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COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

***ON THE STATUS OF THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN ARMENIA AND THE VIOLATION OF THE MASS MEDIA RIGHTS***

**2019 annual report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression**

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

2019 was unprecedented in terms of the number of court cases, involving journalists and the media. During the year, 96 new lawsuits were filed vis a vis 22 lawsuits in the previous year. The majority, 89 of them are on the grounds of insult and slander under Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code, 4 are violations of the right to information, 1 is an economic dispute, in one case the media outlet filed a lawsuit against a political scientist, and against the government in another.

This large influx of lawsuits is largely due to the fact that in the post-revolutionary Armenia the polarization of the media and their division into political and financial camps have become more intense , and as a result many media outlets have turned into outlets, serving the interests of their political sponsors and the public at large. This is coupled with the spread of fake news, deliberate distortion of facts, and misinformation, all of which prompts people of all walks of life to file a lawsuit against the media outlet in relation to the publications it contains.

The trend continued in 2019, when various officials, politicians, and others disrespected or discriminated against journalists performing their duties or displayed intolerance towards the media and their representatives. Prosperous Armenia Party leader Gagik Tsarukyan was particularly notable for such behavior, which caused repeated statements by 10 journalistic organizations. Such behavior was manifested also by President of the Constitutional Court Hrayr Tovmasyan, Prosperous Armenia Party MP Vardan Ghukasyan and others.

Unlike the revolutionary 2018, when there was a large number of physical violence against journalists, in 2019 the number of such cases dropped sharply. 4 cases were registered unlike 21 cases the previous year. But the number of various pressures on the media and their staff has doubled. The number reached 134 unlike the 67 cases the previous year. The rate of the violations of the right to receive and disseminate information has also increased. In 2019, it was 108 against 98 in 2018.

 One of the significant processes of 2019 was the redistribution of ownership of media outlets, in particular television companies. This redistribution took place among the former authorities without the intervention of the new government. A notable example of this was the dismantling of *PanArmenia Media Holding* and the sale of mass media outlets to various companies whose founders, however, are associated with the former authorities or their representatives. In addition, the former *H3 TV* channel was also resold, which, after the first change of ownership, was broadcast as *MoTV*, and after the whole package was transferred to the former owners of *Armenia TV*, namely, the Sargsyan brothers, it was renamed *New Armenia.*

During the period under review, a number of bills put into circulation by the Government raised the concern of the journalistic community. Besides being highly contentious in terms of the ideas and concepts therein, the process of developing and submitting these documents without the involvement of and discussions with the civil society stakeholders caused additional dissatisfaction. Among such documents was, for example, the draft law on amending the RA Law on Freedom of Information, developed by the Ministry of Environment, which was posted on the official e-draft.am website and attempted to limit environmental information on unacceptable grounds.

 The law on making amendments to the RA Law on Television and Radio, submitted by the Ministry of Justice, is also of great concern. Here, among other things, it is envisaged to allow the Public TV Company to broadcast up to 5 minutes of advertising per hour. However, according to the current law, the state-funded Public Television and Radio Company does not have a right to broadcast advertising. In this regard, 10 journalistic organizations made a joint statement on December 13, 2019, stating that the proposed amendment was an unjustified step and was not conditioned by public demand.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Notable among the legislative processes related to freedom of information and media activity was the adoption of the draft law on Making Amendments to the RA Law on Local Self-Government in the City of Yerevanon September 10, 2019. The draft law was developed by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression and was put into circulation by the National Assembly Bright Armenia faction. Accordingly, the unreasonable restrictions applied by the previous authorities on media activity in the municipality were removed, and it was legally stipulated that journalists could access the municipality building as necessary, attend council meetings and cover them freely.

Although in the post-revolutionary period, the media have been free from the interference and control of the new government, they remain under the influence of various political forces. In this regard, the issue of transparency of media ownership and funding in general is an imperative, which was also addressed by the Prime Minister during the pre-New Year reception for media representatives at the end of the year. This issue can be regulated by legislative changes. Specifically, mechanisms for ensuring transparency of ownership in broadcasting sector have been proposed in the new draft law on Television and Radio, developed by three journalistic organizations: the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Yerevan Press Club and Media Initiatives Center. This draft law has been in the National Assembly since July.

 One of the noteworthy events at the end of 2019 was that A1 + TV applied to the RA Administrative Court demanding to annul the acts adopted in 2003 and still in force, which violated the right of the TV station to broadcast.

In 2019, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression continued to monitor the progress the criminal cases initiated in connection with the events of Electric Yerevan (June 23, 2015) and Sari Tagh (July 17 to 30, 2016) in which more than 40 journalists and cameramen were identified as victims. Success was achieved (also with the efforts of the CPFE) in overturning the decision of the Special Investigation Service on suspending the case of Sari Tagh by court proceedings, and the investigation got reopened, however, the appeal of the same decision by the SIS regarding Electric Yerevan is still pending in court.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

 In 2019, international organizations made unprecedented progress in the state of freedom of speech in Armenia. Thus, according to the World Press Freedom Index 2019 report by "Reporters Without Borders" published on April 18, our country has improved its position in the international ranking by 19 points, moving from the 80th to 61st position. On June 5, Freedom House human rights organization released “Freedom and Media 2019: A Downward Spiral” report says that the incumbent authorities in Armenia are "more inclined to accept free press criticism than the former ones." And on November 5, the same Freedom House’s report Freedom on the Net in 2019 stated that the Internet is free in Armenia. According to the methodology used, the countries within the 70 to 100 scale shall be considered free, while Armenia received 76 points.

However, the same is not true of traditional media, particularly broadcasting, where a remarkable redistribution of ownership took place during the year. If in the past any new government took control of the broadcasting industry, with anticipation that the TV companies would serve their interests or would be sold to other, more loyal, entrepreneurs, no such thing happened now. The redistribution took place among the representatives of the former authorities without the intervention of the new government. Thus, when *PanArmenia Media Holding* split in early 2019 and the media outlets that were part of it were sold to various companies, it became clear that the founders were either representatives of the ousted authorities or those associated with them. Another transaction took place in the same period: *H3 TV*  leveraged by the Rule of Law party was sold to *MoTV,* a company that was associated with the same circles, and months later it was bought entirely by New Armenia CJSC, the former owner of Armenia TV, i.e. the Sargsyan brothers.

In 2019, the process of media polarization became even more acute. Much of the media, divided into various political camps, continues to be plagued with hate speech, fake news, biased comments and manipulations. Perhaps this is largely attributed to the fact that the year was unprecedented in the number of new court cases, involving journalists and the media. Their number reached 96, 89 of which were on the grounds of insult and slander under Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code.

The situation in the Armenian media arena where the media, as a rule, are free from government interference but are highly dependent on political influence is very peculiar. Moreover, many media outlets have become propaganda outlets and mainly serve the interests of their political sponsors. From time to time, all this is revealed in the form of program closures, dismissals, and other conflict situations. One striking example of this was when Tsarukyan Alliance faction MP Tigran Urikhanyan, who also ran a program called "Moment of Truth" on the Kentron TV, affiliated with Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) leader Gagik Tsarukyan, announced about the closing of his program and the resignation from his MP mandate on June 5th. The reason was that Tigran Urikhanyan had invited an interviewee who was undesirable for his political leader.

Later, on October 18, Angela Tovmasyan, Editor-in-Chief of Hayeli.am website, was deprived of the opportunity to continue her "Before the Mirror " program on Kentron TV. This decision was followed by misinformation published in Hayeli.am on the circumstances of former police chief Hayk Harutyunyan's death (see CPFE 2019 3rd quarterly report).

At the same time, the dissemination of fake news, distortion of facts, and manipulation by various media outlets for political reasons often cause dissatisfaction among the representatives of different segments of the society, which in some cases has unacceptable manifestations. So, on October 5, a group of young people threw eggs and put up condemning posters on the wall and closed door of Hayeli.am club and the website's editorial office, located in the same area. According to the youth, the motive behind the move was an article published in Hayeli.am “Aliyev's Late but Powerful Response to Pashinyan” (later the word “powerful” was replaced by the word “strong”, yet in quotation marks). On October 29, Styopa Safaryan, head of the Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs, warned in a Facebook post that he would be ban the participation of News.am, Hayeli.am, 168.am, Yerevan Today, 7or.am, Livenews.am, 5th Channel and Yerkir Media TV channels and others in an event he organized, as he considered them to be propaganda and misinformation channels. On the next day, namely on the very day of the event, he indeed invited the unwanted journalists out of the organization, though the event was a public and open event in nature.

In both cases, the CPFE and its partner journalistic organizations made joint statements. Particularly, in connection with the incident at Hayeli.am editorial office, it was stated that the steps that might suppress or violate the right to express an opinion were unacceptable and condemnable. The document also called on media outlets serving the interests of various political camps to return to the professional domain, refrain from manipulation and dissemination of misinformation, follow the norms of journalistic ethics, respect and represent the diversity of opinions in the society. [[2]](#footnote-2) As for the ban on the attendance of an open event by a number of media outlets, imposed by the head of AIISA Styopa Safaryan, the statement issued on this occasion by the journalist organizations described such an approach as "discriminatory towards the media outlets, which is unacceptable and dangerous in terms of freedom of speech." The authors of the document urged to reconsider this approach, tolerate the media and exclude discrimination in the future. [[3]](#footnote-3)

As we have noted, in the period under review the trend of public and political figures and officials’ insults or disrespectful attitude towards journalists upon hearing displeasing questions and attempts at "teaching" them lessons continued. Prosperous Armenia Party leader Gagik Tsarukyan was particularly notable for such behavior, which led to repeated statements by 10 journalistic organizations. This was typical of the President of the Constitutional Court Hrayr Tovmasyan, PAP MP Vardan Ghukasyan and others.
 In 2019, there were a total of 134 cases of pressure on media outlets and their staff members, which is more than double of the figures last year. Of these 134 cases, 70 were committed by politicians, their affiliates, state agencies and individual officials, 33 by citizens, 5 by media outlets, 15 by businessmen/private companies, 2 by judges, 3 by lawyers, one was one by a show business representative, 4 by NGOs, while one was a hacker attack. As for physical violence against journalists, compared to the previous revolutionary year, such incidents declined sharply in 2019 – from 21 to 4. The most controversial one was the incident in Hovtashen community, Ararat marz, when a targeted attack took place against Kentron TV crew. This incident caused another statement by journalistic organizations. [[4]](#footnote-4)

An effective fight against the dissemination of fake news, deliberate distortion of facts, profanity, threats and violence on social media and by media outlets requires, first of all, legislative changes and new regulations. Although Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has stated in his public speeches that it is wrong to use power levers in this regard, as in this case there is a risk of violating the right to free speech,[[5]](#footnote-5) nevertheless, at the April 4 Cabinet session he instructed the NSS director to deal with the manipulative actions of fake users. This did not improve the situation at all because there was no definition of "manipulation" in the RA legislation, and besides, the NSS's intervention would be appropriate if it were about inciting national, racial, religious, and other types of discrimination, calls for war, disorder and violence.

By the end of the year, the legislature came up with an initiative proposing to criminalize the spread of hate speech. A working group was set up at the National Assembly for six months to study and discuss the international best practices of fighting against hate speech and compliance thereof with our legislation. The goal is to increase the scope of criminal responsibility for discrimination on not only the grounds of race, religion and ethnicity, already provided for, but also for discrimination based on gender, origin, occupation, social or physical status, gender identity, disability, and so on.

 The transparency of media ownership and financial resources has also become an urgent issue, requiring prompt legislative reforms. In particular, it is necessary to make appropriate amendments and additions to the RA Law on Mass Media. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression has already drafted such a bill and submitted it to the Parliament for preliminary consideration.

 As for ensuring the transparency of ownership in broadcasting, the necessary mechanisms are proposed in the new draft law on Television and Radio, developed jointly by CPFE and its partner organizations, namely Yerevan Press Club and Media Initiatives Center. This document is generally aimed at making radical reforms in the broadcasting sector, modernizing relations and developing competition therein. The bill was submitted to the Parliament in July but has not been formally put into circulation. Yet, the serious flaws in the enforced law are still affecting the sector and lead to negative consequences. In particular, the tender for the licensing private multiplexor activities, launched on June 27, was canceled on December 30. This is the fourth fruitless tender process. Experts have repeatedly pointed out that the conditions and requirements set out in the Law on Television and Radio to create a multiplex private broadcasting network are unacceptable and not attractive from a business point of view. However, the Committee on Television and Radio continues its formal approach to this issue, without taking any essential steps and not developing any proposal to improve the law.

 Instead, the Ministry of Justice proposed a draft package to amend the Law on Television and Radio, suggesting that the Public Television reserves the right to broadcast up to 5 minutes of advertising per hour. Under the enforced law, state-funded Public Television and Radio is banned from advertising. Many experts in the field believe that the proposed change is in no way justified. On December 13, 10 news organizations issued a joint statement stating that "there is no reason to suppose that the present initiative is due to public demand.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

 The journalistic community also expressed dissatisfaction with the draft law on Mass Media and three other RA laws drafted by the Ministry of Justice, circulated on June 28 on the e-draft.am website, owned by the government. According to the proposed amendment package, mass media outlets were offered to be registered in it to receive free information from the State Register. This was very similar to the process of registering a media outlet, which has not been required ever since January 2004, when the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Mass Media entered into force in December 2003. On July 1, media organizations issued a statement, expressing concern that this was a threat to freedom of speech and demanded that the government removed the provisions of media registration from this legislative amendment package and did not associate it with provision of free information from the State Register. [[7]](#footnote-7)

Besides, the draft law on amendments to the RA Law on Freedom of Information, drafted by the Ministry of Environment and without discussions with the expert community was of concern, too. This draft, too, attempts to limit environmental information to unacceptable grounds. The vote on the document posted on e-draft.am on December 2 generated a mostly negative outcome. Experts have repeatedly pointed out that the Law on Freedom of Information needs to be reformed and updated, with recommendations to avoid artificial barriers to information, but the authorities have ignored those recommendations. In particular, the issue of eliminating the requirement for an electronic signature when submitting an electronic request to state authorities that was raised by the Freedom of Information Center was not resolved. Instead, a draft that endangers and unacceptably restricts freedom of information is tabled.

In contrast to this draft, in 2019 the draft law on amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government in the City of Yerevan, drafted by CPFE and put into circulation by the Bright Armenia Parliamentary Faction, was a success and was adoped by Parliament on September 10 in second reading and in its entirety. Thus, the artificial restrictions on media activity at the municipality introduced by the previous government were abolished, and it was legally stipulated that journalists could properly access the municipality, attend council meetings, and freely cover them.

Problems with official information, however, are not always linked to legislative gaps. More often than not, complications arise because of poorly organized work. Primarily this is about the clear definition of the competences assigned to the person responsible for freedom of information (and this is usually the chief of staff), the press secretary and the PR department and the level of cooperation among them. And this is not always at the proper level, which complicates the work of the media with state agencies.

In addition, as CPFE surveys conducted among journalists indicate many delays still exitent in provision of information with violations of 5-day deadline set by the law, as well as groundless refusals to provide information, incomplete or “blurred” answers, and so on. In total, there were 108 cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information in 2019, 10 more than in 2018. Consequently, the situation has not improved in this aspect.

 At the same time, the Prime Minister of the country continued to go live on Facebook both in the revolutionary 2018 and in 2019, answering questions that most citizens felt concerned about. In addition, he held 4-5-hour press conferences on March 19, May 8 in Yerevan and on September 16 in Vanadzor, attended by all media outlets eager to cover it.

One of the notable events at the end of 2019 was A1+ TV's application to the Administrative Court seeking to void the 2003 administrative acts still in force, which violated the TV station’s right to broadcast in 2002 after it was denied airtime. We would like to remind that in 2002, following a decision of the National Commission on Television and Radio that carried a political implication, "A1+" was deprived of the opportunity to broadcast. Since 2003, the TV station has participated in 13 different tenders announced by the NCTR and has not won due to obviously biased decisions. “A1+” intends to attain that new judicial acts reflect the violation of its rights, followed by compensation.

In 2019, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression continued to monitor the criminal cases on the events in Yerevan's Baghramyan Avenue (#ElectricYerevan) on June 23, 2015 and in Khorenatsi Street and Sari Tagh in the second half of July, 2016, coupled with widespread violence and barriers to professional activity by media workers. More than 40 journalists and cameramen have been identified as victims of these cases, five of which are being represented by CPFE lawyers.

 We would like to remind that on March 4, the SIS suspended the criminal case on "Electric Yerevan" on the grounds of “unidentified offenders”. With the support of CPFE, three injured journalists, Hakob Karapetyan, Gevorg Ghazaryan and Tehmine Yenokyan, filed a complaint against the SIS decision on April 2 with the Prosecutor's Office of Armenia, which overturned that decision on April 15 and ordered the resumption of the preliminary investigation. On July 26, the SIS again decided to suspend the criminal proceedings. On August 26, CPFE appealed the decision with the prosecutor, and after a refusal on September 4, CPFE filed an appeal with the court on October 4. Case hearings were held on October 18, November 19, with the next one scheduled January 21, 2020.

 As to the Sari Tagh criminal case, the SIS decision to suspend it was appealed in court during the period under review, reaching the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal held hearings on July 3 and August 23. At the recent hearing, the SIS investigator stated that the suspension decision had already been lifted. The preliminary investigation has resumed, and CPFE continues to monitor the suit.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2019 by the following CPFE classification:

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

This classification of CPFE is somewhat conditional. In particular, sometimes hindering the access and dissemination of information is accompanied by violence against the journalist. Such facts are attributed to the type of violation that the authors of the report consider to be the closest. Nonetheless, the classification used allows for a more concise and prominent picture of the violations of journalists’ and media rights.

The relevant sections of the report list the facts on the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2019, as well as developments related to the previous incidents.

 ***In total, there were 246 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2019. 4 of them are cases of physical violence, 134 cases of pressure against the media and their employees, 108 cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.***

  Below these data are presented comparatively by quarters and years as of 2018 and 2019 in tables.

**Quantiative data on the violation in 2019 per quarter**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter, 2019 | 2nd quarter, 2019  | 3rd quarter, 2019  | 4th quarter, 2019  | Total |
| Physical violence against journalists |  **2** |  **0** | **1** | **1** | **4** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel  |  **41** |  **42** | **35** | **16** | **134** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information  |  **51** |  **15** | **11** | **31** | **108** |

**Quantiative data on the violations in 2018-2019**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2018 | 2019 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **21** | **4** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel  | **67** | **134** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information  | **98** | **108** |

**Lawsuits in 2019, involving media and journalists**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of court cases** | **1st quarter** | **2nd quarter**  | **3rd quarter**  | **4th quarter**  | **Total** |
| **On the grounds of insult and slander** | **28** | **25** | **30** | **6** | **89** |
| **On the grounds on the right to receive information**  | **0** | **2** | **2** | **0** | **4** |
| **Other disputes** | **1** | **0** | **1** | **1** | **3** |

As in the previous reports, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression would like to note that the data in the table may not be comprehensive and do not claim absolute accuracy. Media representatives sometimes find it unnecessary to publicize facts that impede their professional activities, ignore various threats to them, or prefer to solve problems themselves and overcome illegal restrictions on their own. Therefore, CPFE is convinced that the real number of obstacles is greater than stated in this report. The following are the most significant facts.

1. ***Physical Violence Against Journalists***

*In 2019 there were 4 cases of physical violence against media workers. Compared to 2018, the number of cases has dropped by 17. Below we present the facts recorded in 2019, as well as the developments related to past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

**On January 14,** reporters Alina Nikoghosyan, Anatoly Yeghiazaryan, Hambardzum Papoyan, Armen Petrosyan, Naira Bulghadaryan and Narek Kirakosyan filed a lawsuit against the Special Investigative Service to appeal the decision to suspend the criminal proceedings initiated in relation to the events of April 2019, presented by the Special Investigation Service (SIS) on the grounds of “unidentified offenders” on November 16, 2018.

We would like to remind that this case is about the occasions of obstructing the lawful professional activities of reporters through the use of violence or threats thereof by the police and other law enforcement officers and officials in Baghramyan Avenue, Artsakh, Erebuni, Abovyan and other streets in Yerevan. (For details see CPFE’s 2018 annual and 2019 reports, see khosq.am's Reports section).

After being rejected in the first instance court, several victims filed a complaint to the Criminal Court of Appeal on April 1, which upheld it on May 10. The prosecutor overseeing the investigation then instructed to resume the proceedings. On August 9, the Special Investigation Service suspended the case for the second time on the same grounds of “unidentified offenders.” This decision was appealed to the Procesutor’s office on August 22. It was rejected on August 23, after which it was again appealed to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction. The judicial investigation continues.

**On January 15**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Kotayk Marz held a regular court hearing on the case of journalist Triair Muradyan vs. Arsen Arzumanyan, head of the Kotayk Regional Department of the RA Police.

We would like to remind that on April 20, 2018, journalist Tirair Muradyan of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO was detained from Yerevan-Abovyan highway, despite showing the certificate verifying his profession as journalist.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The preliminary investigation revealed that Arsen Arzumanyan, abusing his official position, obstructed the lawful professional activity of the journalist, for which he was charged by Article 164, Part 2 of the RA Criminal Code.

In 2019 hearings were held on January 30, February 15, on February 27, Arsen Arzumanyan was acquitted due to absence of corpus delicti.

On April 10, the plaintiff appealed the judgment to the Court of Appeal. On April 23, the complaint was accepted for proceedings. Hearings were held on May 14, and on June 5, the Court of Appeal upheld the appeal and quashed the judgment of the Court of First Instance, passed on February 27. Arsen Arzumanyan was found guilty 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 posts or conduct certain activities. On July 22, the defendant filed a cassation appeal against the ruling of the Court of Appeal, but on October 24, the Court of Cassation refused to accept it for proceedings.

**On January 21**, the court of first instance of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (seat in Yeghegnadzor) held the first court hearing on the case of journalists subjected to violence while performing their professional duties in the Shatin community of Vayots Dzor marz.

We would like to remind that the residents of Shatin assaulted the employees of the *Zhoghovurd* daily Syune Hambardzumyan and Knar Manukyan on September 12, 2018. [[9]](#footnote-9) To learn more about the tense situation after the local government elections in 2017, the reporters visited Shatin, where some residents attacked them, snatching their journalistic certificates, hit the other cameraman on the hand and pushed them. (For details see CPFE 2018 Annual and 2019 Quarterly Reports, also see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The court hearings on this case were also held on February 19 and March 14. On April 5, the judicial staff changed, the case was re-admitted on April 10, after which the hearings were held on May 3 and 20, June 4 and 24, July 9, August 15, September 30, October 29, December 11 and 24. The next sitting is scheduled for January 22, 2020.

**On February 13**, the court of general jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of Levon Gasparyan and Julieta Kokolyan, who hindering the professional activities of *Radio Liberty* journalist Sisak Gabrielyan and *Araratnews.am* news website reporter Shoghik Galstyan.

We would like to remind on April 2, 2017, on the National Assembly Election Day, violence was used against Radio Liberty journalist Sisak Gabrielyan and Araratnews.am correspondent Shoghik Galstyan at RPA candidate Hakob Beglaryan's headquarters, at Rustaveli 15, Kond district, Yerevan (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2017-2018, 2019 3rd quarter report, as well as khosq.am's *Reports* section). Shoghik Galstyan is represented by CPFE's lawyer.

The court has declared Julieta Kokolyan, accused of obstructing Shoghik Galstyan's professional activity on February 5, 2018, wanted.[[10]](#footnote-10) The defendant's lawyer has repeatedly informed the court that Kokolyan has health problems and cannot appear before court, but when the court requested supporting documents, they were not presented.

The court decided to suspend the case until Julietta Kokolyan were located and continue the investigation into the other defendant, Levon Gasparyan within separate proceedings. The court hearings on this case were held on March 15, April 11, June 12, July 22, August 16, October 31, December 9 and 25. The next session is scheduled on January 27, 2020.

**On March 14,** employees of cafés near the Opera House that were to be demolished upon Yerevan municipality’s decision, used violence against *Hetq.am* reporter Narek Alexanyan when he was performing his professional duties on the site.[[11]](#footnote-11) A café employee pulled the journalist's hand, and another one shouted: "Get out of my territory."

**On March 14,** violence was used against Civilnet.am news website journalist Gevorg Tosunyan at the Jazzve café near the Opera House, adjacent to the Opera House and subject to demolition upon municipality's decision. "A woman hit me on the back, saying ‘Why are you standing in front of me?’," Gevorg Tosunyan told CPFE.

**On March 27**, the criminal case initiated against former commander of the RA Police Levon Yeranosyan for using special measures against demonstrators and journalists was sent to Yerevan Court of general jurisdiction. He was charged under Article 309, Parts 2 and 3 of the RA Criminal Code for intentionally committing acts that were manifestly outside his powers and caused substantial damage to citizens' rights and legitimate interests, and negligently brought about severe consequences. Ani Keshishyan, a reporter for *168.am* and Liana Yeghiazaryan, a correspondent for *Public Radio's Radiolur* program, are among the victims of this case, too.

 We would like to remind that Ani Keshishyan was injured in Baghramyan Avenue, Yerevan, on April 16, 2018, and Liana Yeghiazaryan was injured at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebuni Streets, on April 22, because of the use of special measures by the police against protesters. (For details see CPFE Annual report for 2018 and Quarterly Reports for 2019, see also khosq.am's *Reports* section).

Hearings of the case were also held on April 19, May 21, June 11 and 20, July 2 and 9, November 1 and 22, with the next hearing scheduled on January 15, 2020.

**On April 2,** the investigation on the criminal case initiated on the event of hindering the lawful professional activity of Narine Avetisyan, Editor-in-Chief of *Lori TV*, continued in the General Jurisdiction Court of Lori Marz.

We would like to remind that on September 28, 2017, Narine Avetisyan was informed that asphalt was being laid on the bridge adjacent to the St. Astvatsatsin Church in the town in the heavy rain, and she left for the site to cover the ongoing works. When she was shooting some footage, the head of Shinplus construction company Tigran Nazaryan and his staff attacked Narine Avetisyan, scrolled her arms, threw her onto the ground, snatched her phone, and deleted the photos.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Sessions in 2019 were also held on May 15, June 18, July 25, September 18, October 22, November 19, and December 19. The next session is scheduled on February 19.

**On May 31**, the Investigative Committee suspended the proceedings on the crimincal case initiated on the events of physical violence used against Public Radio producer Vruyr Tadevosyan and CivilNet.am journalist Ani Grigoryan, on the grounds of “unidentified offender.”

 We would like to remind that Ani Grigoryan was attacked in Avan community, Yerevan on April 21, 2018. [[13]](#footnote-13) On April 22, Vruyr Tadevosyan was assaulted by masked persons in the same place. (For details see CPFE annual report for 2018 and first half-year report for 2019, also see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

These two cases were merged, and according to data received from the prosecutor's office, one person was charged under Article 185 (2) (3) and Article 164 (3) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia. However, the prosecution was halted on the grounds that there was no sufficient combination of evidence. Reporters did not appeal the decision on suspension.

**On June 14,** an indictment of 8 people within a criminal case initiated with charges of using violence against Shantnews.am reporter Artak Khulyan and Factor.am cameraman Hovhannes Sargsyan under Article 225 of the RA Criminal Code was sent to Yerevan court of general jurisdiction.

We would like to remind that on April 22, 2018, violence was used against journalist Artak Khulyan, who was covering the protests in Erebuni district.[[14]](#footnote-14) On the same day, violence was also applied against cameraman Hovhannes Sargsyan in the same community.[[15]](#footnote-15) (For details see CPFE Annual report for 2018 and Third quarter report of 2019, also see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The criminal case with these two parts is investigated with one proceeding. The case was accepted into proceedings by the court on June 19. The investigation of the case was launched on July 9. Court sessions were also held on August 29, September 12, October 3 and 10, November 7, December 5, and 19, and the next session is scheduled on February 6, 2020.

**On September 4**, during the day of the Ministry of Emergency Situations employee, one of the bodyguards of NIS director Artur Vanetsyan, when fulfilling a function, pushed and dropped Artur Harutyunyan, the cameraman of the 24News.am news site when the latter was performing his professional duties. [[16]](#footnote-16)։

**On December 24**, dozens of residents in the Hovtashen community in Ararat marz attacked Kentron TV journalist Arthur Hakobyan and cameraman Simik Mayilyan, hitting them and damaging the camera.[[17]](#footnote-17) The film crew managed to save some of the footage of the incident, which clearly shows the fact of violence. The employees of Kentron TV, along with other media representatives, went to Hovtashen to cover issues related to the fish farm owned by Sedrak Arustamyan, director of Multi Group Concern. The saved footage shows that the attack by the residents was targeted and aimed at obstructing the work of the particular TV crew.

On December 25, a criminal case was launched in accordance with Article 164, Part 1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia on obstructing the lawful professional activity of the journalist, hauling him, disturbing the process of shooting and damaging the camera, based on the materials prepared at the Masis department of the RA Police.

***2․ Pressure on the Media and Their Personnel***

 *In 2019, there was a total of 134 cases on pressures on the media and their staff, more than double the number recorded last year due to a sharp increase in new lawsuits. As it has already been mentioned, 70 of the 134 cases were carried out by politicians, persons related to them, government agencies and individual officials, as of the rest, 33 by citizens, 5 by the media, 15 by business people/private companies, 2 by a judge, 3 by lawyers, 1 by a show business representative, 4 were NGOs, and 1 was a hacker attack.*

*In addition to the facts recorded during 2019, this section of the report also includes the developments and resolutions of various cases on pressure applied to the media and journalists from the past. Below we present all the details in chronological order.*

**On January 9**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted the lawsuit filed by actress Ani Yeranyan against BlogNews.am news website's chief editor Konstantin Ter-Nakalian and Karen Antinyan, director of Datablog LLC, on obliging them to public apology. The reason for the lawsuit is the published information about Ani Yeranyan's personal life, in particular the following expression: "Ani Yeranyan seems to have followed Meline Daluzyan's path".[[18]](#footnote-18)

**On March 15,** the first hearing of the case took place. On September 26, the court ruled to split the case into 2 parts for "BlogNews.am" and "Datablog" LLC, to consider them separately. The trial on the latter’s part is scheduled on February 6, 2020. In the case of BlogNews.am, the plaintiff withdrew the claim, but was not satisfied with the court's decision on demanding 50,000 AMD for the dismissal of the case. On October 24, the plaintiff filed an appeal, which accepted for proceedings on November 8, with the first court hearing scheduled on January 15, 2020.

**On January 10**, Zaruhi Postanjyan, the leader of the Yerkir Tsirani Party, sent a letter to the RA Prosecutor General, appealing the decision of the Investigative Committee, made on December 27, 2018, to dismiss the criminal case initiated on hindering the professional activities of Radio Liberty and A1+ TV correspondents.

We would like to remind that on February 19, 2018, the professional activities of Radio Liberty and A1+ TV correspondents Ruzanna Stepanyan and Susanna Poghosyan were hindered in the Municipality of Yerevan.[[19]](#footnote-19) (Details can be found in CPFE Annual report for 2018 and the reports for 2019, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The Prosecutor’s office refused Zaruhi Postanjyan, and she appealed the ruling in court. The court's April 18 ruling upheld the appeal, obliging the body conducting the proceedings to recognize Zaruhi Postanjyan as a victim and eliminate the violation of her rights. The Prosecutor General's Office of Armenia filed an appeal against this court decision. On August 14, the RA Prosecutor General's Office made a decision to repeal the decision on dismissing the case. During the resumed investigation, Zaruhi Postanjyan was recognized as the victim, and necessary investigative and other procedural actions were taken. On October 17, the Investigative Committee decided not to prosecute and dismiss the proceedings. On November 4, Postanjyan submitted a complaint on this decision to the Prosecutor General, but it was rejected on November 8.

**On January 10**, the Court of First Instance in Shirak marz held the first court hearing on the case of Tsayg LLC as founder of Gyumri Tsayg TV vs. Shant LLC as founder of Shant TV. The Commission on Television and Radio was recognized as a third party to this case.

We would like to remind that on December 6, 2017, Tsayg LLC filed a lawsuit alleging that Shant TV that had national coverage, as assessed by the plaintiff, was carrying out an unlicensed activity in Gyumri, in particular broadcasting local commercials that were different from the production of the headquarters, airing paid reports and other programs. Tsayg TV demanded to stop those activities of Shant TV in Gyumri that are typical of a regional broadcaster.

The May 10 ruling dismissed the civil case on the grounds that the dispute was not subject for judicial review. The plaintiff filed an appeal with the Civil Court of Appeal on June 10, where their appeal against the judgment of the first instance court was upheld on September 30.

The Court of Appeal found that the plaintiff company's right to free dissemination of information and ideas as a broadcaster was infringed because unequal and unfair competition conditions caused the company to incure financial loss, which directly affected the company's operations. As legal justification, references were made to Articles 10, 42, 59 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 of the Convention and so on. The Court of Appeal ruled to send the case back to the same court for a new trial in full.

On November 1, Shant LLC went to the Cassation Court, to appeal the ruling of the Court of Appeal, but the Supreme instance returned the appeal on December 11.

**On January 10**, Emma Kirakosyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of First Instance against the Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC claiming a compensation for the damage to her honor and dignity and demanding refutation. The cause of the lawsuit is The Single Window program broadcast on Public Television First Channel on December 10, 2018.[[20]](#footnote-20) The plaintiff finds that the program contained "false factual information" about her and demands public refutation thereof, as well as pay 1 million AMD together with the other defendants, namely Dustrik Grigoryan, Karine Ohanyan, Liana and Irena Petrosyan, who were guests to the program, too.

On January 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Hearings on the case were held on April 9, May 10, July 24, October 30, and December 12, with the next hearing scheduled on March 4, 2020.

**On January 11,** the penitentiary service of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia filed a lawsuit with the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against the founder of *Zhamanak* daily claiming for a public refutation of the information considered slander. The cause of the lawsuit was an article published by the *Zhamanak* daily on December 12, 2018, under the headline “No control whatsoever: guards earn money for keeping cell doors open in penitentiary institutions” . The December 12, article entitled "State of Employment: Penitentiary Officers Work to Keep Prison Door Open".[[21]](#footnote-21)

On January 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Hearings were held on April 12, June 13, September 18, October 29, and November 25. The next session is scheduled on February 18, 2020.

**On January 11**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication held the first hearing on the case of News.am LLC versus "Dareskibb" LLC as founder of the *Armenian Times* daily.

We would like to remind that the cause of the lawsuit was "Ararat, ArmNews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media, and Fakes: which media outlets has Kocharyan procured”, published by the *Armenian Times* on August 21, 2018.[[22]](#footnote-22) According to the plaintiff, several statements about News.am and the title of the article damaged its business reputation. News.am LLC filed a claim for compensation at 200 thousand AMD by the founder of the *Armenian Times*.

Court sessions were also held on February 28, April 4, June 19, and October 31. The next session is scheduled on February 12, 2020.

**On January 14**, journalist Narek Kirakosyan filed an appeal against the Special Investigation Service's decision to suspend the investigation of the criminal case initiated on the basis of of the events during the April Revolution in 2018 which was made by the Special Investigation Service (SIS) on the grounds of “unidentified offenders” on November 16, 2018.

We would like to remind that on April 18, 2009, Narek Kirakosyan, correspondent of the *Armenian Times* daily, was persecuted for taking photos of armored vehicles located in Baghramyan Avenue in the capital by the order of First Deputy Chief of Police Hunan Poghosyan.[[23]](#footnote-23) The police officer, however, was unable to reach and apprehend the journalist. (Details can be found in CPFE 2018 Annual report and 2019 Quarterly Reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

After being rejected in the court of first instance, several victims within the April 1 case filed complaints with the Court of Appeal. According to the May 10 ruling of the RA Criminal Court of Appeal, the appeal was upheld, and the prosecutor instructed to resume the proceedings. On August 9, the Special Investigative Service suspended the criminal proceedings for the second time on the same grounds of “unidentified offenders”. This decision was appealed with the prosecutor on August 22. It was rejected on August 23, after which it was again appealed to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction. The court examination continues.

**On January 14**, Varduhi Simonyan, editor-in-chief of Tiv1.am website, informed that the site had been shut down for 16 days without any notification to the founding staff and editor-in-chief, all the locks on the doors of the office had been replaced and staff members could not enter the office even to take their personal belongings or close acces to their personal data in the computers.[[24]](#footnote-24)

On February 4, 2019, a criminal case was initiated on this matter in Yerevan’s Arabkir Department of the RA and sent to the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee of Arabkir administrative district, Yerevan.

The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed CPFE that the criminal case was dropped on August 19. In addition, a decision was made not to prosecute Varduhi Simonyan and a group of employees on the one hand, and Edgar Babayan on the other, on the grounds that their conduct was not criminal, was exclusively of civil nature and should be examined by civil proceedings.

**On January 14,** during an interview at the National Assembly, Gagik Tsarukyan answered the question of the *Armenian Times* daily journalist Narek Kirakosyan, "What do you need politics for?" by “Hey, you!” [[25]](#footnote-25) Later, the MP asked the journalist for the recording, listened to what he said and concluded that he had not said “hey you!” but “ehhh”.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**On January 14**, 24news.am website published a report on the incident with former Commander of the leader of Prosperous Armenia Party and MP Gagik Tsarukyan's bodyguard Eduard Babayan under the heading “Tsarukyan’s Bodyguarding Syndrome”. [[27]](#footnote-27) Hence, the questions of the website reporter were so disturbing to Tsarukyan's entourage that he repeatedly tried to persuade the reporter not to publish the interview dispatching various "emissaries" (representatives of Tsarukyan owned or affliated media outlets, then a certian man). And after the publication of the article, 24news website was simply attacked by the armies of fake users funded by Tsarukyan, who blatantly insulted our journalist," the media outlet reported.

**On January 15**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication held the first hearing of the case Constitutional Court member Alvina Gyulumyan vs. Tigran Hayrapetyan and Skizb Media Kentron LLC, seeking refutation of slander and receipt of one million AMD in compensation from Tigran Hayrapetyan. The reason for the lawsuit was the interview by lawyer Tigran Hayrapetyan to 1in.am, where the latter spoke about the activities of Alvina Gyulumyan in her capacity as ECtHR judge, in particular stating that she had made a cunning move to prevent cases against Armenia to be heard at ECtHR. The plaintiff rendered this statement to be slander.

Court hearings on the case were also held on May 14, October 31, and the next one is scheduled on February 12, 2020.

**On January 15,** General Manvel Grigoryan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against Maxinfo.am news website for damaging his honor and dignity and claiming a compensation of 3 million AMD. On January 25, the court returned the lawsuit. On February 19, Manvel Grigoryan again filed the same lawsuit, and on March 4 the court again decided to return it. 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 first-instance ruling unchanged, citing the fact that the above-stated website is not a legal entity.

**On January 15**, attorneys Lusine Sahakyan, Aramazd Kiviryan, as well as Armen and Armine Poghosyan filed a lawsuit against Lakmoes.am and Skizb Media Kentron LLC, claiming compensation for damage to their honor, dignity, business reputation and for infringements of their right to privacy in their personal and family life. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on January 30. On February 4, the motion for securing the claim was partially upheld, and Lakmus NGO and Elmira Martirosyan were obliged to completely remove the article titled "Diaspora Armenians' ‘Hunters’ Seized Military Doctor’s Son" published on Lakmoes.am website at 8:27 pm on December 3, 2018. Skizb Media Kentron company and Arman Babajanyan were also obliged to completely remove the article titled "Diaspora Armenians' ‘Hunters’ Seized Military Doctor’s Son" from the “1in.am” website published at 10:02 am on December 4, 2018. On February 27, Lakmus NGO filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal against the decision to apply a measure to secure 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.

A preliminary hearing was held on June 5, and on July 3 defendant Elmira Martirosyan, representing Lakmus NGO, filed a counterclaim seeking compensation for the moral damage caused by the violation of her right to freedom of expression, which was returned. On July 19, following a double lawsuit, a decision was made to dismiss the counterclaim and delay the payment of the state fee.

Court hearings were also held on September 23, October 17, November 13, and December 9. The next meeting is scheduled on January 27, 2020.

**On January 18,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction partially upheld the claim of the second President of the Republic of Armenia Robert Kocharyan against Skizb Media Kentron LLC to publicly refute the information considered as slander and receive compensation.

We would like to remind that the cause of the lawsuit was first of all the publication of an article titled "Grigor Grigoryan Testified Against Kocharyan, He May Be Arrested" in 1in.am, owned by LLC, on June 7, 2018.[[28]](#footnote-28) Secondly, there were two other publications in the same media outlet on June 23 and 24 (by Sargis Artsruni), titled “Robert Kocharyan is in Panic: the Second President is on His Way to Prison"[[29]](#footnote-29) and "Rober Kocharyan is the Bloody Symbol of the Revolution."[[30]](#footnote-30) Later, on June 28, 1in.am published another analytical article by the same author: “Kocharyan-Sargsyan. Beneficiaries of Two Bloody Decades."[[31]](#footnote-31)

Skizb Media Kentron appealed the ruling on February 20, 2019, according to which 400,000 AMD should be seized to compensate Robert Kocharyan's non-pecuniary damage. 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 ruled to dismiss Skizb Media Kentron’s appeal, leaving the first-instance court's ruling unchanged.

On July 16, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation. On July 31, the cassation appeal was returned to correct deficiencies, and on August 27 it was re-filed and was again rejected on October 30.

**On January 18**, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Lena Nazaryan refused to give an interview to those journalists who would be shooting with their cell phones. In response to journalists' complaints, Lena Nazaryan clarified that she did not mean short comments but long interviews shot by non-professional cameras.

**On January 22,** Tigran Mets Publishing House filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against Iravunk Media LLC claiming to seize 3 845 517 AMD in arrears and 77 000 AMD in advance state fee payment.

On 1 February the application was accepted for proceedings. The motion for injunctive relief, as well as the petition for a simplified procedure, were rejected. Court hearings were held on July 3 and November 7, with the next hearing scheduled on March 3, 2020.

**On January 24,** journalists Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against the Public Television and Radio Company Council with a claim for repealing Administrative Act No. 46-L of December 25, 2018. This act concerns the termination of these journalists’ employment contracts. On January 29, the application was returned. It was re-filed on 15 February and was accepted for proceedings on 22 February.

Liana Karapetyan wrote about the attitude towards them and gave details of her dismissal on Facebook.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The case was heard on April 30, June 27, July 25, November 18, while on December 9, the court upheld the journalists’ suit, deciding to quash the aforesaid administrative act and annul the orders thereon. The Council of the Public Television and Radio Company is going to appeal the judgment.

**On January 24,** former adviser to the RA Prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan filed a lawsuit in the Ararat and Vayots Dzor Court of General Jurisdication against Boris Tamoyan, editor of Politik.am website, claiming compensation of damage to honor and dignity and public refutation of information considered as slander.

The suit was caused by an article titled "Criminal Authority Tooy Granted $10000 to Pashinyan's Aadviser," posted on the website on January 17 and stating that "according to word of mouth Prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan has reportedly granted $ 10,000 by criminal authority Tooy not to have scarcity of funds during the campaign.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

On February 5, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and hearings were held on June 14, September 24, while on October 14, the court decided to uphold the claim partially binding the defendant to publish a refutation within a week posting it on Politik.am website and its Facebook page. In addition, it was ordered to confiscate 250,000 AMD from the defendant in monetary compensation for damages caused to the plaintiff's honor and dignity, and 209,000 AMD as reasonable fee for the attorney and as state duty. The remaining claims for sue charges were rejected. On November 12, the defendant appealed the judgment, and on November 26, the appeal was accepted for proceedings. The date for the court hearing has not been set yet.

**On January 25**, the *Armenian Times* daily reporter Narek Kirakosyan applied to the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, warning that Prime Minister Eduard Aghajanyan, Head of Prime Minister's Staff, was discriminating against the media. "He has been refusing to be interviewed by the *Armenian Times* for several weeks now. I requested yesterday, too, but he refused, however, he gave interviews to Radio Liberty and CivilNet after refusing me," the CPFE reads in the letter.

**On January 30**, the Civil Court of Appeal dismissed Gayane Manukyan's appeal against the judgment of the first instance court, dismissing her claim against 4news.am news site owner Lilit Hovakimyan and Police Lieutenant Colonel David Perikhanyan, ruling a confiscation of 120,000 AMD as state duty and 300,000 AMD in favor of Lilit Hovakimyan as remuneration for the the lawyer.

We would like to remind that the reason for the claim is an article, titled "The Treacherous Step by Gayane Manukyan, a friend to the Azerbaijani media", posted on the site on January 21, 2017, which specifically stated that she had been interviewed by the Azerbaijani "Haqqin.az" website and that she was causing hassle inside Armenia. The information contained in the article was considered insult and slander by the plaintiff and she claimed refutation and obligation for compensation, namely 2 million AMD for slander and 1 million AMD for insult (details can be found in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 Annual Reports, see the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am).

On March 11, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation. On June 19, the Court of Cassation rejected the plaintiff's appeal.

**On January 30**, Konstantin Ter-Nakalian, editor-in-chief of the BlogNews news website, alerted that he had received a notification to go to the NSS to be interrogated within a criminal case on inciting religious hostility through the media[[34]](#footnote-34).

We would like to remind that on September 24, 2018, Forrights.am website reported that the Word of Life Evangelical Church of Armenia applied to the National Security Service of Armenia requesting to launch a criminal case for inciting religious hostility, based on the publications of Dukhov Armenia Facebook page and BlogNews News Website (details can be found in CPFE 2018 Annual Report, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

**On January 31**, Shirak Public Television and Radio Company CJSC was liquidated by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia. The substantiation was that the company was still conducting analog broadcasting and therefore could not ensure coverage for a large audience, whereas digital broadcasting would require firstly a relevant legislative regulation and significant financial investment, which was not realistic as of the moment.

Meanwhile, Shirak TV has found itself in this situation not by its own fault, but because of the state's short-sighted and ineffective policy in this area, which has led to ousting not only to Shirak, but also about 10 other local television stations operating in the marzes from the process of digitalization. On this occasion, 10 journalistic organizations, on the initiative of CPFE, issued a statement on February 1, calling on the Armenian government to reconsider the decision on the liquidation of Shirak Public Television CJSC, refrain from drastic steps in the field of broadcasting that did not meet modern requirements, and develop a program of radical reforms in the field, based on international best practice and taking into account the recommendations of specialized journalistic organizations.[[35]](#footnote-35)

**On February 1**, the trial on the case of teacher Susanna Sargsyan vs. Hraparak.am website correspondent Shushanna Grigoryan resumed in Lori Marz General Jurisdication Court.

We would like to remind that the case is being re-examined in the court of first instance. The reason for the lawsuit was the publication of articles, titled "Head of Vanadzor School N8 was Fired"[[36]](#footnote-36) (October 4, 2013) and "A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time"[[37]](#footnote-37) (December 5, 2013) in Hraparak.am (details can be found in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018, Annual reports and in the reports for 2019, see at www.khosq.am *Reports* section).

Court hearings on this case were also held on March 14 and 28, April 25, May 21 and 23, and November 28, and the next one is scheduled on February 18, 2020.

 **On February 2,** Journalists accredited to the National Assembly were not allowed to enter the parliament building, where a closed-door session of the "My Step" faction was being held, with the participation of the prime ministers and a number of high-ranking officials from the executive branch of power. On February 4, 10 journalist organizations, at the initiative of CPFE, issued a statement demanding that the NA leadership delegate to the competent departments of the NA staff to revise the accreditation procedure and other normative acts inheritied from the previous parliament and create favorable conditions for journalists’ activity in the National Assembly.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**On February 5**, an arson attack occurred against the car of the editorial office of *Syunik Yerkir* newspaper in Kapan at dawn.[[39]](#footnote-39) The editor of the newspaper Samvel Alexanyan thinks that this was revenge against the professional activity of the newspaper. The editorial office released a statement on the case, stating that the case would have been prevented if the previous infringements against the newspaper had not gone unnoticed, referring to former Syunik governor Vahe Hakobyan and the staff of Zangezur CMP CJSC. "The newspaper, in response to the wishes of thousands of Syunik residents, specifically demanded to identify the beneficial owners of the Kajaran plant and restrain the appetite of the gangs that invaded Syunik. Only as of today, the administration of the Kajaran plant has filed 13 civil lawsuits against Samvel Alexanyan and the founder of the newspaper Syunyats Ashkharh LLC,”the editor of the newspaper said.

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

We would like to remind that on May 7, 2018, the RA Administrative Court decided to re-examine the case of the CHAP LLC, founder of GALA TV against the Gyumri Tax Inspectorate. This case has an 11-year history. The decision of the RA Administrative Court to review it again was made after the decision of the European Court of Human Rights passed on May 4, 2017 and after the ruling on this case was overturned by the RA Court of Cassation on April 7, 2018.

Karen Tumanyan, the representative of CHAP LLC filed a counterclaim with the administrative court of the Republic of Armenia, demanding that the tax authorities annul the act of 25 million 212 thousand 700 AMD, issued in 2007 (25.116.700 AMD was actually levied from the TV company founder). According to Tumanyan, the court should find out whether the administrative act was justified, and the dispute should be investigated as a criminal case, since this had to do with the abuse of large sums, which had not been taken into consideration in the three judicial instances of Armenia since 2007, and which the European Court of Human Rights drew attention to.[[40]](#footnote-40)

In a judgment passed on February 22, 2019, the court upheld GALA's claim and annulled the act drawn by the State Tax Service back in 2007 that obliged GALA to pay about 26 million drams.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**On February 6**, the court of general jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes held a regular court hearing on the case Asya Khachatryan vs. Garnik Isagulyan, the Chairman of National Security Party (the founders of *Aravot* and *168 Zham* newspapers, Araratnews.am , Operativ.am and "Henaran.am" news sites were recognized as third parties to the case) with claims to publicly refute the information rendered as slander and compensate for the damage caused to honor and dignity. [[42]](#footnote-42) The plaintiff disputes a statement made by Garnik Isagulyan, a consultant to the NKR Permanent Mission to Armenia at Hayeli Club on March 28, 2018: “Asya Khachatryan is not new to us. It is unconfirmed information that during her visits to Tbilisi, our so-called freedom-loving girl has been to Baku several times with her girlfriends. It is easier to enter Azerbaijan via Georgia without any clear notes in the passport.” The plaintiff demanded evidence from Isagulyan that she had been to Baku several times, seeking refutation and compensation of half a million AMD. (Details can be found in CPFE 2018 annual report and 2019 reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

Hearings were also held on April 15, May 10 and August 19. On September 9, the court ruled to dismiss Asya Khachatryan's claim against Garnik Isagulyan. The dispute did not continue.

**On February 11**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction hearaccepted into proceeding the case of News AM LLC vs. 1in.am news website reporter Sona (Sirush) Harutyunyan.

We would like to remind that on September 26, 2018, NewsAM LLC filed a lawsuit against the journalist, based on a post on her Facebook page where Sona Harutyunyan associated News.am with Robert Kocharyan's name.[[43]](#footnote-43) The founder of News.am demands from the journalist 200,000 AMD in compensation, in addition to publishing a refutation, apologizing publicly, and obliging the journalist to publish the court ruling on her Facebook page.

This year hearings were held on April 23, May 29, June 26, and July 9. On July 24, the claim was partially upheld. The court obliged the defendant to post a refutation on her personal Facebook page and to pay 50,000 AMD in favor of NewsAM as compensation for non-pecuniary damage incurred by slander.

On August 20, the defendant filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal. On September 12, the complaint was accepted for proceedings. A hearing was held on November 5, and on November 14 the Court of Appeal decided to dismiss the appeal and upheld the first-instance judgment. The defendant had decided not to apply not to go to the Court of Cassation, the text of the refutation would be posted on Facebook, but as of December 31, it was not published yet.

**On February 11**, a regular hearing on the case of citizen Narine Abrahamyan vs. journalist Kristine Aghalaryan was held in the Avan and Nor Nork administrative districts seat of Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction.

We would like to remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the article, titled "Meghri Medical Center Against the State Revenue Committee" on Lurer.com website, published on May 17, 2011, which addresses Narine Abrahamyan being in the center of numerous scandals during her career. [[44]](#footnote-44)

Trials on this case were also held on September 10 and December 26, with the next hearing scheduled on April 21.

 **On February 11**, the New Generation NGO filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against *Hraparak* Daily with claims to refute the information considered as slander and collecting 500,000 AMD as compensation for the damage. The reason for the lawsuit is the article, titled "LGBT Forum will Nevertheless Take Place" published on December 3, 2018.[[45]](#footnote-45)

On February 26, the application was returned and re-filed on March 29. On April 10, it was accepted into proceedings. Court hearings were also heard on July 2, September 6, and on September 9, the court decided to leave the case without examination (the plaintiff did not attend two consecutive hearings and did not set motion for the continuation of the case), to confiscate 200,000 AMD from New Generation NGO in favor of "Hraparak Daily" LLC as a lawyer's remuneration.

 **On February 11,** former Armavir governor Gagik Mirijanyan filed a lawsuit in the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Skizb Media Kentron LLC with a claim to oblige the LLC to refute the information damaging his honor, dignity and business reputation. The reason of the lawsuit was an article published in the *Zhamanak* newspaper, titled “Corruption: Gagik Mirijanyan Managed to Open a Private Clinic in 4 Months.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

On 25 February the application was accepted for proceedings. The case was heard on July 1, September 20, while on October 11, the court ruled to approve the settlement agreement between Gagik Mirijanyan and Skizb Media Kentron LLC. The defendant published a refutation in the *Zhamanak* daily, as demanded by the plaintiff. Thus, the proceedings were dismissed.

**On February 12**, Daniel Ioannisyan, Programs Director of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against blogger Narek Malyan claiming a compensation (300,000 AMD) for the damage to his honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was Narek Malyan's Facebook live broadcast, where he called Daniel Ioannisyan a liar and urged everyone to add that word every time in front of Daniel Ioannisyan's name.[[47]](#footnote-47)

On February 26, the application was returned and re-filed on March 18. On March 26, it was accepted for proceedings. The case was heard on June 11, July 1 and 16, while on August 5 a ruling was passed on rejecting Daniel Ioannisyan's claim against Narek Malyan. The court found that the plaintiff's arguments on the inadmissibility of evidence were not substantiated. The judgment entered into force.

**On February 12**, businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Syunyats Ashkharh LLC. The third person involved in the case was CHAP Chemical LLC (the founder of GALA TV), claiming compensation of one million AMD for damage to its honor and dignity and claims for apology. The cause of the lawsuit was an article titled "Car of the Editorial Office of *Syunik Yerkir* Newspaper under Arson Attack" and published on February 5, where the site's editor mentioned Vahe Hakobyan's name as the possible organizer of the arson.[[48]](#footnote-48)

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

**On February 13**, Lyova Abrahamyan, head of Sarukhan Community in Gegharkunik Marz, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Narine Hasratyan, a reporter at the *Haykakan Zham* news site, claiming refutation of the information damaging his honor, dignity and business reputation. The cause of the lawsuit was an article titled "Who Sponsors Sarukhan Mayor and Prevents Preliminary Investigation Since August,"[[49]](#footnote-49) published on the website on January 10 and containing villagers’s complaints about their mayor.

On February 22, the appeal was returned, on March 14, after corrections, it was re-filed and on March 25 it was accepted into proceedings. A case hearing was held on November 27, and the next hearing is scheduled on February 25, 2020.

**On February 14,** citizen Erik Yeghinyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against Factinfo news website with claims of one million AMD confiscated in his favor, written apology and pubslihed refutation. The cause of the lawsuit is the publication on September 10, 2018, entitled "The Prisoner Attempted a Suicide Because He Was Not Taken to the Dentist."[[50]](#footnote-50)

On February 28, a decision was made to return the application. On March 25 the plaintiff appealed that decision to the Court of Appeal, and on April 25 the appeal was upheld. On June 17, the case was accepted for proceedings by the court of first instance, and the motion for injunctive relief was dismissed. Court hearings were held on October 23 and December 11, with the next one scheduled on February 7, 2020.

**On February 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes held the first hearing of the case of RA Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan vs. Boris Tamoyan (Editor of Politik.am website) with claims of compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity and public refutation of defamatory information.

We would like to remind that the cause of the lawsuit was the publication of the following articles in Politics.am: "Deputy PM Avinyan Used Marijuana in the Government" (October 26, 2018), "Avinyan is Afraid. Marijuana Put Him into Trouble”, (October 27, 2018)”, and “A Surprise is Awaiting Avinyan in Court; He will Have to Undergo an Examination” (October 29, 2018).

Court hearings were also held on March 25, May 6, and June 14. On July 3, the court's ruling partially upheld Tigran Avinyan's claim according to which the defendant was obliged to publish a refutation, as well as to pay the plaintiff 1 million drams as compensation for slander and 24,000 drams as state duty.

On August 1, the defendant filed an appeal, on August 22, it was returned to correct the violations, on August 30, it was re-submitted and was accepted for proceedings on September 9. On November 21, Boris Tamoyan's appeal was rejected. On December 20, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation.

**On February 14**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction continued the trial of the case of lawyer Gevorg Mkrtchyan vs. the founder of News.am news website NewsAM LLC.

We would like to remind that the cause of the claim was an article published on the website on news.am website on March 18, 2016, titled "Ridiculous Situation in the Chamber of Advocates -2. Retaliation Continues.” The publication notes that Attorney Gevorg Mkrtchyan had given obviously false testimony[[51]](#footnote-51) (details can be found in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 annual reports, see the Reports section of www.khosq.am).

A hearing of the case took place on September 10, and a judgment passed on the case on November 20 obliged news.am website to publish a refutation on News.am website. In addition, 50,000 AMD should be confiscated in favor of Gevorg Mkrtchyan from NewsAM as compensation for non-pecuniary damage and 5,000AMD as state duty advance payment. On October 15, NewsAM filed an appeal, which was returned on October 21, for which the defendant filed a complaint with the Court of Cassation on November 28.

In 2019, 4 more lawsuits were filed against NewsAM LLC by the same person with claims of refution of defamatory information and monetary compensation of non-pecuniary damage.

Court hearings on the first of these lawsuits (caused by an article published at 5:06 pm on June 23, 2017, titled "Victory of Pndukism: Armen Soghomonyan beaten by Leadership of Chamber of Advocates Was Invited for Interrogation"[[52]](#footnote-52)) were held on February 14, May 15, August 21, December 4, while on December 12, the claim against the media outlet was rejected.

Court hearings on the second case (caused by an article published at 6:31 pm on June 23, 2017, title "If they think Atanesyan and Soghomonyan will drop their complaints, they are sorely mistaken: Lusine Sahakyan"[[53]](#footnote-53)) were held on March 15, May 20, July 15, November 12, and a judgment made on November 26 rejected the claim.

Court hearings on the third case (caused by an article published at 15:36 on June 23, 2017: "It's just a shame and an obvious illegality: Tigran Atanesyan was summoned for interrogation as a suspect"[[54]](#footnote-54)) were held on February 25, March 4, May 21, July 8 and 17, October 21, and November 20. By a judgment passed on December 5, the claim was rejected.

A court hearing on the fourth case (caused by the news piece of the Investigative Committee's titled “5 People Charged for the Attack on Atanesyan and Soghomonyan” published at 5:46 pm on June 23, 2017, at the end of which the editorial staff recalled the previous materials[[55]](#footnote-55)) was held on April 16, and the claim was rejected on April 26.

On May 31, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal, the case was accepted for proceedings on June 28, and it was dismissed on August 22, and the first-instance court decision remained in force.

**On February 15**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication held the first hearing on the case of citizen Azat Tovmasyan vs. ATV TV company and citizen Sirvard Avoyan claiming for acknowledging the violation of the right to privacy and family, obliging to refute the information deemed defamatory and compensating at the value of $ 2 million AMD. The lawsuit was caused by an accusation addressed at Azat Tovmasyan during the program "Semi-open windows" on July 30, 2018. Sirvard Avoyan accuses the father, Azat Tovmasyan, of abducting his daughter. [[56]](#footnote-56)

The lawsuit was filed on October 3, 2018, but the court returned it on October 17. On November 9, the lawsuit was re-filed and it was accepted for proceedings on November 22.

Court hearings on this case were also held on May 24, September 20, and November 22, with another hearing scheduled on February 14, 2020.

**On February 15**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court hearing on the case of citizen Armen Khachatryan vs. Editor-in-chief of "Irates" newspaper Piruza Meliksetyan, claiming public refutation of slander.

The claim was filed on September 10, 2018, caused by an article titled "The goal is to see a Gay Catholic on the Enlightener’s throne which will destroy not only the church but will also become the end of the Armenian gene,"**[[57]](#footnote-57)** published on Irates.am on July 17, 2018. On September 24, the case was accepted for proceedings.

Court hearings of the case were also held on April 10, May 24 and July 9. According to the court ruling published on October 10, the case was dismissed based on the plaintiff's appeal. Besides, it was also ordered to levy 100000 AMD from the plaintiff as a reasonable lawyer’s remuneration. On December 9, the plaintiff appealed the first instance judgment at the Court of Appeal, but on December 26, the appeal was returned, citing incompliance with due dates.

**On February 19**, the court of general jurisdiction of Tavush marz held a regular court hearing on the case of Television and Radio Broadcasting Network of Armenia vs. IJevan Studio LLC. The lawsuit sought confiscation of 2 million 599 thousand 550 drams from the founder of the TV company, which was accumulated due to the fees for broadcasting television programs unpaid by Ijevan Studio. Director of Ijevan Studio Naira Khachikyan told CPFE that she had made the payments properly before 2015, but as a result of the state policy in 2016, the company was left out of the transition process into digital broadcasting and continued to operate in analogue mode, losing its audience and advertisers, and was in dire financial straits, hence stopped the payments.

The case was also held on August 13, and according to the judgment made on August 28, about 2 million 599 thousand 550 AMD shall be confiscated from Ijevan Studio LLC in favor of Television and Radio Braodcasting Network of Armenia CJSC as a debt accumulated due to failure to fulfil contractual obligations.

**On February 20**, the Service for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Museums and Preservation of Historical Environment SNCO filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the *Armenian Times* daily with claims of compensation for non-pecuniary damage caused by publishing slander about individuals and refutation of the defamatory information. The case was caused by an article "He was Beaten, Harassed and Fired for Giving an Interview. An Employee Fired from Garni Shop after 30 Years” published on Januray 17, in which the author presented the dispute between the director of the SNCO and the former director of Garni Museum-Reserve.[[58]](#footnote-58)

On March 4, the court returned the appeal on the grounds that the documents were incomplete. It was re-filed on March 21 and accepted for proceedings on April 1. Hearings were held on June 11 and 20, July 23, September 9 and 30, November 4 and 15, and December 2. The next hearing is scheduled on February 26, 2020.

**On February 21**, businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against attorney Hovik Arsenyan and Yerkir Media TV claiming 2 million AMD in compensation for the damage to his honor and dignity and obligation of refutation of defamatory information. The lawsuit was prompted by the lawyer's question during the October 18, 2018 issue of "Country’s Issue" program on why former governor of Syunik marz Vahe Hakobyan had not been prosecuted as of the moment.[[59]](#footnote-59)

By the way, on the same occasion, Vahe Hakobyan filed two more lawsuits on November 12, 2018, and on January 16, 2019, but the court returned them. The lawsuit, filed for the third time on March 6, was accepted for proceedings. The hearings were held on July 8 and November 5, with the next one scheduled on February 5, 2020.

 **On February 25,** the RA Investigative Committee dismissed the criminal case initiated on the persecution of Lragir.am correspondent Tehmine Yenokyan, gathering and disseminating information on her private life on the grounds of absence of corpus delicti. On March 22, Tehmine Yenokyan informed about this, sharing some details about the investigation of the case. [[60]](#footnote-60)

We would like to remind that on September 11, 2018, Tehmineh Yenokyan posted on Facebook that Lydian Armenia employees had cut her phone conversation from her colleagues’ live broadcast, then posted it and insulted the journalist.[[61]](#footnote-61) Tehmine Yenokyan reported this to the police. (Details can be found CPFE 2018 annual report and 2019 reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The criminal case was dropped on the grounds that the information collected and published was related to Tehmine Yenokyan's public activity and was not private in nature. The journalist appealed the decision to the prosecutor's office in the established manner, and, after rejection, she filed a lawsuit on April 29, seeking an obligation to refute insulting information and to pay a compensation of 1 million AMD. On May 15, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Court hearings were held on September 25, November 13, with the next one scheduled on January 17, 2020.

**On February 27**, a regular session on the case of Sokrat Hovsepyan, Mayor of Aygestan Community in Ararat Marz vs. Armenia TV CJSC, founder of Armenia TV was held at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction.

The lawsuit was prompted by the “Duty Office” program broadcast by Armenia TV Channel on December 17, 2017, which stated that Sokrat Hovsepyan, the mayor of the village, had dismantled and sold the gas pipes owned by the village, abusing his official position. The plaintiff sought to oblige the defendant to publicly apologize for spreading false information, damaging his dignity and business reputation and pay 3 million AMD in compensation.

 Court hearings were also held on March 21, April 4, April 19, May 29, and June 19. According to a judgment issued on July 2 and already in force, Sokrat Hovsepyan's claim was partially satisfied. The Armenian police were obliged to apologize to Sokrat Hovsepyan and publish a refutation during the "Duty Office" program and pay 150,000 AMD for insult and slander and 11,000 AMD as state duty. Sokrat Hovsepyan refused from his lawsuit against Armenia TV, and this part of the case was dropped.

**On February 27**, the case of Vahe Makaryan, a correspondent of the *Hraparak* daily, vs. former MP Rubik Hakobyan's continued at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction.

We would like to remind that on December 7, 2016, the National Assembly MP Rubik Hakobyan after using violence against the *Hraparak* daily's correspondent Vahe Makaryan, made abusive remarks about the journalist in the NA hall, as well as in various interviews and records, calling him a hooligan, an ignorant man, and a criminal. Vahe Makaryan filed a lawsuit claiming protection of honor and dignity in connection with the incident (details can be found in CPFE's 2016, 2017, 2018 annual reports and 2019 reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

Court hearings on this case were also held on July 1, September 12, November 27, and December 18, with the next one scheduled on February 5, 2020.

**On March 1**, a journalist of Radio Liberty Gayane Saribekyan asked Gagik Tsarukyan whether he was interrogated within the framework of the investigation on the events of March 1, 2008. The question caused Tsarukyan's indignation. "Girl, what do you mean, interrogate, well, don't you feel ashamed, how many times can I explain to you, tell you that Tsarukyan had nothing to do with it, he couldn’t have anything to do with it. Or you must be pretending you don’t understand, after 100 explanations, after being told the same thing, you again ask that question to make a pretence, it is a shame, I feel ashamed for you, one should have some brains, and understand what question they are asking, you have come here with prior intention, with a written scenario ... Tsarukyan is pure, crystal clear, no blackmail, nothing can affect Tsarukyan." [[62]](#footnote-62) Afterwards, in response to Factor.am reporter Mher Arshakyan’s question on whether Prosperous Armenia Party was responsible for the March 1, 2008 events, he continued answering in the same manner. "Aren't you ashamed to speak so ignorantly?"

**On March 4,** the Prosecutor General's Office of Armenia informed that media reports about the abduction of and threats to TV anchor Hamlet Ghushchyan had been sent to the RA Police General Department of Criminal Investigation with an instruction of checking the circumstances contained in them.

On the same day, when speaking to Hraparak.am and in answer to the question whether it was true that Samvel Alexanyan's men beat him when he spoke about Lusastgh vodka, Hamlet Ghushchyan said: "What beating ... Who is that scam to beat me, they just kidnapped me, they abducted me, took me away by night and put a gun to my head and said, 'You're gonna repeat what we tell you to say'.”[[63]](#footnote-63) ։

The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed CPFE that a criminal case was initiated on March 29 at the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police of the Republic of Armenia, which was sent to the Investigations Department of the Investigative Committee of Yerevan and was accepted for proceedings. On July 19, the Investigative Committee decided to suspend the proceedings of the initiated criminal case. The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed CPFE that all necessary procedural and investigative actions had been carried out during the preliminary investigation of the criminal case, but the proceedings were suspended on the grounds of “unidentified offender”.

**On March 4**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction launched new proceedings for the case of Gagik Tsarukyan vs. Founder of Mamul.am website Social Media LLC. The lawsuit was firstly prompted by the following articles were published on Mamul.am on August 13, 2018: “A Mandatory but not Forced “Niva”, Work in Barns, Construction Sites, Gardens: Modern Feudalism at the Gas Stations in Tsarukyan's "Kingdom""[[64]](#footnote-64) and "Tsarukyan's Employees Forced to Buy a Niva Car with Monthly Deductions from Salaries at a Price Higher than on the Market."[[65]](#footnote-65)

A preliminary hearing was held on April 4, while on July 15 the court ruled to dismiss the case on the grounds that the plaintiff failed to attend two consecutive court hearings or submit a motion on delaying the trial or settling it in his absence, and the defendant did not petition to continue the investigation.

**On March 5,** businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Hayeli Press Club. The plaintiff sought to oblige the defendant to pay 3 million AMD in compensation for damage to his honor and dignity, as well as to publish a refutation. On March 15, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

CPFE failed to find out the cause of the lawsuit. Moreover, the defendant was not even aware of the scheduled hearings that took place on September 5 and November 18. During the last hearing, a petition on withdrawal of the claim by the plaintiff and a consideration of sharing sue charges was reviewed. The next meeting is scheduled on February 4, 2020.

**On March 7**, Chairman of the RA NA Standing Committee on Defense and Security Andranik Kocharyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the *Hraparak* daily with claims of public apology for an insult, compensation in the amount of 1 million AMD, and public refutation of defamatory information.

The reason for the lawsuit is the article titled "Who really is Andranik Kocharyan?" [[66]](#footnote-66) published in the newspaper and on the homonymous website. Hasmik Melkonyan, the author of the article, wrote that those who collaborated with Andranik Kocharyan in the 1990s either died or lost their memory, and presented a number of details about his life in an unfavorable context.

The lawsuit was accepted into proceedings on March 21. Court hearings on the case were held on June 11, July 1 and July 15, November 11, December 2, and December 25, with the next one scheduled on January 29, 2020.

**On March 11**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court hearing on the case of citizens Koryun Atoyan, Paruyr Kalantaryan, Lyuba Mehrabyan and Mihrdat Harutyunyan vs. Norik Sargsyan. Aravot Daily LLC and Hraparak Daily LLC were recognized as third parties to the case.

We would like to remind that the claim was caused by the publications by Norik Sargsyan, titled “An Open Letter to Norik Sargsyan, Rector of the Armenian State University of Economics, Mr. K Atoyan” printed in the *Hraparak* daily on April 15, 2016 and “Where the Shoe Pinches” printed in the *Aravot* daily. (Details can be found on CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018, annual reports and 2019 reports, see also khosq.am's *Reports* section).

A hearing was held on September 10 this year as well, and the judgment on the case was published on September 25, according to which the case was dismissed on the grounds of withdrawal of lawsuit. Accordingly, the claim against the *Hraparak* daily was dismissed, too. Whereas Lyuba Mehrabyan's claim was satisfied, and the *Aravot* daily was obliged to publish a refutation. In addition, according to the judgment, 208,000 AMD should be confiscated from the plaintiffs and third parties.

On December 4, the defendant appealed the decision in the Court of Appeal, and on December 19, the appeal was accepted into proceedings. The court hearing date has not yet been set.

**On March 11**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court hearing on the case of citizen Samvel Hakobyan vs. Shamshyan Media LLC, seeking refutation of defamatory information, public apology for insult and monitary compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The case was caused by a publication on Shamshyan.com website, titled “Emergency in Yerevan. A drunken driver of a Mercedes Introduced Himself as Colonel and Asked Road Police Officers “You Think You Have Caught a Criminal, huh?’ and Some Time Later Unrinated into His Pants: Photo Report, Video”, dated October 5, 2018.

The case was also heard on May 15, June 19, July 12, while on July 24, the court ruled to dismiss the case because the plaintiff had dropped the claim.

**On March 11**, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor appealed the Investigative Committee's December 24 decision to dismiss the criminal case initiated in relation to the threats to the editor-in-chief of Medialab.am website. HCAV filed its complaint with the supervising prosecutor and, after rejection, went to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction. The court, too, rejected the appeal on May 22.

We would like to remind that on January 28, 2018, the editorial office of Medialab.am website received serious threats from a Facebook user named Hayk Berman Ohanyan. The reason was a caricature published in the media outlet on the same day, on the topic of flowers purchased by the Ministry of Defense of Armenia at the value of 7 million AMD and corruption risks in the army. The threat contained a hint that Medialab.am could face the fate of the *Charlie Hebdo* French magazine that was attacked in January 2015.

A criminal case was initiated at the RA Prosecutor's Office under Article 137 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (threat of murder, serious harm to property or destruction of property) on February 6, 2018, and it was sent to the RA Investigative Committee for preliminary investigation.[[67]](#footnote-67) Marianna Grigoryan's representative, human rights activist Artur Sakunts's motion for an expert examination of the text and symbols was satisfied. HCAV then sent a petition to the investigator to include Hayk Ohanyan with a nickname of Hayk Berman Ohanyan as defendant in the case, but on December 21, this petition was rejected.

On July 8, the HCAV appealed the ruling of the court to reject the complaint against the decision of the Investigative Committee to dismiss the criminal case filed in relation to the threats addressed at the editor-in-chief of Medialab.am. On September 9, the Court of Appeal rejected the HCAV’s appeal. On September 27, HCAV applied to the Court of Cassation with a cassation appeal, yet the latter refused to accept it into proceedings on December 26. HCAV’s office is examining the grounds for applying to the European Court of Human Rights.

**On March 12**, citizen Hayk Mkrtchyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Armnews TV CJSC, GALA TV, Tert.am LLC, Shant TV, Iravunk newspaper, Radio Aurora FM100.7, Hayeli Club, Armday.am LLC, Asekose.am LLC. The reason for the lawsuit is the news that 32-year-old Hayk Mkrtchyan, a resident of Nor Nork administrative district of Yerevan, used counterfeit banknotes. The plaintiff considers this to be slander and demands refutation. On March 14, the application was returned.

On March 29, Hayk Mkrtchyan again filed a lawsuit in the same court, this time against Armnews TV CJSC, seeking refutation of the factual data considered slander and compensation for the damage caused. On April 15, the application was returned, citing incomplete documents. On May 13, he again filed a lawsuit; on May 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The hearings were held on September 29, October 29 and December 9. The day of the next meeting is not scheduled yet.

**On March 12**, businessman Vahe Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens. The plaintiff seeks to oblige the defendant to pay 1 million AMD as compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity and to apologize.

The reason of the lawsuit was the news piece published on Fip.am on October 23, 2018, according to which "former governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan created the Syunik Development and Investment Fund, the proceeds of which came from donations from Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Plant. According to the source, these funds were channelled to organizations and companies, affiliated with Vahe Hakobyan and his wife."[[68]](#footnote-68)

On March 21, the case was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary hearing was held on July 19. On October 1, the court ruled to leave the claim without consideration, as the plaintiff failed to attend two consecutive hearings, as well as submit a motion to postpone or resolve the case in absentia, and the defendant did not petition to continue the investigation.

**On March 15**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction ruled to launch new proceedings on the lawsuit on the case of Ashot Grigoryan vs. 24 News LLC, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tigran Seyranyan, seeking compensation for damage to one’s honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by a video under the heading of “Chance Comer in Yerevan: Who is the Big Schemer, Initiating the Restart of Nairit?” that was published on the YouTube channel of the website.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The lawsuit was first filed on August 27, 2018, it was accepted for proceedings on September 6, with no further developments. The trial is scheduled on January 21, 2020.

**On March 16,** the Special Investigation Service launched a criminal case against the *Zhoghovurd* daily on charges of publishing preliminary investigation secrets.[[70]](#footnote-70) Earlier, on March 15, the SIS officially announced that disclosure of pretrial secret data could lead to criminal liability, requesting the media to refrain from accessing pretrial secret data made available by some “unscrupulous” participants of the investigation and judicial proceedings, causing leak of information. Despite the warning, the March 16 issue of the *Zhoghovurd* daily published an article, titled "Serzh Sargsyan, too, Would Issue Order 0038: Serzh Sargsyan’s Testimony on March 1 Case", which contains excerpts from the protocols of the third RA President Serzh Sargsyan’s interrogation as a witness.

CPFE has been told by the SIS that the case was still under preliminary investigation, with no defendant involved as accused.

**On March 18**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court hearing on the case of citizen Armen Arakelyan vs. Asekose AM LLC with claims of publicly refutation of slander published in the hoonymous website. The reason of the suit is an article, titled "The Moral Image of the Hieromonk Demanding the Resignation of the Catholicos," published on August 6, 2018.[[71]](#footnote-71) By the way, at the end of the article the website expressed its readiness to publish the opinion of the other party, too, but defrocked hieromonk Koryun Arakelyan (also known as Armen Arakelyan) preferred to go to court.

Court sessions were also held on June 17, October 4, and the next one is scheduled on January 22, 2020.

**On March 18**, the first hearing of the case with claims for compensation for insult and slander of the citizens of Yerevan Marat Grigoryan, Sargis Kelyan, Levon Harutyunyan, Liana Manukyan, Esther Manukyan, Tatevik Boyakhchyan vs. the *Hraparak* newspaper was held at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication.

The lawsuit was accepted into proceedings on December 6, 2018, caused by an article titled "A Scandal at YSU? Has a New “Sashik" Come Forth?” which, according to a certain letter, the dean of YSU Faculty of Geography and Geology Marat Grigoryan, was accused of embezzling 50 percent of faculty salaries.[[72]](#footnote-72) By the way, the site also published Marat Grigoryan's comment to the letter, and on October 19, the researchers' refutation of the facts presented in the preceding article, this however did not satisfy the plaintiffs. [[73]](#footnote-73)

Court hearings were also held on May 23, July 22, and October 24, with the next one scheduled on January 23, 2020. By the way, according to the defendant, the plaintiff submitted a petition, requesting the court to examine the case in absencia from now on.

# On March 20, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on the case of Samvel Harutyunyan, Chairman of the State Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia vs. Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, with claims of 2 million AMD compensation for damage to honor and dignity.

# We would like to remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the status posted onto his Facebook page by Daniel Ioannisyan on June 12, 2018[[74]](#footnote-74) and an interview based on it and published on Tert.am website on June 13 ("The Minister of Education and Science should also answer the question to what extent the friendship between Samvel Harutyunyan's son and himself influenced the decision of appointing the father in the position: Ioannisyan”).[[75]](#footnote-75) The third party to the case is Panarmenian Media Group CJSC as the rightholder of Tert.am website. On June 26, the case was accepted for proceedings.

There were also hearings on the case on May 16, August 26, October 4, and the judgment, issued on October 24, partially satisfied the claim. Daniel Ioannisyan was obliged to refute the information about Samvel Harutyunyan through his Facebook account and on Tert.am news site. In addition, 500000 AMD should be confiscated in favor of the plaintiff Samvel Harutyunyan as compensation for the damage caused to the plaintiff's honor and dignity. The remainder of the claim was rejected.

On November 28, the defendant appealed to the Court of Appeal.

**On March 22**, Emma Kirakosyan filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against ATV TV Company LLC with claims of compensation of damage to her honor and dignity and obligation for refutation. The suit was triggered by the February 22 issue of Semi-Open Windows program. The topic is the 20-year-old lawsuits caused allegedly by Emma Kirakosyan herself.[[76]](#footnote-76) On April 2, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Court hearings were held on July 24 and November 18, with the next one scheduled on March 10, 2020.

**On March 27**, the Court of General Jurisdiction in Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes held the first court hearing on the case of Lydian Armenia vs. Journalist Tehmine Yenokyan.

The suit was triggered by the Facebook Live broadcast by Tehmine Yenokyan from the drinking gallery in the town of Jermuk on August 12, 2018. According to the plaintiff, the journalist made derogatory remarks discrediting the company's business reputation during her public address, and thus the plaintiff claims for a compensation of 1 million AMD, and refutation of defamatory information in the same location by means of a public address via a live Facebook broadcast.

Court hearings were held on June 5, September 25, December 4, and the next one is scheduled on March 12, 2020.

**On April 2**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first hearing on the case of Alvina Gyulumyan, a member of the Constitutional Court vs. the founder of the *Armenian Times* daily "Dareskizb" LLC. The lawsuit was prompted by the publication of an article stating that when Gyulumyan was representing Armenia at the ECtHR as a judge, she did not spare any effort to postpone the investigation of one of the cases in relation to the March 1, 2008, events in Yerevan.

The suit was accepted for proceedings on November 12, 2018. Alvina Gyulumyan claims for a refutation by the media outlet without monetary compensation.

Court hearings of the case were also held on June 7, July 29, October 28, and November 28. A judgment passed on December 6 rejected the claim on the ground that it was time-barred. Moreover, according to the judgment, 100,000 AMD shall be confiscated from the plaintiff in favor of the media outlet as a lawyer’s reasonable remuneration.

**On April 2**, editor-in-chief of Yerevan.Today website Sevak Hakobyan issued a statement demanding an explanation from the Investigative Committee on what was discovered the previous year as a result of an expert examination of equipment seized from the editorial office on September 17.

 We would like to remind that on September 17, 2018, officers of the 6th Department of the RA Police and Special Investigation Service conducted a search in the editorial office of the Yerevan.today news website. They searched for bugs, computers were checked to find out how the site had received and published the YouTube URL of NSS director Arthur Vanetsyan and SIS chief Sasun Khachatryan's bugged telephone conversation two days before it was available online.[[77]](#footnote-77) (Details can be found in CPFE 2018 annual reports and in 2019 reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

On June 17, Yerevan.Today published an article entitled "Investigative Committee Chief Hayk Grigoryan Lies and Avoids Response".[[78]](#footnote-78) In response to this artcile, the Investigative Committee issued a statement on June 28 with claims of refutation on website the site, as the article "not only distorted the information of the investigative body on the course of criminal proceedings, but also breached media ethics and used incorrect and inappropriate expressions about the Chairman of the RA Investigative Committee.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

In response to an inquiry by the CPFE, the Investigative Committee reported on September 30 that according to the conclusion of the computer-technical expertise assigned after the seizure of the equipment from Yerevan.Today on September 17, 2018, no data of interest to the investigation were found in the hardware.

The results of the forensic examination show that the brutal methods used to obtain data from the editorial office, in particular search and seizure of hardware, and failure to return it for months, were groundless and shall unequivocally be assessed as pressure on the media.

**On April 2,** Serzh Sargsyan's former chief bodyguard Vachagan Ghazaryan in Yerablur when answering reporters' questions on his release on bail, said: “Mind your own business, folks, what do you want? There are no two words, we will speak when it is all over.” [[80]](#footnote-80) Later, when one of the reporters asked Serzh Sargsyan whether he was afraid he would be arrested, Vachagan Ghazaryan told the journalist: "Get out of here." [[81]](#footnote-81)

**On April 2,** at Yerablur, Serzh Sargsyan spoke with chuckles and mockingly to journalists. Responding to a question when a reporter asked to comment on allegations that the April war was devised, he said, "I have nothing to do with sick people."[[82]](#footnote-82) Later, Sargsyan's bodyguards prevented the journalists from approaching, and one of the bodyguards ruthlessly pushed away the microphone of one of the journalists. [[83]](#footnote-83)

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

We would like to remind that on April 24, 2016 the Armenian Police Chief Vladimir Gasparyan told reporters at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex that they were "losing color and fading out." In response to Siranuysh Papyan’s question, a reporter for 1in.am and Lragir.am websites, that the police regularly spoke about reforms, but the public did not see them, he said: "And I don't even see a woman in you."

The journalist filed a lawsuit with claims of compensation for the damage to honor and dignity, as well as obstruction of professional activity and gender discrimination. Siranuysh Papyan's interests were represented by a lawyer from the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression. (Details can be found in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 annual reports, see the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am).

Exhausting all instances in the country Siranuysh Papyan with the support of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression lodged a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights on December 29, 2018.

**On April 5,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court hearing on the case of citizen Gagik Gevorgyan vs. President of the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia Gagik Makaryan and the H3 TV Company. The lawsuit claims to oblige the defendants to refute the information that defames honor and dignity and to pay a compensation of 2 million AMD for slander.

The suit was accepted for proceedings on December 12, 2018. Following a hearing on April 15, 2019, the case was dismissed on April 19 because the plaintiff had dropped the claim.

**On April 8,** PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan, referring to the transgender person’s speech in the Parliament, criticized it and said that this kind of a defect should be kept secret. When Tsarukyan saw that the journalist felt surprised, he responded in a disrespectful tone. "Go read and find out what I mean."[[84]](#footnote-84)

**On April 10,** lawyer Georgi Melikyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Shamshyan Media LLC with claims of compensation for the non-pecuniary damage caused by the publication of defamatory information about him and refutation of that information. The case was prompted by information posted on the Shamshyan.com website on March 7 that questioned the legality of the plaintiff's legal activity.

On April 23, the court returned the application. It was re-filed on May 8 and was accepted for proceedings on May 21. The court hearing scheduled on November 22 did not take place because Judge A. Badiryan was attending training courses. The day of the next session is not appointed yet.

**On April 15,** Mher Derdzyan, the head of the "Under One Roof" housing project, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office LLC with claims for a publicly apology and obligation for 1,5 million AMD compensation for insult and slander. The lawsuit was caused by the newspaper’s concerns that the program could be a deliberate hoax.[[85]](#footnote-85) On April 19, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Trials were held on July 15, September 12, and November 26, with the next one scheduled on February 4, 2020.

**On April 16**, the Court of General Jurisdiction in Shirak Marz held the first court hearing of the case of citizen Shoghik Aleksanyan vs. Mariam Poghosyan, Narine Sargsyan and the Asparez Journalists' Club with claims of refuting defamatory information and compensation for damage. The cause of the lawsuit is the article entitled "Following the Complaint of School N 18 in Gyumri" published on Asparez.am on November 6, 2018.[[86]](#footnote-86) According to the author of the article Ani Mkrtchyan, the lawsuit was based on the statement of the school teacher and deputy head Narine Sargsyan, that was published on the website verbatim. The claim was accepted for proceedings on December 26, 2018.

In 2019 the court hearings were also held on June 6, July 4 (in this hearing a counterclaim was filed with a claim of apology that was returned on July 15), October 15, and November 12, and by the judgment of December 2, the application was granted in part. It was decided to confiscate 40,000 AMD from plaintiff Shoghik Alexanyan in favor of defendant Asparez Journalists' Club as a lawyer’s reasonable remuneration.

**On April 17,** citizen Khachatur Khachatryan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Shamshyan Media LLC with claims of public apology for damage caused to honor and dignity and compensation of damage at 1 million AMD. The lawsuit was prompted by an article titled "Shirak marz police operation against drug addicts. Two of the detained have just been released under amnesty. Deputy Director of one of the Diaspora Ministry's SNCOs is among the Detained."[[87]](#footnote-87) Published in Shamshyan.com on March 13.

On April 29, the court decided to return the documents to the plaintiff.

On August 1, the citizen filed a second lawsuit with the same claim. On September 2, the application was accepted for proceedings. February 6, 2020, is appointed for a court hearing.

**On April 26,** the Syunik Marz Court of General Jurisdiction ruled on the case of Gayane Avagyan vs. Citizen Hovakim Karapetyan (ATV TV's "Semi-Open Windows" program was identified as the third person to the case) to schedule a trial.

The cause of the lawsuit is the private information released during the May 29, 2017, issue of the program. The plaintiff claims a refutation of the defamatory information, a public apology, and a compensation of 800000 AMD.

In 2019 the case was heard on May 22, and the decision of June 4 partially granted the application. Hovakim Karapetyan was obliged to refute the following inaccurate opinion about Gayane Avagyan voiced during the "Semi-Open Windows" program: "She was a month pregnant when she came to our house." The remainder of the claim was rejected.

**On May 6,** Armenian Progressive Youth NGO filed a lawsuit against Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, Editor-in-Chief of BlogNews.am and the founder of Channel 5 TV Company, SHARK LLC, with claims of refuting a defamatory statement, apologizing for insult and seeking compensation as a means of remedy from actions defamatory to honor, dignity, and business reputation. On May 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

According to the information provided by the Armenian Progressive Youth NGO, the claim was caused by a statement made by Constantin Ter-Nakalian, Editor-in-Chief of BlogNews.am website, in the Channel 5's "Face to Face" program on April 5 that Progressive Youth NGO implemented LGBT campaign in a Kotayk region school.[[88]](#footnote-88) On the following day, the NGO posted on its Facebook page a "Request for Refutation" addressed to Konstantin Ter-Nakalian. On April 12, a video was posted on the Facebook page of the "ADEKVAD" group, entitled "We apologize to all gay, pro-Azerbaijani morons who Made a Step".[[89]](#footnote-89) In the video, co-author of #SutNikol Initiative Arthur Danielyan and Konstantin Ter-Nakalian posted a video under “refutation” heading that contained hate speech and abusive expressions. Since then, there were two more similar "refutations" addressed to NGO President Grigor Yeritsyan, who is also a member of the Yerevan Council of Elders from the "My Step" faction.

Preliminary hearings were held on August 28 and November 8, with the next one scheduled on January 27, 2020.

**On May 14**, Channel 5TV owner Armen Tavadyan showed disrespect in a conversation with Civilnet.am reporter Gevorg Tosunyan. In particular, the businessman did not like the journalist's questions about being summoned to police and interrogated in connection with the assault on activist Varges Gaspari. "Are you an investigator, or what? To reserve such a right to yourself?... Many things may be of interest to you, so what?"[[90]](#footnote-90)

**On May 15**, the wife of Armen Harutyunyan, candidate for the rector’s position at Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinematography, called the editorial office of "Aravot.am" news site, demanding to reveal the source of the news about her husband and threatened to go to the police.[[91]](#footnote-91)

**On May 15**, Governor of Lori Marz Andrey Ghukasyan filed a lawsuit against MIG TV journalist Karine Vanesyan for insulting him and demanded to oblige her to apologize in the same manner. In particular, the journalist wrote on her Facebook page: "The smart ones from among you are sitting at home in a state of uncertainty, and homeless morons like you take advantage of the moment and start devouring like a pig. Shame on you, if you know what shame is…"

On May 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The hearings were held on September 4, October 3, and November 14. On December 5, the court obliged the journalist to apologize to Andrei Ghukasyan, posting the apology on her Facebook page.

**On May 16**, former NA MP Alexander Sargsyan, the brother of the third President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan, showed disrespect for Marine Khachatryan, a journalist at Radio Liberty in the yard of the court, and in response to attempt to ask a question, he shouted: "Go away." [[92]](#footnote-92)

**On May 16**, citizen Lilit Martirosyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Tesaket LLC, with a claim to to oblige Irates.am website owned by her to publicly apologize for offensive expressions and pay 1 million AMD in compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article published on the web site on April 9 and titled "A Sodomite openly Addresses the Public from the NA Platform".[[93]](#footnote-93) On June 3, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Case hearings were held on September 6, November 5, November 28, and December 19. The next hearing is scheduled on May 11.

**On May 18**, the Investigative Committee suspended the criminal case of Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of Informed Citizens' NGOs vs. Iravunk.com website for the second time. The case was initiated for illegally collecting and disseminating information considered a personal and family secret.

We would like to remind that in on March 25, 2017, Iravunk.com published "Interesting Episodes from Civic Activist Daniel Ioannisyan's Biography" with information on Daniel Ioannisyan and his family’s private life, exclusively owned by the RA Police and Investigative Committee. (Details can be found in CPFE 2017- 2018 annual reports and 2019 reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

Daniel Ioannisyan first appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office, then to the court, appealing the Investigative Committee's decision to suspend the criminal case. After rejection from both the prosecutor’s office and three judicial instances, Ioannisian filed a motion with the Investigative Committee to restart the case, which was upheld. At the same time, he filed a motion on indictment, which was rejected and the proceedings were suspended.

On May 20, Ioannisyan filed a complaint with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication on the investigator's inaction. On July 19, it was rejected. On September 15, an appeal was filed, which was also rejected on November 8. Ioannisyan is going to appeal to the Court of Cassation.

**On May 21,** Rubik Hakobyan, a politician on Public Television, behaved in a derogatory manner on air, during the Public Discussion program, using insulting vocabulary when addressing journalist Petros Ghazaryan, called him a flatterer, and complaining about his manner of hosting the show, trying to teach him “lessons.”[[94]](#footnote-94)

**On May 22**, some students at Yerevan State Institute of Theater and Cinematography restricted the free movement of journalists during a rally against the rector's elections, obstructing their lawful professional activity.

 **On May 24,** in response to the question asked by Radio Liberty reporter Artak Khulyan: "Will there be any new resignations in the Supreme Judicial Council, because it seems there are such sentiments?" Acting Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council Gevorg Danielyan, spoke harshly, disrespecting the journalist. "You are not who anyone should report to on this issue. Why do you assume that the sentiments should be shared with you? It is not within the competence of the journalist, and if there are any sentiment, they don’t have to ask you, they will just let you know," Gevorg Danielyan said.[[95]](#footnote-95)

**On May 28,** Artur Khachatryan, member of the ARF Dashnaktsutyun Supreme Body, spoke disrespectfully during a conversation with journalists in Sardarapat on May 28. In particular, in response to the question by journalist Hripsime Jeyebyan from Aravot.am: "During the RPA times, do you think that elections were held with violations? ... there were violations that did not affect ...", Artur Khachatryan replied: “You are lying. Who says there has always been such a thing?" [[96]](#footnote-96)

**On May 29**, at the National Assembly Prosperous Armenia Party leader Gagik Tsarukyan responded with indignation to a reporter's observation that people are not sure whether Tsarukyan is fully paying taxes. "All of them who say this are evil, jealous people, an inactive person always feels jealous of an active person and speaks bad of them. They have been checking Tsarukyan for so many years, who they should check, my dears, they are not checking the ones they should check, so well, just open your eyes. You come to Tsarukyan having taken money to follow an order scenario… if Tsaruyan did not pay taxes, he would be slaughtered." Reporters asked which of them was paid money to ask him such questions, why he was accusing them him, and Tsarukyan pointed at Aravot.am journalist Hripsime Jebejyan, saying "This girl!" Then he added: "You must answer for such things, girl, do you have amoral right to say such things to me?"[[97]](#footnote-97)

**On May 29**, David Adyan, Head of Social Sector Control of the RA State Control Service, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the Skizb Media Kentron LLC as founder and publisher of the *Zhamanak* daily. The reason for the lawsuit was the article entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia,” published in the May 9 issue of the daily newspaper.[[98]](#footnote-98) The plaintiff is seeking a refutation of the information contained in the article, a public apology and compensation of 2 million AMD for defamation, and 1 million AMD for insult. The application was accepted for proceedings on June 11. A preliminary court hearing was held on November 26, and the next one is scheduled on January 16.

**On May 30,** Lara Aharonyan, head of the Women's Resource Center NGO, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against Hayeli Club and Live News Media LLC, seeking compensation of damage to her honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD.

The lawsuit was caused by a video with the heading “Member of the CC Board of Trustees Lara Aharonyan is Involved in Sexual Profanity of Childern: Hayk Ayvazyan” published on April 24, in which one of the guests of Hayeli Club, Hayk Ayvazyan, made assessments of Aharonyan's activities during a press conference. The video was posted on Hayeli.am and Livenews. am news sites. Hayk Ayvazyan expressed a view in the video, stating that Lara Aharonyan was also involved in the propaganda of profanity, among children, too, and it contained misinformation and slander, discrediting Lara Aharonyan's honor and dignity.

On May 31, the claim was returned to correct the defects. It was resubmitted on June 24, and it was accepted for proceedings on June 28. Court hearings were held on September 24, November 4, December 3, and December 16, with the next one scheduled on February 24, 2020.

**On May 31**, Prosperous Armenia Party leader Gagik Tsarukyan told reporters that Aravot.am’s correspondent Hripsime Jeyebyan would be held liable for asking hims such questions (see the news piece from May 29). And he offered those NGOs that made a statement in connection with the previous case to first invite journalists to order. "I'm still amazed at myself to have responded her in such a reserved manner," Tsarukyan said.[[99]](#footnote-99)

**On May 31**, citizen Babken Ghazaryan filed a lawsuit against Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens with claims of refutation of and compensation for information considered slander. On June 10, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

The suit was caused by Daniel Ioannisyan's statement accusing NSS Director Arthur Vanetsyan of having a relationship with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan known as "Vestrechi Aper" and Babken Ghazaryan known as "Tokhmakhi Babo", calling them "criminal authorities" at Media Center on May 22.[[100]](#footnote-100)

Court hearings were held on October 2, October 24, and December 2, with the next one scheduled on February 14, 2020.

**On June 3**, the participants of the "VETO" protest movement made insulting remarks to Diana Davtyan, a reporter for the 24News news website who was asking them "awkward" questions.[[101]](#footnote-101) One of them also threatened: "You should be careful when leaving your editorial office." According to Diana Davtyan, in about forty minutes after this incident a young man repeatedly shot her and her colleague with his camera, but apparently the man was not a journalist, he had no badge on.

During the coverage of the action, the editor of the site Narek Galstyan instructed the journalist and the cameraman to stop the activity and called them back to the editorial office, followed by Diana Davtyan's dismissal.[[102]](#footnote-102) The editor explains this step of his by the fact that the journalist acted as an activist in the course of the fulfilment of her professional functions. Diana Davtyan claims that the reason is the friendly relations between her editor and the head of "VETO".

**On June 3**, RA Health Minister's spokesperson Alina Nikoghosyan filed a lawsuit against the founder of the *Hraparak* daily with claims of public apology and confiscation of 1 million AMD as compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is an article published on Hraparak.am on May 9 under the heading "Ministry of Health Conceals What Happened and Practices Protectionism towards Lfik".[[103]](#footnote-103) According to the plaintiff, it contains abusive expressions about him. On June 13, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Preliminary hearings on the case were held on September 19, November 11, and the next one is scheduled on February 25, 2020.

**On June 4**, in response to the question asked by reporters accredited in the National Assembly on whether his bodyguards participated in March 1 2008 events, the leader of Prosperous Armenia Party Gagik Tsarukyan responded: "I've repeated it 100 times, I've answered those questions and you should speak whatever you want... I have nothing more to say." And in response to the question on supporting the second President Robert Kocharyan, he said: "Don't do invent things ..."[[104]](#footnote-104)

**On June 6**, former Chief of Police Vladimir Gasparyan's Chief bodyguard Arshak Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens, demanding refutation of information and compensation. The lawsuit was prompted by a statement made Daniel Ioannisyan at Media center on May where he accused NSS director Arthur Vanetsyan of having relations with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan, nicknamed "Vestrechi Apper" and Babken Ghazaryan, known as "Tokhmakhi Babo" calling them "criminal authorities."[[105]](#footnote-105) On June 20, the court returned the application.

It was re-filed on July 31 and accepted for proceedings on August 12. The motion to secure the claim was rejected, and the preliminary hearing is scheduled on February 13, 2020.

**On June 10**, citizen Yura Adyan filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Skizb Media Kentron LLC with claims of refutation of slander and 2 million AMD in compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is the article entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia”, published in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily. The plaintiff seeks to deny that he is the uncle of the Adyans, who occupy posts in the State Control Service, who, during the former authorities, was considered an “old fox” in the field of procurements and participated in tenders beyond his field of specialization and sold the contract to other companies having been awarded the contract. On June 14, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary hearing is scheduled on December 10, with the next one scheduled on April 28, 2020.

**On June 11**, Governor of Lori Andrey Ghukasyan called the critics of his activities "media servicing black forces" in a Facebook post. In his comments, he made offensive remarks, particularly addressed at Narine Avetisyan, editor-in-chief of Lori TV, who demanded an explanation about the governor's action to reward himself.[[106]](#footnote-106)

**On June 12,** citizen Yura Adyan filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Aysor.am with claims of refutation of slander and 2 million AMD in compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is an article in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia,” which was reprinted by the website. The lawsuit has not yet been accepted for proceedings, but Aysor.am has already published a refutation.[[107]](#footnote-107) On June 20, the application was returned.

On the same day, on June 12, the same citizen filed **two more lawsuits** against NewsAM LLC (News.am) and MITK Media LLC ("Mitk.am") with the same content and the same claims. The reason for the lawsuits is the same. In the first case, the claim was returned on June 26 and re-filed on August 12, it was acceptd for proceedings on August 16. Court hearings were held on October 11 and October 25, and the next one is scheduled on March 11, 2020. In the second case, the appeal was returned on June 24 for correction of defects, re-filed on July 11 and accepted for trial on July 22. The preliminary hearing on the case was held on November 11, with the next one scheduled on March 23, 2020.

**On June 13**, MP Hayk Sargsyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Law Media LLC seeking compensation of the damage to honor, dignity and good reputation. The lawsuit was prompted by an article published in the *Iravunk* newspaper on May 14, stating that "the entire information package against David Sanasaryan reached the NSS with Hayk Sargsyan’s help." The plaintiff claims a compensation of up to one million AMD.

On June 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Court hearings on the case were held on October 7, November 4, and December 2, with the next one scheduled on March 19, 2020.

**On June 17**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court hearing on the case of journalist Artur Hovhannisyan vs. RA Ministry of Health (with Aravot Daily LLC involved at third party).

We would like to remind that case was prompted by “Don’t Trust Fake Information: There has been no attempt at vaccination at the Aygabats community school in Shirak marz” information piece published on the official website of MoH on January 11, 2018.[[108]](#footnote-108) According to the plaintiff, this publication contains insults and slander addressed to him (Details can be found in CPFE 2018 Annual reports and 2019 quarterly reports, see the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am).

Court hearings was also held on October 9, 2019, with the next one scheduled on February 17, 2020.

**On June 18**, the Court of General Jurisdiction in Shirak Marz held the first hearing on the case of citizens of Susanna Minasyan and Arkadi Boyajyan vs. ATV LLC, demanding confiscation of 2 million AMD in compensation for violating the right to privacy of personal and family life. The suit was caused by a regular issue of the aforementioned "Semi-open Window" program on ATV, broadcast on October 1, 2018, about a housing dispute between neighbors.[[109]](#footnote-109)

On September 10, the court suspended the proceedings until a final ruling was reached on another case between the parties.

**On June 19**, NA deputy Hayk Sargsyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Andradardz Press Club NGO with claims of compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation by defamation and insult. The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled "Who donated an expensive car to Hayk Sargsyan and why: all is knows" published on Newspress.am website.[[110]](#footnote-110)

On June 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary hearing on the case is scheduled on February 15, 2020.

 **On June 19**, Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) leader Gagik Tsarukyan stood out in the parliament with his disrespectful attitude towards journalists. In response to a question by RFE/RL's correspondent Ruzanna Stepanyan on compliance with the law, he got angry and said in an aggressive tone: "You and your family should obey the law."[[111]](#footnote-111) Then, using his typical vocabulary, Tsarukyan accused the journalist and her colleagues of fulfilling instructions, "engaging in empty talks". CPFE made a joint statement with its partner organizations demanding that Gagik Tsarukyan formally apologize to the journalists he offended and give assurances that such behavior would not be repeated in the future. The statement put forward a demand from the leadership of the National Assembly to discuss Gagik Tsarukyan's behavior towards the journalists accredited in the parliament and evaluate it from the point of view of parliamentary ethics. [[112]](#footnote-112)

**On June 21,** NA deputy Hayk Sargsyan filed a second lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Andradardz Press Club NGO, seeking compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity through defamation and insult. The cause of the lawsuit was an article, titled "Another precious gift: a cell-phone number that costs 20 million AMD for Hayk Sargsyan"[[113]](#footnote-113) and published on Newspress.am website. On June 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on February 15, 2020.

On the same day, Hayk Sargsyan filed **three more lawsuits** with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Hraparak Daily LLC, seeking compensation of damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through defamation and insult. The reason for the MP’s lawsuit against the founder of the *Hraparak* newspaper, he said, were the 22 publications against him in the newspaper and their dissemination via satellite websites. In particular, the published photos of the MP taking girls to Baghramyan 26.[[114]](#footnote-114) One of the articles, entitled "New Schmeiss appeared in Parliament," is also mentioned.[[115]](#footnote-115) According to the website, "Hayk Sargsyan is the most odious MP in the parliament", and there are suspicions that he played a role in a scandalous criminal case. According to another article published on the website, Hayk Sargsyan "made a row" on the Yerevan-Moscow plane.[[116]](#footnote-116)

 In all 3 lawsuits, the MP demands that the defendant make a public apology and publish the court judgment in the same newspaper and on the website, as well as to pay a compensation of 500,000 AMD for defamation and 300,000 AMD for insult in relation to the first case, and pay 300,000 AMD for defamation and 300,000 AMD for insult in relation to the second case, and 600,000 AMD for defamation and 300,000 AMD for insult in relation to the third case.

On October 9, all three cases were accepted into proceedings. A preliminary hearing was held on one of the cases on November 12, the other one is scheduled on February 6, 2020. As for the other case, a preliminary hearing was held on November 14, with the next one scheduled on February 17, 2020. The hearing on the third case was held on November 20, with the next one scheduled on February 4, 2020.

**On June 26**, Anna Karapetyan, a member of the NA "My Step" faction, was reluctant to answer the journalists' questions, showing a dissatisfied facial expression at every question.[[117]](#footnote-117) When a journalist asked who she would consider as a president of the Constiutional Court when going there, Vahe Grigoryan or Hrayr Tovmasyan, Karapetyan noted with disdain: "Since I have already touched upon this question repeatedly, why do you think I shall speak about it again…?" The publications show that this MP has a persistently disdainful attitude towards journalists.[[118]](#footnote-118)

**On July 3,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted into proceedings the lawsuit on the case of the former NSS colonel Eduard Harutyunyan vs. Former MP Taron Sahakyan (with the involvement of the founder of "1in.am" website "First News" LLC), with claims of public apology, as well as a refutation of the information considered slander and payment of compensation.

The reason for the lawsuit was the May 29 article titled “The Harutyunyans dynasty is still rooted in the state administration system: who occupies a post, what post and where?” and published on the website, which specifically notes: “Eduard Harutyunyan, too, held several positions at YSU years ago - Deputy Head of International Cooperation Department, Head of Department, Deputy Chief of Rector’s Staff, but in fact he was the representative of NSS at YSU. (...) Eduard Harutyunyan possesses tremendous wealth, he owns gas stations in Arzni and not only, but also owns other serious businesses."[[119]](#footnote-119)

On July 3, the court also granted the motion for an injunction. The preliminary hearing is scheduled on November 1, the next hearing is scheduled on March 13, 2020.

**On July 4**, during a rally in front of the government building on July 4, Robert Kocharyan's supporters insulted journalist Nelli Babayan from Aravot.am. In particular, the founder of "Slaq.am" Menua Harutyunyan did not like the journalist’s questions and reacted as follows: "You are the one sent by Nicole, they instructed you." Some of the demonstrators tried to teach the reporter lessons,too, but did not use inappropriate expression in her address.[[120]](#footnote-120)

**On July 9,** MP Arman Babajanyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against the owner of 7or.am website Andranik Tevanyan with claims of public refutation of slander, apology for insult and payment of a compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is an article on May 27 published on the above-mentioned website and entitled "Who does Arman Babajanyan serve?", which states that the deputy "had many owners, jumped from one lap into another, then came back as a cheat, then ran and cheated again, and acted so continuously."[[121]](#footnote-121) The application was returned on July 23, re-filed on July 30 after amendment and returned again on August 14. No other developments have been reported.

**On July 12**, citizen Ashot Gevorgyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Hraparak Daily LLC with claims of refutation of the information considered as slander and payment of a compensation for slander. The reason for the lawsuit is the news published on the front page of the daily on July 11, according to which "…members of the non-traditional sexual orientation community have targeted "traditionalist MPs." The newspaper cited a Facebook post by Ashot Gevorgyan, in which he offered to "burn", "exterminate" and "expel" Prosperous Armenia MP Naira Zohrabyan.

On July 23, the lawsuit was accepted into proceedings. The deay of the court hearing has been appointed on May 14, 2020.

**On July 16,** Senior Investigator of Syunik Regional Investigation Department Narek Abgaryan filed a lawsuit in Syunik Marz Court of General Jurisdiction against former Mayor of Meghri Arshavir Hovhannisyan, with claims of public refutation of defamatory information, public apology for insult and slander, and compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity. The founder of the *Syunyats Yerkir* newspaper "Syunyats Ashkhar" LLC was recognized as a third person to this case. The reason for the lawsuit are the insulting statements made by Arshavir Hovhannisyan about Narek Abgaryan, which were published on June 16 in the *Syunyats Yerkir* newspaper. On July 30, the application was returned for corrections, was re-filed on August 7 and accepted for proceedings on August 29.

The preliminary hearing on the case took place on December 19, with the next one scheduled on March 25, 2020.

**On July 22**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted the lawsuit of citizen Yura Adyan against Mitk Media LLC ("Mitk.am") with claims to refute the slander and pay 2 million AMD in compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is an article in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily, entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia", which the website had copied from another media outlet.

The preliminary hearing was held on November 11, the next one is scheduled on March 23, 2020.

**On August 1**, Anriva Tour LLC filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Ani Alexanyan (with Public Television of Armenia CJSC, Educational Planet LLC as third party) with claims for the protection of business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit were the statements made on the "One Window" program about "Anriva-Tour" on the public television channel on July 1, which the plaintiff considers to be defamatory.[[122]](#footnote-122) On August 9, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The first hearing of the case was held on December 9, with the next one scheduled on March 31, 2020.

**On August**, 2 Karen Karapetyan, the former head of the Operational Intelligence Department at the State Revenue Committee, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the founder of the *Zhamanak* daily Skizb Media Kentron LLC with claims of compensation for damage caused to honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit is the article “Someone related to SRC Deputy Head Appointed as Head of the Operational Intelligence Department”, which was published in the *Zhamanak* on July 5 and specified "... Before this appointment, Karen Karapetyan was the head of the operational intelligence department at SRC, being Valeri Osipyan's godfather. He left within the context of acorruption scandal."[[123]](#footnote-123)

On August 14, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the preliminary hearing was held on November 12, where the court set the facts to be proved. The next court hearing is scheduled on February 18, 2020.

**On August 12**, citizen Nelly Mikayelyan filed a lawsuit in the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Anna Gevorgyan, director of the Haykakan Zham/Hzham.am news site, and 7or.am website with claims for a public apology, refutation and confiscation of 2000 times minimum salary from each as compensation. The suit was casued by articles published on the aforementioned websites on May 14, namely "Who is this mysterious beauty and what does she have to do with pedophilia?"[[124]](#footnote-124) and "Here's who number one anti-Kocharian movement activist is."[[125]](#footnote-125)

On August 21, the lawsuit was returned for correct ions. The plaintiff was rejected twice again, most recently on November 27, the court noted that it was unclear what the status of 7or․am was as indcited by the plaintiff, in particular whether it acted as a legal person (in which case the latter’s organizational or legal form was unclear) or a physical one. In addition, the claim set before the defendants was not clear. Later, Nelli Mikaelyan did not file a new lawsuit.

**On August 12**, citizen Arusyak Mkrtchyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the *Zhoghovurd* daily with claims of refuting defamatory information and compensating the damage caused. The cause of the suit was an article published on Armlur.am website on July 12, titled "A DJ in Healthcare Sector: Circa $ 20,000 to the Minister's Acquaintance.”[[126]](#footnote-126) The author notes that the RA Ministry of Health has allocated over 9.5 million drams from the state budget to In Progress Production Company, founded by Arusyak Mkrtchyan, i.e. DJ Vaccina, to shoot social ads. "Let's take notice of the fact that DJ Vakcina, being Health Minister Arsen Torosyan’s friend (at least their photos testify to this), is making use of the RA state budget." By the way, the article posted on the website contains commentary by Arusyak Mkrtchyan.

On August 16, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court hearing was held on November 25, with the next one scheduled on March 25, 2020.

**On August 12**, citizen Yura Adyan filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against News.am founder NEWS.am LLC with claims of refutation of slander and payment of 2 million AMD as compensation of damage caused. The reason of the lawsuit is an article in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia", which the website has copied from another media outlet. On August 16, the lawsuit was accepted for proccedings. The case was heard on October 11. The next hearing is scheduled on March 11, 2020.

**On August 15**, citizen Vahe Parazyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Tert.am LLC, the founder of Tert.am news website, with claims of publicly refutation of defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The cause of the lawsuit is an article titled "Vahe Parazyan, Who reported Against Samvel Karapetyan’s Nephew, Has a Criminal Backgound", and published on the website on July 16.[[127]](#footnote-127)

On August 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the preliminary hearing was held on November 27, and the next hearing is scheduled on April 1, 2020.

**On August 16,** Vahe Parazyan's father, Ashot Parazyan, filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction with the same claim. On August 28, the lawsuit was acceptedinto proceedings. The preliminary hearing was held on December 2, the next one is scheduled on April 8, 2020.

**On August 16,** Vahe Parazyan filed **three** more lawsuits in Yerevan Court of First Instance against various media outlets. One of them is against the owner of "Orer.am" website Varuzhan Babajanyan and its editor Anahit Seyranyan with claims of public refutation of the information considered slander and compensation of the damage to honor and dignity. The lawsuit was triggered by an article titled "Vahe Parazyan Who reported to the Police Kidnapped an Armenian together with Chechens" published on the website on July 16.[[128]](#footnote-128) On August 30, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. By the way, on September 10 the website published the refutation.[[129]](#footnote-129)

Vahe Parazyan filed another lawsuit against Slaq.am website’s founder Virtual Media LLC and founder Menua Harutyunyan, seeking a public apology, public refutation of the defamatory information, and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The suit was triggered by an article entitled “Tracing the Scandalous Incident: Narek Karapetyan Gives Details”, a video attached to it and published on the website on July 17.[[130]](#footnote-130) The appeal was returned on August 27 and re-filed on September 9 after corrections. On September 18, it was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary hearing was held on November 21, with the next one scheduled on February 10, 2020.

The third lawsuit was filed against Armenia TV CJSC, journalist Shake Ghazaryan and lawyer Armen Feroyan. The lawsuit was sccepted into proceedings on August 28, the preliminary hearing was held on November 1, and the next one was scheduled for March 13, 2020.

**On August 21**, Factor.am reporter Narek Kirakosyan reported on his Facebook page that his cameraman and him had been trying to get into the National Assembly for about an hour, but they could not do so for unknown reasons. “An hour ago I asked the Deputy Chief of Staff of the National Assembly to provide me and the cameraman with access to the parliament. He reported that he had sent a letter to the NA Chief of Staff, we have been at the checkpoint for 30 minutes, but no passes have been arranged for us. Our badges have expired, the National Assembly has not issued a badge for two months, they say they will issue them in September, and in the meantime we will enter the parliament with a passport. The institution does not have a head or an acting head of media department with powers to issue a pass. To put it mildly, they are hindering our professional activities,”the journalist said, when he appealed to CPFE.

# On August 22, “Pargev” LLC filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the Law Media LLC for protection of business reputation. The suit was triggered by an article entitled "SSFS Treats the News in *Iranvunq* as an Alarm Which Will be Followed Up” published on Iravunk.com website on July 19 which, according to the plaintiff, contained inaccurate and groundless information, discrediting the business reputation of Pargev LLC. In particular, the article states that Ashtarak Kat's sour cream with 15% fat contents, which contains vegetable oil, is still sold as sour cream."[[131]](#footnote-131) On September 6, the application was returned for corrections. On October 28 a new lawsuit was filed and on November 6 it was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary hearing is scheduled on January 31, 2020.

**On August 22**, Factor.am reporter Narek Kirakosyan alarmed that police officers serving at the National Assembly Park and NSS staff did not allow Factor TV to shoot footage, arguing that the management should be aware of the purpose and content of the shooting.[[132]](#footnote-132)

**On August 23**, Artak Gevorgyan, the head of Ani community in Shirak marz, filed a lawsuit in Shirak Marz Court of General Jurisdiction against Andranik Gevorgyan, a resident of Maralik town of Ani community, seeking a refutation and compensation. **Armlur.am news site was recognized as a third party to the case.** The reason for the lawsuit was the phrase "ate it up, robbed it all" in the video and the accompanying text posted on the site on August 10. “The former head robbed the village college and fled. What do the people of Maralik tell us?" [[133]](#footnote-133) The plaintiff claims 2 million AMD from the defendant.

On September 4, the application was returned and after corrections was re-filed on September 18, it was accepted for proceedings on September 30. On December 13, the case was transferred to another court, and the case was heard on December 24. The preliminary hearing is scheduled on February 11, 2020.

**On August 28**, Factor.am reporter Shoghik Galstyan expressed concern over NA Speaker Lena Nazaryan's attitude. When the reporter approached her to ask a question, she demanded to ask questions only when there was an agreement in advance.[[134]](#footnote-134)

**On August 29**, Constitutional Court President Hrayr Tovmasyan was disrespectful to H1 journalist Anush Muradyan. In response to the reporter’s question when the opinion of the Venice Commission and the ECtHR on Robert Kocharyan's case would arrive in Armenia, the CC President replied that he had not agreed to an interview. Then he added: "If we haven’t made an arrangement, why would you create such an awkward situation? You're not an ordinary journalist, you're a journalist that is fed on my taxes, and you should try and behave like a journalist on Public Television." According to CPFE, this behavior of the CC president who is also paid at the expense of taxpayers is an obvious pressure on the journalist.

**On September 5,** former Chairman of the State Revenue Committee Vardan Harutyunyan filed a lawsuit in the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Investigative Journalists NGO with claims of compensation of damage cause to honor and dignity and public refutation of the factual information considered as slander. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled “Cash registers were obtained at a high cost by a secret decision of the government: a criminal case has been launched” and published on hetq.am on August 7.[[135]](#footnote-135)

On September 12, the application was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary hearing was held on December 6, with the next one scheduled on February 4, 2020.

**On September 6**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted for proceedings the lawsuit of NA deputy Hayk Sargsyan against Armday.am LLC, founder of Armday.am website, with claims of compensation to the damage to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult. The cause of the lawsuit was an article titled "From Being Laid to the Asphalt to Night Celebrations; What is Going on Inside “La Scala" published on the website, where the MP is allegedly ascribed information about night parties, as well information that "Hayk Sargsyan and Pzo are in pretty close relationship, and Sargsyan is trying to comply with criminal rules and regulations." [[136]](#footnote-136)

The court hearing is scheduled on February 12, 2020.

**On September 16**, Vayots Dzor Governor Trdat Sargsyan filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Human Rights Defender Artak Galstyan for obliging him to apologize publicly. The Noyan Tapan Information Center was recognized as a third party in the case.

The reason for the lawsuit is the opinion voiced during a press conference at Noyan Tapan, according to which illegalities continued in the marz, and the governor was inactive. The lawsuit was filed on September 30, the preliminary hearing was held on December 4, and the next hearing is scheduled on February 14, 2020.

**On September 18**, Deputy Mayor of Echmiadzin Arsen Petrosyan filed a lawsuit in the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Astghik Sapeyan, editor of the *Zhamanak* daily, and Arman Babajanyan, the editor-in-chief of the founder and publisher of the daily Skizb Media Kentron LLS with claims of public refutation of information damaging his honor, dignity and business reputation by recognizing it inaccurate and false. In his conversation with CPFE, Arsen Petrosyan noted that the cause of the lawsuit was on a garbage recycling site where unreliable information was circulated about him. On September 25, the lawsuit was returned due to deficiencies in the documents. No new lawsuit was filed.

 **On September 18,** former NSS Intelligence Colonel Eduard Harutyunyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against former NA deputy Taron Sahakyan (founder of A1plus.am website "Meltex" LLC is third person to the case) with claims of public apology for insult, refutation of information considered slander and compensation. The suit was triggered by a video released on A1plus.am on August 14 in which Taron Sahakyan talks about a former NSS official, in particular accusing him of "being related to drug supply", "alienating strategic objects at the cost of a penny to his immediate surroundings," “in exporting cheap resources from Armenia and importing expensive ones." [[137]](#footnote-137)

On October 1, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the motion to injunctive relief was also granted. No court hearing is scheduled yet.

**On September 23,** the first court hearing on the case of politician Vahan Babayan vs. journalist and publicist Lisa Jagharyan was held at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction.

We would like to remind that the reason for the suit was Lisa Chagharyan's Facebook post on April 13: " one by the name vahan babayan may claim the first place in global slobber competition."

The case was also held on December 6, with the next one scheduled on April 13, 2020.

**On September 23,** the court of general jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes held the first hearing of the case of Nver Mnatsakanyan, a journalist and anchor at 1in.am website, vs. Hayeli Club and Garnik Isagulyan, with claims to oblige for a public apology and publication of the judgment in the media.

The reason for the lawsuit was the video under the heading of “Hey, Nver, aren’t you ashamed: you will serve whoever pays you: Garnik Isagulyan” published on Hayeli.am website on April 14, where the latter made his assessment on a number of processes in Armenia, including Nver Mnatsakanyan's activities.[[138]](#footnote-138) A court hearing was also held on December 2, and the next one is scheduled for February 24, 2020.

**On September 24**, Yerevan Zoo Director Ruben Khachatryan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against journalist Narine Kirakosyan. The plaintiff claims refutation of information considered slander and monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The suit was triggered by the journalist's Facebook post on August 25, where she stated that Ruben Khachatryan had inflicted great damage to the animals by declaring himself a sole leader. In addition, Khachatryan had given the country's wealth, rare state-owned animals to other countries, hijacked a breeding pair of bearded vultures out of Yerevan Zoo and moved them to a so-called animal shelter, operating under his own foundation in Urtsadzor community, Ararat marz. This was reported by the *Armenian Times* daily's director Arsen Harutyunyan.

Prior to making a decision on the claim, the plaintiff's representative requested that it be returned. On October 7, the application was returned. On November 13, the already former director filed a new lawsuit against the journalist, which was accepted for proceedings on November 27. No court hearing was scheduled as of December 31.

**On September 27**, Lydian Armenia CJSC representative Inga Sarafyan filed a lawsuit against economic commentator Atom Margaryan and the Lragir e-newspaper seeking a refutation of defamatory information and claiming confiscation of compensation for expressions discrediting business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit is an interview with Atom Margaryan, entitled "In case of impartial investigation, Lydian's leaders will face a problem" and published on Lragir.am on September 15.[[139]](#footnote-139)

On October 8, the lawsuit was returned because of a number of unclear statements, including the status of the Lragir electronic newspaper as defendant, indicted by the plaintiff.

The application was re-filed on October 17, and was accepted for proceedings on October 29. The motion to secure the claim was rejected, for which the plaintiff filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal on November 21.

**On September 30,** Vega World LLC filed a lawsuit against the founder of the *Zhamanak* newspaper, Skizb Media Kentron LLC, with a claim for public refutation of defamatory information without any monetary compensation. The reason for the lawsuit is the article published in that newspaper on August 30, under the following heading: "All Was Planned: Before the fire, the State Revenue Committee was Going to Carry out Inspections at Vega.”[[140]](#footnote-140) The application was accepted for proceedings on October 10. The preliminary hearing is scheduled on February 10, 2020.

**On September 30,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted a case based on a lawsuit of citizen Gagik Gevorkyan against the founder of *the Armenian Times* daily’s founder Dareskibz LLC and three other citizens with claims of refuting the information damaging honor and dignity and paying a compensation for insult and slander. The reason for the lawsuit is the article "They try to use our patriotism and deceive us". Serzh Sargsyan's adviser 'dumped' a Canadian-Armenian businessman”[[141]](#footnote-141) published in the *Armenian Times* on May 22 and on Armtimes.com website on May 24. The preliminary hearing was held on December 24, and the next one is scheduled on April 9, 2020.

**On October 1**, NA deputy Hayk Sargsyan filed a lawsuit at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the *Irates* newspaper and Irates website with claims of compensation of damage caused to honor and dignity through slander and insult. On October 11, the application was returned on the grounds that the documents were incomplete, in particular, the legal status and organizational form of the defendant were not mentioned. On November 28, the application was re-filed and accepted for proceedings on December 12. No court date is appointed.

**On October 1**, website Armine Ohanyan, editor-in-chief of Hraparak.am, reported that the editorial office received just another letter from the first garrison investigative unit under the General Military Investigative Department of the RA Investigative Committee, proposing to report the sources of information reflected in the “article “The Prime Minister’s Son Had a Conflict with Zori Balayan’s Grandson” in the September 23 issue of the same media outlet. The editor writes: "We have rolled back into the '90s when not only was free speech unprotected, but the legislative field and traditions were not well developed, and it was possible to close 10 media outlets overnight, smashing editorial offices." [[142]](#footnote-142)

**On October 5**, a group of young people went to the editorial office of Hayeli.am website, threw eggs and put up condemning posters on the wall of the media outlet’s premises and the closed door. According to the youth, the motive behind the move is an article, titled “Aliyev's late but powerful response to Pashinyan” published on Hayeli.am (later the word ‘powerful’ was replaced by the word "strong" in quotation marks). Journalist organizations have issued a condemning statement on the matter.[[143]](#footnote-143)

A criminal case was initiated in the Central Department of the Republic of Armenia Police under Article 164, part 1 of the RA Criminal Code, which was sent to Kentron and Nork-Marash administrative district units of Yerevan Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee and was accepted for proceedings. Four people – David Hovhannisyan, Sargis Manukyan, Artak Margaryan and Hayk Stepanyan – were indicted in the criminal case. A signature on non-departure was chosen as a precautionary measure against the latter.

**On October 8**, lawyer Hakob Charoyan filed a lawsuit in the Lori Court of General Jurisdiction against Artur Mnatsakanyan (with "1in.am" news site as the third party) with claims of refutating information damaging honor and dignity and compensating the damage. The reason for the lawsuit was an interview by the defendant about the case of Vardan Antonyan, accused of attempted murder of Vahag from Alaverdi, which specifically contained a statement that the shootings in Akhtala were intended to kill Vahag from Alaverdi and his supporters.[[144]](#footnote-144)

The plaintiff asked to oblige Artur Mnatsakanyan to give an interview to “First News Program” (1in.am), refuting the information damaging his honor and dignity and business reputation, as well as apologizing, compensating for the damage at the value of 2 million AMD. On October 14, the application was returned, it was re-filed with corrections on November 1 and accepted for proceedings on November 5. No hearing date has been set yet.

**On October 11,** Lydian Armenia CJSC filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Skizb Media LLC. The cause of the lawsuit was the article entitled "What is the way out? Armen Sargsyan can change the situation" published on "1in.am" news site at 3:10 pm on August 19. Armen Sargsyan Can Change the Situation” article where the author Sargis Artsruni wrote as follows: "It is obvious, for example, that a comprehensive legal and political assessment of the former system's performance will inevitably affect Lydian, who has, of course, obtained the right to exploit the mine as a result of corrupt deals and such arrangements that the current Armenian government may terminate the deal, having in general all the political and legal bases for doing it." The plaintiff claims for a confiscation of only one AMD from the defendant for the damage caused to the business reputation of the company.

**On October 22,** the application was returned for correction of deficiencies in the documents, it was re-filed on November 7 and accepted for proceedings on November 21. No court hearing date is scheduled yet.

**On October 18,** the Court of Cassation overturned the decision of the Civil Court of Appeal Jirayr Sefilyan’s appeal and remitted the case to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction for a new examination.

Let us remind you that this is a case that has been going on for three years. The lawsuit was caused by a video about him in the "Sharp Corner" program on Armenia TV just days before Jirair Sefilyan's arrest, braodcast on June 12, 2016, which contained e information that the plaintiff considers as slander. On January 25, 2018, the Court of Appeal rejected Jirayr Sefilyan's appeal against judgment of the first-instance court. On February 28, the RA Court of Cassation appealed against this decision, which was accepted for proceedings on June 18 and the case was on a halt for about 18 months. (Details can be found on CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018 annual reports, see the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am).

According to the decision of the Court of Cassation, by publishing any evaluatory judgment, the journalist must take all reasonable measures to verify the information to be true, even if the journalist's judgment is based on the facts revealed by a certain person, the journalist must at least try to listen to the party the information is about. Concerning slander, the Court of Cassation noted that the activities of a journalist activity shall not pursue in any disguised way an aim of discrediting a person's honor, dignity, or business reputation. The Court has also found it inadmissible to make a judgment on a case and violate one's dignity under the guise of freedom of opinion.[[145]](#footnote-145)

**On October 18,** the editorial staff of the *Zhoghovurd* daily and ArmLur.am website published a statement according to which the investigative bodies of the Republic of Armenia along with the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Armenia simultaneously demand disclosure of a source of information in connection with various publications. According to the statement, there had been four such cases during the year in relation to various articles.[[146]](#footnote-146)

**On October 28**, Tigran Khzmalyan, the former director of Yerevan Studio, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Hraparak Daily LLC, with claims of public refutation of the factual information considered slander and payment of compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by the newspaper's claim that the unique archive of the Public Television and Radio Company, i.e. the Soviet-era television films and programs that were the pride and riches of any television station, had been destroyed during his term in office.[[147]](#footnote-147) It is true that the author of the article also received clarifications from Tigran Khzmanyan, however, in the conclusion to the article the journalist questioned some facts related to Khzmalyan's tenure.

 The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on November 6, with a preliminary hearing scheduled on January 17, 2020.

**On October 29**, the Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs banned the participation of a number of mass media outlets in an event it organized and called “A Look at the Past, Lessons Learnt and Reflections.” One day before the event, the head of the AIISA, Styopa Safaryan posted an ad on his Facebook page, in which he noted that News.am, Hayeli.am, 168.am, Yerevan․Today, 7or. Livenews.am websites, Channel 5 and Yerkir Media TV companies would not be granted access to the event. Styopa Safaryan invited reporters from the 5th Channel and Livenews.am out of the venue of the event.[[148]](#footnote-148) In this regard, the journalist organizations made a statement, assessing the approach as discriminatory towards the media, which is unacceptable and dangerous in terms of freedom of speech.[[149]](#footnote-149)

MP Arman Babajanyan also did not respond to journalists' questions during the above mentioned AIISA event. He emphasized that he does not speak specifically to Channel 5.[[150]](#footnote-150)

 **On October 30**, former Vayots Dzor governor Trdat Sargsyan filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against Hraparak Daily LLC claiming a confiscation of a compensation in the amount of 2,000-fold the salary for slander in the address of the plaintiff and obligation for refutation of data considered slander. The suit was caused by a publication in the newspaper, according to which Governor Trdat Sargsyan was present at the brutal beating of Lieutenant Colonel Ara Mkhitaryan.[[151]](#footnote-151)

The application was accepted for proceedings on November 8. No court hearing date is scheduled.

**On November 7**, Diana Davtyan, a reporter at 1in.am website, asked Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of the Prosperous Armenia faction, whether business and politics were separate. "Yes," Tsarukyan replied. The journalist continued: "Then why are you in the National Assembly?" "What institution have you graduated from?" Tsarukyan replied, then hearing the answer, said: "Why is a Yerevan State university graduate working as journalist? You must have been a bad student. And you must have got your diploma not because you earned it, but because you had acquaintances in the faculty.”[[152]](#footnote-152)

 **On November 15**, a group of journalists complained on Facebook that the journalists' right to free movement and professional activity was restricted at one of the entrances to the National Assembly. In particular, "Aravot.am" journalist Hripsime Jebejyan wrote: “They created barricades for journalists in the National Assembly and isolated them in an isolated corridor of one of the buildings, so that we did not approach the Prime Minister and ask questions. Mr. Prime Minister, just a few months ago you were walking around in the NA building freely, approaching journalists, greeting us in the foyer, has anything changed? Why these instructions ...?"[[153]](#footnote-153)

**On November 19,** Prosperous Armenia faction MP Vardan Ghukasyan tried to teach journalists lessons at the National Assembly, urging them to convey to their owners that he was a decent, pious person, and told Factor.am reporter Narek Kirakosyan: "God is my master, while you may have many masters."[[154]](#footnote-154)

**On November 22**, Aravot.am wrote that Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction ruled to grant the motion for evidence filed by Paylak and Artak Yayloyans, according to which Anjela Tovmasyan, coordinator of Hayeli Club, the editors-in-chief of Aravot.am. Yerkir.am, News.am, Armtimes.am websites and Kentron TV were required to submit to the court thw raw footage of some videos and source material for publications.[[155]](#footnote-155) This is about Paylak and Artak Yayloyans vs. citizen Artur Khurshudyan, according to which the ideas he voiced in Hayeli Club on January 15, 2019 did not correspond to reality and were statements damaging honor, dignity and business reputation.

We would like to remind that under Article 5 of the RA Law on Mass Media, the court has the right to demand the disclosure of the source of information only when it has to do with grave and particularly grave crimes, and if all other means of protection of the public interest are exhausted.

 **Since December 12,** the Forrights.am website of Reporters for Human Rights organization was regularly attacked by hackers, which has completely disrupted the operation of the website for a long time.[[156]](#footnote-156) In this regard, the Cyber ​​Security Support Team, CiviCERT-AM, stated that this long-running and unprecedented scale attack is a violation of freedom of speech. Commenting on the attack, site editor Janna Alexanyan wrote on Facebook: “I have strong doubts as to who authored it. We are covering a criminal case involving one of the most famous oligarchs. This oligarch still has a great influence in Armenia, as you can see, in restricting freedom of speech, too.” The operation of the website has been restored.

**On December 19**, unidentified persons stormed the editorial office of the *Zhoghovurd* newspaper and, according to the reporters of the same newspaper, they turned everything upside down, opened drawers, entered the editor's office, threw newspapers and papers all over, most likely trying to find something. A criminal case was initiated in the Center Department of Yerevan Police of the RA Police in connection with the incident, a preliminary investigation is underway. In this connection, 10 journalistic organizations, at the initiative of CPFE, issued a joint statement, describing the incident as an attempt to pressure the media.[[157]](#footnote-157) Editor-in-chief of the newspaper Knar Manukyan said that this was an attempt to intimidate them.[[158]](#footnote-158)

**On December 20**, Ararat Governor Garik Sargsyan filed a lawsuit in Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marz Court of General Jurisdiction against 168 Zham LLC with claims of public refutation of factual data considered slander and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The reason for the lawsuit was the article "Again An Incident with the Participation of Governor of Ararat" published on the "168.am" website, which states that again there was a fight with Garik Sargsyan’s participation and that the hairdresser Serob was beaten for not cutting the governor's hair asking him to wait for his turn and was not allowed to continue working in Nor Kyank community.[[159]](#footnote-159)

On December 30, the lawsuit was accepted vor proceedings.

1. ***Violations of the Right to Rceive and Disseminate Information***

*In 2019 CPFE recorded 108 facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. In only 4 of these cases a lawsuit was filed with the court, and in 2 cases an application was filed with the Personal Data Protection Agency to verify the grounds for refusal.*

*We present the facts recorded during the period under review, as well as new developments in relation to the events from past periods, in chronological order.*

**On January 14,** a regular hearing on the case of Levon Barseghyan, Chairman of Asparez Journalists' Club, against the Director of the Museum of Armenian History SNCO Grigor Grigoryan took place at the RA Administrative Court.

We would like to remind that on May 10, 2017, Levon Barseghyan sent a written inquiry to Grigor Grigoryan, asking for information about the museum. However, the SNCO Director did not respond to the request, thus violating the RA Law on Freedom of Information (details can be found in the CPFE 2017-2018 Annual Reports, see the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am).

Court hearings on this case were also held on April 9 and June 20. On October 16, the court decided to refer the case to the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction, where the case was accepted for proceedings on November 15. A preliminary hearing is scheduled on March 23, 2020.

**On January 14,** Freedom of Information Center of Armenia applied to the State Control Service for information requesting the organization's staff list and a reference to its publication. An incomplete response was received.

**On January 14,** Asparez.am website sent a written inquiry to Radik Martirosyan, President of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, asking for information on the NAS budget, staffing list, procurement process, and business trips in 2017-2018 academic year. The National Academy of Sciences did not fulfill the requirement of the RA Law on Freedom of Information and didnot even provided the required information even within 30 days. In response to an additional verbal inquiry by Ani Mkrtchyan, a correspondent for Asparez.am, academician-secretary of the National Academy of Sciences Hrant Matevosyan said: 'Don't make me angry'.[[160]](#footnote-160) On March 13, four days after the news was published, the editorial office received a reply from NAS, which was not exhaustive. [[161]](#footnote-161)

 **On January 17,** Panorama.am news website has sent an inquiry to the Government of Armenia of the following content: "Is the Government going to take any steps to save Alexander Mantashev's monument-house in Tbilisi?"[[162]](#footnote-162)

On January 25, the Government replied that the provision of the additional information required additional work, and that the questions would be answered within 30 days.

On February 5, the response was received, yet it was incomplete and did not contain specific data.

**On January 18,** the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia applied to the Ministry of Justice requesting to inform when the meeting of the Ministry's pardoning committee was held to examine the case of Mher Yenokyan and to provide a copy of the conclusion of the above-mentioned sitting. The reply was received late on February 1, in violation of the Law on Freedom of Information.

**On January 18,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministry of Enviroment requesting to provide a list of the names of Ministerial Assistants and Advisors as of December 1 in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The reply was received on January 29 with delay.

**On January 21,** Freedom of Information Center of Armenia applied to the Municipality of Yerevan with the request to provide the 2018 list of employees who received monetary rewards by the mayor in the period between September and December, indicating the amount of the bonus paid to each. The municipality responded by referring to a Facebook page where the requested information was available, but incomplete. This violates the requirements of the RA Law on Freedom of Information. Firstly, the information on a private Facebook page is not considered an official response, besides, if a part of the requested information is not provided, it must be substantiated, with a specific a reference to a specific provision in the law.

On January 30, FOICA sent similar inquiries to the heads of Nubarashen, Erebuni, Nork-Marash, Ajapnyak, Arabkir, Kanaker-Zeytun, Nor Nork, Avan, Malatia-Sebastia, Shengavit administrative districts.

Yerevan Municipality responded to all these inquiries with delay, only on Febrary 13, providing the list of both Yerevan Municipality and administrative district employees who received bonuses, indicating the amount of the bonus each received.

On January 29, FOICA sent inquiries to the Ministries of Finance, Defense, Health, Education and Science, Justice, Emergency Situations, Territorial Administration and Development, Transport, Communication and Information Technology, Labor and Social Affairs, Economic Development and Investments, Energy Infrastructure and Natural Resources, Nature Protection, Office of the Human Rights Defender, and on February 7, also to the Fund for Agricultural Development. FOICA requested these public authorities to provide a list of the persons who received bonuses during December in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and the amount of the bonus each received. The answers to 9 of the 14 inquiries in this set were incomplete, 2 were in violation of the 5-day deadline set by the Law on Freedom of Information, and in 3 cases the requests were not answered with unfounded reasoning or silent rejection.

On January 30, FOICA also applied to the State Control Service and Gyumri Maternity Hospital CJSC with the same inquiry about bonuses, but about the fourth quarter of 2018, but in **both** cases the answers were provided in violation of the deadline set by the law.

**On January 22** Aysor.am journalist Hasmik Hambardzumyan sent a request to Eduard Aghajanyan, Chief of Staff of the Government, to provide information on the reasons for the dismissal of Arthur Grigoryan, the former head of the Department of Environmental and Mineral Inspection. The official response to the inquiry was made the following day on behalf of the Acting Head of the Information and Public Relations Department, but the content read only as follows: “Arthur Grigoryan was dismissed by the Prime Minister's decision."[[163]](#footnote-163) The journalist considers the answer to be incomplete as it does not provide any information on the reasons of the dismissal.

**On January 23,** the administrative case of Daniel Ioannisyan vs. Yerevan Municipality was dropped with its claims of obligation to provide information.

We would like to remind that on March 2, 2018, Daniel Ioannisyan filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against the Municipality of Yerevan with claims of obliging to provide information on the number of boys and girls born in Yerevan maternity hospitals in January 2018.

According to the court, the defendant is not the entity that owns the information so the claim is subject to rejection.

**On January 23,** at the request of neonatologist from "Gyumri Maternity" CJSC Naira Hovhannisyan, Freedom of Information Center applied to Gyumri Maternity Hospital for information on the grounds of unpaid salaries and terms of their payment. The request was left unanswered.

**On January 24,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO filed an appeal against the Administrative Court's decision of December 12, 2018, according to which NGO's claim against the municipality was partially satisfied.

We would like to remind that on January 8, 2018, the Union of Informed Citizens filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court of Armenia against Yerevan Minicipality, requesting a full response to the written inquiries. The NGO was asked to report whether the Department of Exterior Design and Advertising of the Municipality of Yerevan had considered the banners with the so-called "Devoted and Conscripted to One Purpose" as a social advertisement, and if so, whether it stemmed from a document. The municipality responded to the written inquiry only partially.

On February 12, the complaint was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing is scheduled on January 30, 2020.

**On January 25,** Seda Ghukasyan, a journalist at Hetq.am, reported that in response to the letter from the editorial office of the newspaper, the staff of Defense Minister Davit Tonoyan office verbally and preliminarily informed that the minister was not against taking photos in his office, however after negotiations that lasted for about a month, another employee from the staff said the minister was against it. According to the journalist, it took the Ministry 30 more days to respond positively or negatively to the request for a photo shoot.[[164]](#footnote-164)

We would like to remind that the Law on Freedom of Information provides that additional time may be required only when additional work is required to provide an answer.

# On February 6, the ruling of the RA Administrative Court dismissed the claim of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO against the State Committee of Science of the Republic of Armenia for obliging it to take action.

# We would like to remind that this lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on August 20, 2018. The plaintiff sought to oblige the Committee to provide, within 5 days, the information requested by the NGO Program Director Daniel Ioannisian on July 2, i.e. the list of confidential information items of the given agency subject to classification, with the exception of points containing state or official secrets.

# The court justified the refusal by the fact that the Committee is not the owner of the requested information.

**On February 20**, www.aravot.am news website sent a written inquiry to the RA Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia requesting that Minister Arayik Harutyunyan comment on whether he had offered YSU rector to resign and whether Aram Simonyan was being targeted for being a RPA member, as he claims.[[165]](#footnote-165) On the same day, the Ministry of Education and Science told Aravot.am that the Minister was in Georgia and would respond to the inquiry upon return, moreover, expressed readiness to reply in writing. However, after his return, the Minister referred to the situation at YSU and the tensions between the rector and the tensions between the two in a Facebook live. The journalist of the website Gohar Hakobyan complained that the minister had responded publicly, violating right to exclusivity. "By the way, during the press conferences held at the Ministry of Education and Science, the Minister has also lately avoided answering questions beyond the topic of the day, and has started to leave right after the press conference, saying he will not answer any question by individual reporters," the journalist noted.

**On February 20,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the National Security Service requesting to provide a list of documents owned by the staff that were disclosed during 2018. The NSS responded to the inquiry on February 26, but not fully. On March 1, FOICA applied to the National Security Service with a second inquiry, but the information was rejected on the grounds of ongoing preliminary investigation and contained personal data, which FOICA considers to be ungrounded rejection.

On the same day, on February 20, FOICA applied to the RA Police with a similar inquiry, receiving a response on February 22, which, however, was incomplete. On March, FOICA applied to the RA Police with a second inquiry and received no response. On April 25, FOICA applied to the RA Police for the third time with the same inquiry. The inquiry had the same fate, and FOICA viewed the approach as a rejection.

On the same day, FOICA also applied to the RA Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Energy Infrastructure and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Defense with an inquiry about declassification of documents. The responses to the first two of these inquiries were provided in violation of the 5-day deadline set by the Law on Freedom of Information, and the third one was incomplete.

**On February 25**, Freedom of Information Center applied to My Step Foundation to provide the ful list of fund's donors who are legal and physical persons, and the size of donations per donor. The reply was received with delay on March 28.

**On February 25**, Panorama.am website sent a written inquiry to My Step Foundation about received donations and incurred expenses. The Foundation received a response on March 4, in violation of the 5-day deadline provided by law, and the information provided was incomplete, as assessed by the editorial office.[[166]](#footnote-166)

**On February 28**, at the request of citizen Silva Balayan, FOICA applied to the State Register of Legal Entities of the RA Ministry of Justice for the provision of a package of information on the Department of Judicial Acts Enforcement under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia. The reply was received with delay on March 11.

**On March 1**, Lilit Hovhannisyan, a journalist at 24news.am website, applied to the State Revenue Committee for a written request requesting information on imports and received a response only on April 11, which means that the State Revenue Committee violated the provision of the law on freedom of information on the 5-day deadline. In the meantime, as the journalist had a deadline for publishing the article, she applied to the Freedom of Information Center, which applied to the SRC on her behalf and received a response within 5 days.

**On March 1**, Freedom of Information Center applied to the Scientific-Practical Center of Forensic Medicine Center SNCO of the Ministry of Health with a request to provide the staff list of the Shirak Marz Forensic Examinations Division for the third quarter of 2014 and the list of persons employed in that position. An incomplete response was received.

**On March 13,** Freedom of Information Center applied to the State Revenue Committee requesting the list of companies that imported gas, sugar, butter, wheat, flour and bananas in 2016, 2017, 2018. The reply was received on March 25 with delay.

**On March 15**, Factor.am website reporter Narek Kirakosyan sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense asking for information on the organization that cleans the MoD administrative building. The request was left unanswered.

**On March 19**, Angela Stepanyan, a reporter for the ALT TV Company in Armavir, sent a written inquiry to the State Water Committee seeking information on irrigation water losses in the territory of Armenia in 2012-2018. The reply was received on April 4, and the reporter informed CPFE: "We got a blurred answer that contained nothing about the data we mentioned."

**On March 20,** the Yerkir.am news site sent a request to the PR and Information Department of the RA Prime Minister's Office asking to inform Nikol Pashinyan on the ARF's analysis of the government program and the plan on government's structure reform.

The editorial received the reply on April 10 with a 20-day delay, and the letter read as follows: “The government is implementing a program that received the people's vote on December 8 and was approved by the National Assembly." According to the site's editor, they notice that the government is generally discriminatory against their media outlet.

**On March 29**, at the request of ArmDaily.am online periodical, Freedom of Information Center applied to the Department of Information and Public Relations of the National Assembly to find out how much money was allocated for travel, accomodation and per diem for each member of the delegation during the mission to the Federal Republic of Germany from the RA state budget. The answer was only partial.

**On April 2**, Freedom of Information Center applied to the National Assembly requesting information about the number of service cars drivers cut, as well as the number of unused cars since June 1, 2018. FOICA turned to the Ministry of Emergency Situations with the same inquiry. Both responses were received on April 15 with delay.

**On April 12**, Asparez.am reporter Ani Mkrtchyan filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against Shoghik Alexanyan, Head of Gyumri Secondary School #18 SNCO, demanding to oblige her to respond an inquiry.[[167]](#footnote-167) On April 19, a decision was made to move the case to the Gyumri seat of Shirak Marz Court of General Jurisdiction and the case was accepted for proceedings on May 8.

Court hearings on the case at the Gyumri seat of Shirak Marz Court of General Jurisdiction were held on September 24, October 24 and November 28. On December 4, the court decided to dismiss the case. The plaintiff's representative stated that she was withdrawing the claim because the defendant voluntarily complied with the claim during the investigation. The pre-paid state duty and 20,000 AMD as a reasonable attorney's fee was confiscated from the defendant in favor of the plaintiff.

**On April 17**, the Investigative Journalists NGO filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the RA State Revenue Committee Chairman David Ananyan with claims of obliging him to provide information. In particular, the NGO requested copies of all contracts with Taiwanese Mitak Information Technology and Chinese Pax Technologies companies, and if the contracts contain trade secrets, close the relevant lines. They also asked for information on how the State Revenue Committee had identified the companies to cooperate with, who represented them in Armenia, how the SCR had decided on the competitiveness of the submitted quotations.

On April 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The case was heard on May 29, June 18, and July 17. At a closed hearing on August 6, the court ruled to satisfy the Investigative Journalists' claim partially, oblige the State Revenue Committee to provide copies of all contracts signed with the Taiwanese and Chinese companies, closing all the excerpts containing trade secrets, as well as information on Armenian representatives.

On September 12, the Investigative Journalists NGO appealed to the Administrative Court of Appeal, not satisfied with the ruling. This court received the complaint on September 17 and accepted it for proceedings on October 1. A court hearing is scheduled on June 18, 2020.

**On May 2**, Freedom of Information Center received a tax bill from " Departmental Buildings Maintenance and Operation" CJSC, which, apart from the monthly fee provided for by the contract, included unwritten penalties for 2018 in the amount of 19016 AMD. On this occasion, FOICA applied to the Municipality of Yerevan asking for a breakdown of the penalties included in the tax bill, as well as information on why the penalties for 2018 were submitted to FOICA only in May 2019. The FOICA has also requested to provide a statement of the grounds on which penalties were applied for delaying the payment for several months if FOICA had not received any bills incorporating the penalty before. No response was received.

**On May 6,** at the request of lawyer Misak Babajanyan Freedom of Information Center applied to the RA Ministry of Justice requesting information on the selection of an external legel consultant to ensure the protection of RA’s rights and lawful interests in the International Court of Arbitration in the context of the lawsuit, related to “Lydian UK Corporation Limited” and “Lydian Canada Venture Corporation.” FOICA considered the response to this inquiry as well as to the double request sent on May 21 unsatisfactory, and since the same person responded to the repeated request with the same content, a violation of the law has occurred.

**On May 7,** the RA Administrative Court quashed the lawsuit of the Union of Informed Citizens against the Minister of Energy Infrastructure and Natural Resources Ashot Manukyan with its claims of obliging him to provide information.

We would like to remind that on March 23, 2018, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO filed a lawsuit against the minister because the ministry had refused to provide the requested information, saying it contained secrets.

The court, having considered that the information requested by the plaintiff has been provided by the defendant after the claim had been filed with the court, found that the dispute had in essence been exhausted and that the proceedings in the case should be dismissed. On June 13, the NGO appealed the decision of the administrative court to the Court of Appeal, as the answers to the questions were incomplete, and the case was accepted for proceedings on July 8. A court hearing is scheduled on August 20, 2020.

 **On May 8**, Civilnet.am news website sent a inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, requesting to provide the list of permanent and outstaffed advisers to the Minister and their terms of appointment. On May 23, the Ministry of Defense, citing the Law on State and Official Secrets, refused to provide the requested information. The law, however, does not provide that the number of MoD advisers can be a secret. However, the ministry did not provide this information either. The MoD also cited the RA Government Decree of 1998 (Clause 8 of Decree no. 173), which deals with the confidentiality of information about troops deployment and their number, organizational structure, number, but does not prohibit the disclosure of information to MoD advisers.

**On May 16**, Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministry of Nature Protection requesting information on how many official websites were created or redesigned for the Ministry in 2014-2019 and how much money was spent for this purpose, presented by years and sources of funding. The received answer was incomplete.

On the same day, FOICA applied to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the same inquiry, and the responses were delayed. In the first case, it was received on June 5 and in the second case – on May 27. On May 20, FOICA applied to the State Revenue Committee with the same inquiry. From here, too, the reply was received late on June 14.

**On May 21,** a regular court session was held on the case of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO vs. Road Police with claims of information provision.

We would like to remind that as early as on June 1, 2017, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO sent a request to the Road Police, expecting to find out what percentage of cars registered in the RA are on the right-hand drive. That information was denied on the grounds of confidentiality, after which the organization filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court seeking to declare the denial unlawful. The case was accepted for proceedings on December 8, 2017.

On June 12, the court upheld the claim of the Association of Informed Citizens NGO.

**On May 30**, at the request of Constantine Leon from Radio France International, the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia sent an inquiry to the Prime Minister's staff, requesting the copies of the contracts between the RA Government and Viola Water CJSC, the bidding packages within the public tender announced by the RA Government for the management of water resources in Armenia, public announcement of the winning organization, and environmental and social impact assessments of water resources, carried out by the Government of Armenia or Viola Water CJSC, as well as, if available, copies of the Internal Audit Report on Water Management at Viola CJSC. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development answered the inquiry. The reply was incomplete.

**On June 8,** 24news.am news website had not received an invitation from the RA Presidential Administration to cover the Conference of Thoughts in Dilijan, which the media outlet viewed as discriminatory and a violation of the right to receiving information. Hasmik Petrosyan, assistant to President Armen Sargsyan, told the media outlet that "a very limited number of journalists were taking part in the event, and direct coverage would be provided by their press service." The media, however, found out that many media outlets participated in the event.

**On June 17**, Hetq.am website ("Investigative Journalists" NGO) turned to Nerses Yeritsyan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Scientific Laboratory after A.I. Alikhanyan (Yerevan Institute of Physics) Foundation, requesting the decisions made by the Board of Trustees in 2011 – 2019. Nerses Yeritsyan informed that overtime work would be needed to answer the inquiry, which would cost 550,000 drams.

On July 8, the website filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court seeking to oblige the Foundation's Board of Trustees to provide copies of all decisions made in 2011-2019. On July 15, the case was remitted to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction, where the case was accepted for proceedings on August 14. A hearing of the case was held on December 6, and the next hearing is scheduled for March 3.

**On June 18,** the Hetq.am website applied to Public Television Company asking to provide copies of state procurement contracts reflecting the costs for the equipment, renovation of buildings, production of new programs and films. The television company, however, refused, saying that the contracts contained secrets. However, this state-funded media outlet must work transparently and be accountable to the public.

 **On July 2**, Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, asking for information on what electronic platforms are being used by agencies to provide information. In both cases, the answer was received with delay.

**On July 8,** Union of Informed Citizens NGO filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against Arthur Vanetsyan, Director of the National Security Service (NSS), with claims of obligation for provision of information. In particular, on January 25, 2019, Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the NGO sent letter H-1717 to the NSS, requesting that it provide the departmental list of information subject to encryption (or a copy of the relevant order and attached list), except for parts that may contain state or official secrets. Having received no response, the NGO went to the court.

On July 16, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. After corrections, the application was re-submitted on August 19, with delay, so a motion to recover the missed deadline was attached. On August 23, the court decided to reject both the motion and the application.

 **On August 5**, President of Freedom of Information Center NGO Shushan Doydoyan applied to the Personal Data Protection Agency, requesting to check whether the provision of the staff list of the Forensic Medicine department in Shirak Marz of the Scientific and Practical Center of Forensic Medicine SNCO and the name list of persons occupying those positions upon inquiry contradicted the requirements of the RA Law on Presonal Data Provision.

 The Agency found that the publication or the provision of the above data by the SNCO upon inquiry in accordance with Article 7 (3) (4) of the RA Law on Freedom of Information does not contravene the Law on Protection of Personal Data. Thus, the SNCO's refusal to provide information to FOICA was recognized as ungrounded.

On December 12, FOICA sent a new inquiry to SNCO requesting the same information. No response was received as of the end of the year.

**On August 6,** Civilnet.am journalist Gevorg Tosunyan warned that he was urged by the NSS to send inquiries only through their website or by mail. Only after the Facebook status did the agency accept the journalist's request sent by e-mail.

**On August 21**, Petros Ghazaryan, Director of the News Program of the Public TV Company asked Edgar Ghazaryan, Chief of Staff of the RA Constitutional Court, to answer questions arising from the announcement posted on the CC website, in particular which of the eligible persons at the CC drafted the English versions of the applications addressed to the ECtHR and Venice Commission and how many members of the Constitutional Court took part in that decision. The CC first requested additional 30 days to give a response to the request, then stated that the request violated the law on personal data protection and therefore they could not provide the information. However, the request relates to the public functions of those individuals, not their private lives, and cannot be considered protected personal data. On October 1, the Public Television Company of Armenia applied to the Agency for Personal Data Protection. The latter held hearings on October 10, and later on November 14, it made a decision that the provision of the requested information did not contravene the RA Law on Protection of Personal Data.

On November 29, Public TV again appealed to the Constitutional Court, citing the decision of the Personal Data Protection Agency. As of December 31, no reply was received from the Constitutional Court.

**On September 9,** Hayk Sahakyan, a reporter for Yerkir Media TV, asked Eduard Aghajanyan, Chief of Staff of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, with a request to clarify the issues related to the organization of the events in Gyumri on September 21. Gegham Manukyan, the director of the news and socio-political programs at the TV company, posted this on his Facebook page. In particular, the journalist inquired whether or not a tender was organized for the event, who won the tender and so on. The staff did not respond to these questions within 5 days and informed them that they would respond within 30 days. “September 21 will certainly belong to the past already, and we will no longer be interested in the response. But we will wait patiently for the 30-day period to expire, ”Gegham Manukyan wrote. On October 2, the reporter received the answer to the question, but earlier in an interaction wih the media representatives on September 18 those questions were already answered, violating the principle of exclusivity.

**On September 17**, Gegham Manukyan, director of news and socio-political programs at Yerkir Media TV Company, beat the alarm in a Facebook post, speaking about the approaches of the RA National Assembly Staff to the RA Law on Freedom of Information.[[168]](#footnote-168) In particular, he noted that in response to the request for an interview, they offered to send the questions in writing, and after receiving them in writing, they offered to ask for an interview in writing.

**On September 17**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the National Assembly asking who the official responsible for freedom of information in the parliament was, whether any information about this person was posted on the National Assembly website, and requested to provide a copy of the legal act, designating that official to that position. The National Assembly provided an incomplete answer, failing to address all the questions.

**On September 23**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the National Assembly, requesting to clarify why electronic signatures are required in the case of e-mails to the NA staff, whereas all electronic inquiries sent through the Government's e-request platform are considered official. It turns out that the National Assembly is developing an enforcement practice that is different, even contradictory to the one applied by the RA Government. The National Assembly provided an incomplete answer.

**On October 3**, the Freedom of Information Center applied with the same request to the State Education Inspectorate, Environmental and Mining Inspectorate, Health and Labor Inspectorate, and the Urban Development, Technology and Fire Safety Inspectorate asking information on officials responsible for freedom of information in these respective department. In all 4 cases FOICA received late responses in violation of the law.

On the same day, FOICA applied to the State Market Inspectorate and received an incomplete response, and the State Committee of Nuclear Safety Regulatory did not provide any answer.

**On October 16**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministries of Health, Emergency Situations and the State Revenue Committee requesting information on the service cars of owned by the departments, indicating the model and state registration plate number for each car. The answers were received with delay.

On the same day, FOICA sent the same inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, which rejected it on October 22. Following a repeated inquiry on November 4, FOICA received a groundless refusal from the MOD.

FOICA also applied to the RA Police with the same issue and received a refusal.

**On October 24,** Freedom of Information Center, at the request of the Center for Public Information and Monitoring, applied to the Municipality of Yerevan for information about Dalma Gardens and received an incomplete response.

**On November 7,** Public TV journalist Gevorg Tosunyan expressed dissatisfaction with the work of the Ministry of Environment on Facebook. “A few days ago the Chief of Prime Minister's wrote that Nork forests are being restored, and the Prime Minister disseminated this information on his Facebook page, too. For two days I have been trying to get a sound bite from the Ministry of Environment on the topic, the interviewee agreed in the eventing, but changed his mind on the next day, people in the Ministry's information department are not competent at all, it turns out that only one person is responsible for this matter in the whole department, and this person is on a business trip.” [[169]](#footnote-169)

**On November 21**, the *Armenian Times* asked the administration of the Republican Stadium after Vazgen Sargsyan for information on the cost of the stadium renovation, as well as how the refurbishment would affect the national team's schedule of games and more. The editorial office did not receive a reply to this inquiry, nor to the other two inquiries submitted during the next 4 days.

**On November 22**, Panorama.am sent an inquiry to the National Security Service to provide information on the Prime Minister's instruction, issued on November 14. Specifically, at the Cabinet session on that day, the Prime Minister instructed the NSS to find out whether the QR code had anything to do with Satan or not.

Lala Ter-Ghazaryan, a journalist with Panorama.am, warned that the NSS website indicated that the inquiry was seen, but the response was received with delay on November 29.[[170]](#footnote-170) In addition, the reporter was not satisfied with the content of the response: “NSS reports that operative intelligence measures have been taken to find out the possible link between Satan and the QR code. But they refuse to share the results, citing Article 8(1) and (2) of the Law on Freedom of Information. It turns out to be a state secret, besides if published, it will violate the privacy of one's family and family life, ”the journalist said.

**On December 2,** Factor.am reporter Narek Kirakosyan sent a request to Yerevan Municipality requesting to provide the contracts signed Factor Production LLC, Stage Style LLC, Light Design LLC and ANPP Construction CJSC. These are the companies that will provide services at the cost of 325 million AMD on New Year's Day.[[171]](#footnote-171) The journalist reported this on Facebook. On December 16, Narek Kirakosyan received an incomplete response and expressed his dissatisfaction in a letter and by a phone call on the same day, however, with no further response.

**On December 3**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministry of Environment requesting information about the grant program within the framework of which the draft law on Amending the RA Law on Freedom of Information, uploaded on unified website for publication of Draft Legal Acts – e-draft.am – was developed. The NGO considered the response inadequate and re-submitted the inquiry on December 11. The answer was received with delay, and the content did not address the substance of the question.

**On December 3,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Municipality of Yerevan requesting information about the legal basis for requiring students to receive a health certificate from a medical institution (26 form) for enrolment and whether the process was mandatory or parents might refuse to do on at their discretion. The received response was incomplete.

**On December 4**, Panorama.am website asked the Passport and Visa Department of the RA Police to provide data on the number, status, registration of Indian citizens residing in the RA. The response was received with delay on December 13, and was not satisfactory for the editorial staff because of unclear content.

**On December 19,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministries of Environment, Finance and Territorial Administration and Infrastructure requesting information on how many tenders the Ministry administered in 2019, indicating how many tims they applied single source procurement, and provide a link to the official website page where all procurement contracts were published. The responses of all **three** agencies were received in violation of the law with delay.

On the same day, the NGO made the same inquiry to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and the administrations of Nor Nork, Kanaker-Zeytun, Arabkir, Nork-Marash, Malatia-Sebastia, Davitashen, Erebuni, Nubarashen districts. In all **9** cases the inquiries were left unanswered.

***OTHER EVENTS ON THE ACTIVITY OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS***

 **On July 16**, Gayane Manukyan, a journalist from the *Haykakan Zham/Hzham.am* accused of extortion, was released on bail.

We would like to remind that on June 19, the RA Investigative Committee issued a report that a journalist of the *Haykakan Zham* was arrested on suspicion of a large scale extortion.[[172]](#footnote-172) (Details can be found in CPFE Semi-Annual Report 2019, see the *Reports* section of khosq.am)

Ghazaryan & Partners Law Firm reported that after paying 2 million AMD and presenting evidence to the prosecution body, Gayane Manukyan would participate in the preliminary investigation of the case being in freedom.

**On August 28**, News.am LLC, the founder of News.am website, filed a lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against political scientist Styopa Safaryan, seeking compensation for the damage to its business reputation. The suit was prompted by a Facebook post saying that the site had received an order from Robert Kocharyan's office to publish some articles about the judges.[[173]](#footnote-173) On September 5, the lawsuit was returned to eliminate the violations. On September 30, the application was re-filed and was accepted into proceedings on October 2.

However, on October 3, the plaintiff appealed the judgment of the Court of Appeal, issued on September 5. On October 22, the appeal was accepted for proceedings, a hearing was held on November 5, and on November 7 the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal by News.AM LLC. The case was remitted to the archive.

By the way, the case accepted for proceedings on October 2 has not been processed yet.

 **On September 16,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court hearing on the case of the founder of the *Iravunk* newspaper, former MP Hayk Babukhanyan against Larisa Minasyan, the Executive Director of Open Society Foundations-Armenia.

We would like to remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 4 with claims of refuting the information considered defamatory, and the reason was Larissa Minasyan's statement that Hayk Babukhanyan, too, received a grant from their foundation. [[174]](#footnote-174)

Court hearings were also held on October 14 and December 16, with the next hearing scheduled for on February 24, 2020.

**On September 26,** Syunik Marz Court of General Jurisdiction (Meghri seat) held a regular court hearing on the case of Samvel Tsatryan, editor of the *Syunikats Yerkir* newspaper vs. citizen Mania Tsatryan. The plaintiff seeks refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation.

We would like to remind that three criminal cases were initiated against Samvel Alexanyan, editor of the *Syunik Yerkir* newspaper in Kapan Police Department on January 31 and February 1, 2018. On February 5, the Investigative Committee decided to combine the three criminal cases into one proceeding. (Details can be found in CPFE 2018-2019 annual and quarterly reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

At the court hearing on September 26 it was decided to move the civil case to trial. The court hearing was held on December 12, and the next one is scheduled on March 6, 2020. By the way, in 2017 Syunik Governor Vahe Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in Syunik Marz Court of General Jurisdiction against Syunyats Ashkharh LLC, founder of the *Syunik Yerkir,* with claims for compensation for damage and obligation of refutation. On August 3, 2018, former governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan filed a new lawsuit in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication against Samvel Alexanyan and Noyan Tapan LLC within the same dispute. (Details can be found in CPFE 2017-2019 reports, see khosq.am's *Reports* section).

On September 6, 2019, the court upheld Vahe Hakobyan's claim partially and obliged Samvel Alexanyan and Noyan Tapan LLC to publish the case on www.noyan-tapan.am news site within five business days after the judgment entered into force, on the same website in relation to the video containing a number of statements about Vahe Hakobyan that was uploaded at 7:17 pm on June 14, 2018. In addition, it was ordered to confiscate 300,000 AMD from Samvel Alexanyan in favor of Vahe Hakobyan as compensation for non-pecuniary damage.[[175]](#footnote-175)

**On December 18**, the founder of "A1 +" TV company "MELTEX" LLC filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against the RA Government and the Commission on Television and Radio in relation to the annulment of acts from 7 broadcast licensing competitions held in 2003. We would like to remind that as early as 2002 the TV Company was deprived of the opportunity to broadcast on political grounds and subsequently was not granted a license as a result of all organized competitions.

On December 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The first court hearing is scheduled on March 13, 2020.

 **On December 24,** the owner by Channel 5 TV Armen Tavadyan was arrested on suspicion of committing a criminal act under Article 340, Part 4, Clause 1 of the RA Criminal Code, in connection with Robert Kocharyan’s alleged supporter Varuzhan Mkrtchyan. On December 26, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction ruled to detain him for two months. By the way, on May 13, Armen Tavadyan was taken to the Nor Nork Police Department in relation to the act violence against civic activist Vardges Gaspari during a protest held in support of Robert Kocharyan.

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136. [**https://armday.am/post/89590/-asfaltin-prvelo-ts-minche-gisherajin-khrakhchanqner-inch-e-katarvo-m-la-skalajits-ners?fbclid=IwAR3g3y5BEyMat2eMAxLNKI67QauabmVNxJfoji7Ngfqq1Mj17uo1Fv6b0pw**](https://armday.am/post/89590/-asfaltin-prvelo-ts-minche-gisherajin-khrakhchanqner-inch-e-katarvo-m-la-skalajits-ners?fbclid=IwAR3g3y5BEyMat2eMAxLNKI67QauabmVNxJfoji7Ngfqq1Mj17uo1Fv6b0pw) [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
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138. [**https://hayeli.am/?p=130607&l=am%2F&fb\_comment\_id=2275903112504681\_2276035325824793**](https://hayeli.am/?p=130607&l=am%2F&fb_comment_id=2275903112504681_2276035325824793) [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
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141. [**https://armtimes.com/hy/article/160379**](https://armtimes.com/hy/article/160379) [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. [**https://hraparak.am/post/b1f0daed881cfb6a14877a29ec9b71e7**](https://hraparak.am/post/b1f0daed881cfb6a14877a29ec9b71e7) [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. [**https://khosq.am/2019/10/07/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-42/**](https://khosq.am/2019/10/07/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-42/) [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. [**https://youtu.be/R9JvpgtnAf8**](https://youtu.be/R9JvpgtnAf8) [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/109392?fbclid=IwAR3g21o3tkASb6iXaFHUj0AWXDe2mt0wB6rxBEWkPdqyJ2\_psEjD0FUx7-I**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/109392?fbclid=IwAR3g21o3tkASb6iXaFHUj0AWXDe2mt0wB6rxBEWkPdqyJ2_psEjD0FUx7-I) [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. [**https://www.aravot.am/2019/10/18/1072808/**](https://www.aravot.am/2019/10/18/1072808/) [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. [**https://hraparak.am/post/67c1af6d53cee868d28bb2fc2c992b41**](https://hraparak.am/post/67c1af6d53cee868d28bb2fc2c992b41) [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. [**https://www.armdaily.am/?p=68235&l=am&fbclid=IwAR1Nl05yGRCmnLPAXRMOAQ96EDjX9CbV74MivqMdZMRnUB8Tz6LI-JklSGQ**](https://www.armdaily.am/?p=68235&l=am&fbclid=IwAR1Nl05yGRCmnLPAXRMOAQ96EDjX9CbV74MivqMdZMRnUB8Tz6LI-JklSGQ) [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. [**https://khosq.am/2019/10/29/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-43/**](https://khosq.am/2019/10/29/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-43/) [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\_continue=358&v=0tAIU-iNJ0o&feature=emb\_titl**e](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=358&v=0tAIU-iNJ0o&feature=emb_title) [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. [**https://hraparak.am/post/0d8d1bc6c9a6800ea110fcb6878812f6**](https://hraparak.am/post/0d8d1bc6c9a6800ea110fcb6878812f6) [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. [**https://factor.am/197481.html**](https://factor.am/197481.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. [**https://www.facebook.com/hripsime.jebejyan/posts/2534189346673097**](https://www.facebook.com/hripsime.jebejyan/posts/2534189346673097) [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
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157. [**https://khosq.am/2019/12/19/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-50/**](https://khosq.am/2019/12/19/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-50/) [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
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