public announcement of the winning organization, environmental and social impact assessments for water resources, carried out by the RA Government or “Violia Djur” CJSC, as well as, if available, the conclusion of the Internal Audit Report on water management carried out in “Violia Djur” CJSC. The RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure answered the inquiry. However, the answer was incomplete.

To cover the “Summit of Minds” in Dilijan, **on June 8**, “24news.am” website did not receive an invitation from the RA Presidential Administration, which is viewed by the media as a discriminatory attitude and a violation of the right to information. Hasmik Petrosyan, Assistant to the President of the RA, informed the media that “a very limited number of journalists are attending the event, and direct coverage is provided by their press service”. The media outlet, however, found out that numerous media outlets participated in the event.

**On June 17,** “Hetq.am” sent an inquiry to Nerses Yertsyan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory (Yerevan Physics Institute) Foundation asking to provide the Decrees of the Board of Trustees for 2011-2019. Three days later, Nerses Yeritsyan informed that the Decrees of the Board are corporate documents containing confidential information not subject to publication. The media sent another inquiry to Nerses Yeristsyan, with the suggestion of hiding the confidential information in the documents and providing non-confidential parts. Nerses Yeritsyan informed that overtime work was needed to answer the inquiry which would cost 550,000 AMD. “Hetq” intends to file a lawsuit with the claim of obliging Nerses Yeritsyan to provide the necessary information.

**On June 18**, “Hetq.am” sent an inquiry to Public TV Company of Armenia asking to provide the copies of the state procurement contracts of equipment purchases, renovation of buildings, preparation of new programs and films within the expenditure framework. The TV Company, however, rejected saying the contracts contained sensitive information. However, this state-owned media outlet should work transparently and be accountable to the public.

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

**On January 29,** in Syunik Region Court of General Jurisdiction (seat in Meghri) a regular hearing on the case Samvel Aleksanyan, editor of the *Syuniats Yerkir* newspaper, against Manya Tsatryant was held. The plaintiff demands to refute the defamatory information and to compensate for the damage caused to his honour, dignity and business reputation.

It is worthwhile to remind that on January 31, 2018 and February 1, 2013 three criminal cases were initiated against Samvel Aleksanyan, the editor of the *Syuniats Yerkir* newspaper in Kapan Police Department. On February 5, the Investigative Committee decided to combine the three criminal cases and examine them in one proceeding. (See the details in CPFE 2018 Annual and Quarterly Reports)

In 2019, the case was taken to proceeding on February 22, June 11 and the next one is scheduled on July 12.

By the way, in 2017, Governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan filed a suit to Syunik Region court of general jurisdiction (based in Meghri) against “Syuniats Ashkharh” LLC., founder of the *Syuniats Yerkir* newspaper. The cause for this suit with a claim of refutation and compensation for damage caused to his honour and dignity is the article published on “Syuniacyerkir.am” website on September 19, 2017, under the heading “Vahe Hakobyan lied: the information stated in the declaration and his financial flows do not match, which is an indication of possible corruption.” On August 3, 2018, Vahe Hakobyan, already former Governor of Syunik, filed a new suit to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Samvel Aleksanyan and Noyan Tapan LLC with the claim to deny the defamatory information, apologize for the insult, compensate for non-pecuniary damage caused by insult and defamation for publishing the court decision on www.noyan-tapan.am and www.syuniacyerkir.am websites and on Facebook. This year all court hearings on this case were deferred and the next hearing is scheduled on August 20.

**On June 19**, the RA Investigative Committee released a report on the arrest of a journalist from “Haykakan zham” website on suspicion of committing extortion in large amounts: she demanded 800.000 AMD[[135]](#footnote-135). Pursuant to initial data, the journalist visited the office of Deputy Commander of 1st officer battalion of Road Police, introduced herself as a journalist and said that she had information that the latter was allegedly engaged in entrepreneurial activity and in this relation had unpaid tax liabilities of 41.000.000 AMD. The journalist also claimed that she was going to publish the discreditable information in four media outlets and demanded 800.000 AMD for not publishing it, implying that the amount of the required money could be reduced.

On June 19, 2019 around 16:30 the journalist from “Haykakan Zham” daily, visiting the aforementioned official’s office, demanded and received 400.000 AMD by extortion. Immediately after it, as a result of measures taken by the employers of the General Department of Fight against Organized Crime of the RA Police, she was caught at the office.

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48. **<http://khosq.am/2018/05/25/%D5%A3%D5%A1%D5%AC%D5%A1-%D5%B6%D5%9D-%D5%A8%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A4%D5%A5%D5%B4-%D5%B0%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AB%D5%B6-%D5%BF%D5%A5%D5%BD%D5%B9%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6-11/>**  [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. **<http://galatv.am/hy/news/news277960/>** [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. **<http://www.aravot.am/2018/05/07/955311/>** [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
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52. **<https://lurer.com/?p=255408&l=am>** [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. **<https://hraparak.am/post/213409>** [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. **<https://www.1in.am/2503780.html>** [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. **<https://www.facebook.com/narek.malyan/videos/2434786706549546/>** [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
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59. **<https://news.am/arm/news/317604.html>** [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. **<https://news.am/arm/news/396878.html>**  [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
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62. **<https://news.am/arm/news/396861.html>** [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
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64. **<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mznz1XD6KEw>** [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
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67. **<https://youtu.be/AMQXDYmyGNI>** [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. **<https://www.lragir.am/2019/03/22/428137/>** [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. **[https://www.facebook.com/tehmine.yenoqyan/posts/1897779590268586?\_\_xts\_\_[0]=68.ARAz3VISA9F-cl2LvF5W0up00fdh7FXPaV134HIz6i\_SGZ7qXmcXEHLUd1HZn-H7rq-yaC-x9gRgDqkN6XoZgpJKmsgc94aI3Z0F6ZC4pv8RaArEEV2jvG2tH6jBFozkopQl370tuCwHPqYIvUvps\_e76B6MCvJ7tHxm3AEgsllfKsQZJ](https://www.facebook.com/tehmine.yenoqyan/posts/1897779590268586?__xts__%5b0%5d=68.ARAz3VISA9F-cl2LvF5W0up00fdh7FXPaV134HIz6i_SGZ7qXmcXEHLUd1HZn-H7rq-yaC-x9gRgDqkN6XoZgpJKmsgc94aI3Z0F6ZC4pv8RaArEEV2jvG2tH6jBFozkopQl370tuCwHPqYIvUvps_e76B6MCvJ7tHxm3AEgsllfKsQZJ)** [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. **<https://youtu.be/YmG9y8TgZOo>** [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. **<https://hraparak.am/post/1865133956?fbclid=IwAR1PTyIDnntLa4ePdT_tM9BW-BygrkP9fcYXrN2WFc6t9B_GxumGmNBfF_Y>** [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
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89. **<https://armtimes.com/hy/article/158069>** [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
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114. [**https://www.aysor.am/am/news/2019/06/12/%D5%85%D5%B8%D6%82%D6%80%D5%A1-%D4%B1%D5%A4%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6/1574807**](https://www.aysor.am/am/news/2019/06/12/%D5%85%D5%B8%D6%82%D6%80%D5%A1-%D4%B1%D5%A4%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6/1574807) [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
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