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COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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

**2020 second quarterly 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 for the second quarter of 2020.*

*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***

Armenia has retained its position in the international ratings on the freedom of the press, however the situation in the country in terms of the violations of journslists’ and media outlets’ rights causes concern.

The second quarter of 2020, unlike the previous quarter, was marked by physical violence against journalists. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression registered 2 cases, during which at least 6 journalists were injured. These happened during the protests organized by the Prosperous Armenia Party when they put forward the demand for the resignation of the Government. Journalistic organizations made condemning statements in this regard.

As for the limitations of the journalistic activities at the time of the state of emergency due to the coronavirus pandemic, introduced in the first quarter and resembling censorship, they were lifted in the second quarter. However, the CPFE registered a case when the police initiated administrative proceedings against the media outlet in connection with the publication on the topic of the coronavirus.

The total number of various types of pressure applied in the reporting period amounted to 34. The number of new court cases against media outlets is 23: in one case the journalist went to court as a result of the violation of the right to receive information, and 22 claims were filed against media outlets on the grounds of insult and slander, established by Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code: this exceeds the data for the previous quarter by 10. That is to say, the tendency of growing numbers of claims against media outlets and journalists was maintained in the second quarter. Freedom House[[1]](#footnote-1) and Journalists without Borders[[2]](#footnote-2), too, reported that these phenomena were causing concern. Even though both organizations confirmed the good level of freedom of speech in the post-revolutionary Armenia, they considered that the media polarization in Armenia was alarming: in Armenia the media are not under state control, but they are dependent on their owners.

In this sense it is extremely urgent to ensure the transparency of media ownership. These solutions should be provided for first in the Law on Mass Media for the improvement of which a working group has been established in the Parliament. Later this should also be ensured by the legislation, regulating the broadcast sector.

On April 27 three NA MPs put the new draft law on Audio-Visual Media into circulation. It has been harshly criticized by journalistic organizations, since it is not meant to introduce reforms in the sector and will not contribute to the solution of the problems in the sector. And even thought the CPFE has submitted 35 recommendations on the amendments to the draft to its authors, the organization believes that the document needs to be revisited conceptually. Nonetheless, the Parliament passed the Bill at the first hearing on June 18.

Both hate speech, disinformation and various manipulations on domestic and foreign policy as well as on the topic of the coronavirus continued to be widely circulated in both social media and media outlets in the reporting period. The situation became so serious that on June 12 the RA Prime-Minister announced of a working group formed within the Government staff upon his instruction to study disseminated disinformation.[[3]](#footnote-3) The issues have also been in the focus of the parliament’s attention: the NA Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs continued the working group discussions on the fight against hate speech aiming at legislative reforms with the representatives of the civil society during the reporting quarter. Whereas the package of amendments to the RA Criminal Code and RA Criminal Procedure Code which envisages criminal liability for public statements calling to apply violence, public justifications of the acts or preaching of violence, was adopted by the Parliament on April 15 at its second reading and in the entirety.

In the reporting period the government has been in direct contact with the public on a daily basis via social media, and the PM of the country gave his regular five-hour long press conference on May 16, answering approximately 70 questions. However, the official information provided by the state bodies is not always and fully accessible for the media which leads to the latter’s dissatisfaction. In the course of the second quarter the CPFE registered 26 cases of the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

The second quarter of 2020 continued to be a complicated period for the activity of the media, conditioned by the persistent Coronovirus pandemic and the tense domestic political situation, when the oppositional Parliamentary *Prosperous Armenia* Party was demanding the resignation of the Government. In this period both various forms of pressure and impediments of journalistic activity, and physical violence were registered. This, on June 16, during the protest organized by the Prosperous Armenia party in front of the NSS premises the Police applied brutal force not only against the protesters, but media representatives, too. At least 5 (and 1 more on June 14) journalists covering the event were injured in the jostle and because of the actions of the police. On this occasion the journalistic organizations made a statement, condemning the violence against the media representatives fulfilling their professional functions and demanding from the RA police to conduct an objective internal investigation to study that event and to hold the guilty liable.[[4]](#footnote-4) At the same time, taking into consideration that these events took place in the conditions of the state of emergency because of the coronavirus, another statement was published to call on the managements of media outlets to keep their employees away from the coverage of mass protests, thus keeping them away from being in crowds of people, and if impossible, to give clear instructions of ensuring their safety. After the event, the Police apologied for what had happened, and then an internal investigation was launched for implementing disproportionate actions against journalists, and the materials of the internal investigation were sent to the Special Investigation Service.

Unlike the first quarter, when due to the state of emergency caused by the coronoavirus pandemic, the Government introduced limitations to be applied to the activity of the media, too, thus establishing control over publications on the coronoavirus, in essence, no media content control was exercised in the second quarter of the year. On April 13, upon the Commandant’s decision, the clause imposing limitations on the work of the media in relation to the dissemination of the coronavirus pandemic was fully repealed. In response to the inquiry made by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression on May 20th, the RA Police informed that in the period between April 1 to 13 no notification requiring the immediate removal of a piece of news was sent to any media outlet. However, the CPFE registered a case of initiated administrative proceedings by the police in relation to a piece of new published on Aprill 11th. Besides, no administrative penalty was imposed on media outlets or jounalists in the state of emergency. Instead, as compared with the previous quarter, the number of lawsuits against media outlets and journalists on the grounds of insult and slander increase by 10, amounting to the total of 22. In general, the total number of various kinds of pressure applied against media and journalists is 34.

The Freedom House international human rights organization also addressed the large number oflawsuits against media and journalists, referring to the data of the 2019 annual report of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression in its own report published on May 6th.[[5]](#footnote-5) Thus, Freedom House evaluates the number of court suits against media outlets amounting to almost 100, 4 cases of physical violence, and 134 cases of pressure against media outlets as alarming.

The report by Freedom House also contains a reference to the proposal, made by the Government to criminalize calls of violence, as well as another proposed amendment to the Criminal Code, according to which the dissemination of fake information in the media shall be criminalized, which caused a lot of concern in the media sector. By the way, if this recent amendment is currently under discussion in the NA, the package of draft laws, which establish criminal liability for the public calls to apply violence, public justification and propagation of violence, the parliament passed at second reading and in its entirety on April 15.

As for the freedom of press index, according to Freedom House, it is 3 out of the possible 7. The report mentions that the media is extremely polarized, particularly, TV companies are fre from state control however, are dependent on their owners. The problem was not overlooked by Reporters without Borders – a reputable international organization – in its annual report on the freedom of press published on April 20.[[6]](#footnote-6) Here Armenia can retain its 61st position being almost on a level with Georgia, Poland and Croatia, however in our country the freedom of press situation was described as follows: “The government that emerged from Armenia’s “velvet revolution” in the spring of 2018 has failed to reduce the media’s polarization. The editorial policies of the main TV channels coincide with the interests of their owners. Journalistic independence and transparent media ownership are still far from being achieved.”

This circumstance has been multiply mentioned by the CPFE, underlining that very frequently media outlets do not provide objective and multifaceted information, servicing the interests of this or that political force. This situation is from time to time aggravated parallel to the political developments in the country. The PM of the country spoke about this issue, too, in his Facebook live on April 19, mentioning, that the majority of media outlets used to receive money from the previous authorities before the revolution, “and now they are enraged, since theyr do not receive money any more or they do receive money in fear or in different and smaller amounts. How was trhe media sector managed? 99% of media outlets and 70% of the journalists used to concretely be paid by the authorities.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

After this statement a number of editors-in-chief replied to this, demanding that the PM gave names and concrete facts, otherwise anonymus statement would be considered as pressure on the press. In her own turn the press secrtary of the PM Mane Gevorgyan replied to the statement herself, “If they say that this is pressure on the mpress, then how is it expressed? All of them continue to act freely, all of them enjoy the right of freedom of speech and are exercising this right. None has been persecuted, none has been closed down.”

In essence, these reciprocated accusations followed a scandalous happening on the same day when the technical preparation footage of the Live address by PM Nikol Pashinyan to the citizens of the country by Public TV appeared on the Internet, and an unknown user made a mock video of this footage and disseminated it on Facebook.

In this regard, the Paublic TV company responded to the accusations in their address, mentioning that they had provided an open signal that was used by Armenia, Shant, Mir, H2, AR, Kentron, Yerkir Media, and Channel 5 TV channels. Consequently, all the above-mentioned TV companies had an opportunity to use the raw footage of the speech by the PM.

However, there were resignations at Public TV in the following days: executive director Margarita Grigoryan, the director of news and analytical programs Petros Ghazaryan and Creative director responsible for the live broadcast of the PM’s address Vardan Hakobyan resigned. And on April 21 the *Armenian Times* daily that belongs to the PM’s family published an article where, referring to its sources, it mentioned that the notorious leakage was happened from Yerkir media TV company, controlled by the ARF. According to the news circulated in the media sector, Gegham Manukyan, Director of the newscast at Yerkir Media, gave the footage to Harutyun Harutyunyan, Director of Channel 5, owned by Robert Kocharyan, the former organizing the leakage by means of one of the fake account holders supporting Robert Kocharyan,” the newspaper wrote.

In the Armenian media outlets, as well as social media, hate speech is largely applied for political purposes, targeting this or that group. A vivid example of the former is the hate speech against Tatevik Revazyan, the Chair of the Civil Aviation Committee, voiced by one of the editors of a website, which was publicly reprimanded. Another case had to do with the leakage of personal data and their use for political reasons, when the RA Investiagtive Committee found out that at 23:09 on June 1, the social media page called Zndan wirh zndan711 ID data published the following status: “Who will answer for the innocent victims. As a result of the pandemic, unfortunately, we had a high toll, and this number is growing from day to day. Would everything be as sad as it is now, if we had a normal leader?” attaching the personal data of 132 people who dies of the coronavirus. A criminal case was initiated on this occasion on June 3rd.

Generally speaking, the information environment created in the conditions of the state of the emergency has led to the establishment of a working group upon the instruction of the PM to study the sources of disseminated disinformation. The PM announced about this at the NA on June 12, stating that it should be found out if the foreign special services had interfered in this matter, if it is the circles related to those services that are interested in the dissemination of disinformation, whether there could be political or non-political circles which, coming from their narrow interests, could spend money on disseminating such kind of disinformation.

The PM continued to speak about his concern on June 25, again in the NA, when he announced that it was wrong to lift the limitations on the freedom of speech in relation to the coronavirus because at the moment even that topic had become a point of manipulations: “Forces that spread stench believe that the more people in Armenia get infected with the coronavirus and the higher the toll the louder they may speak. They speak about newspapers. Yes, we have said it and we are still saying that in the RA political parties, media outlets, NGOs must be 100 percent transparent so that the so-called ex-Presidents do not take up the funding of platoons and batallions of fake account holders to wage a hybrid war against the people of Armenia.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Pointing at the evaluations of the international organizations on the freedon of speech in Armenia and referring to the TV broadcasts, the PM mentioned: “Show me a situation in the history of the third Republic of Armenia when all, and pardon my French, political corpses would be on at least 3 – 4, if not 6 – 7 TV channels from morning till night, spreading the rotten stench all over the country.”

When speaking about the current situation in the Armenian media, both political and social circles prioritize the need for legislative amendments. The NA Standing Committee on the Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs continued the discussions on the fight against hate speech during the second quarter of this year. On May 19 a similar online discussion took place with the participation of the representatives of journalistic, human rights organizations, MPs and lawyers. It is expected that the raised issues, concerns and proposals on legislative amendments will be submitted to the Committee in writing.

And since April 27th the NA Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport put the draft law on Audiovisual media into circulation. And on May 28, at the initiative of the Committtee to Protect the Freedom of Expression an online discussion on the topic of “The Issues of Broadcast Sector and Need for Legislative Amendments” was organized with th eparicipation of NA MPs, managers of TV companies, the represnetatives of journalistic organizations and media experts. Before that, the CPFE had submitted 35 recommendations on the amendments to the draft law to its authors. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Yerevan press Club and Media Initiatives Center registered that the circulated draft law did not solve the existent problems and did not contribute to the reforms. Particularly, the draft law on Audiovisual media does not create any feasible opportunity to create a private multiplex, the issue of the digital broadcast of about 10 regional TV companies remains unsolved, the obsolete and controversial procedure of licensing is not changed, the transparency of the beneficial owners of broadcasters which is more necessary than ever is not ensured and so on. Whereas in 2020 the deadlines for the licenses awarded to the TV companies would expire, and if the draft law is adopted in the current form, the tender for licensing will be held according to almost the same rules as 2010, and this may completely stagnate the sector.

The discussions held during the first reading of the draft law in the NA were accompanied by heated debates and statements. They showed that the ruling political power firstly aimed at influencing the content of media outlets. Thus, on June 18, Mkhitar Hayrapetyan, MP from the My Step faction and Chair of the Standing Committee of Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport referred to a publication in News.am information website, without mentioning the name of the media outlet, under the title of “A Draft Law against Russian TV Channels Is Being Discussed at the NA Right Now,” and urged in the tone of an ultimatum to remove the piece or change the title.[[9]](#footnote-9) The CPFE qualified this case as pressure against the media outlet.

The law was passed at the first reading after which, on June 26th, the Union of Operators, too, expressed it concern, drawing attention to the circumstance that, among others, unequal conditions were provided for large, medium and small cable broadcasters.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Ambassador of Russia in Armenia made a statement on the same day, too, expressing his dissatisfaction that the adoption of the draft law dictates new rules of the game to the Russian TV channels broadcast in Armenia, which was a matter of concern.[[11]](#footnote-11) Reminding of the historical relations between the Armenian and the Russian peoples and the issue of the recognition of Armenian driver’s licenses, the Embassy made the following proposal in response: “It is necessary that in Armenia Russian should have the status of an official language.”

While the draft law on Audio-Visual Media was at the stage of discussions, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the enforced Law on Television and Radio on April 15, according to which the Armenian TV company was given a right to broadcast commercials for up to 5 minutes per one hour of air time. In this regard, journalistic organizations expressed concerns even back at the end of the previous year, mentioning that giving the Public TV company, funded by the state budget, a right to make use of the commercial market was not justified, because it would create unequal competitive conditions in the broadcast media sector.

The authorities intend to introduce amendments to the RA Law on Mass Media, and a dedicated working group was created in the Parliament. In the reporting period the CPFE had a discussion with the leader of the group – Gayane Abrahamyan, a member of My Step faction. A package of legislative amendments, which envisages equal requirements for the transparency of ownership and financial sources for all types of media, including print, online and broadcast, shall be submitted. A new definition of the concept of media is provided and a number of other issues are solved.

The proposed amendments are especially important for regulating the activities of online media outlets since the enforced law has a lot of obvious gaps in this sense. Many online platforms are taking advantage of this opportunity and they do not even share their imprint data with their audience. The results of the survey conducted by the CPFE also testified to this. Thus, during the reporting period 25 websites that had a monthly view rate of over 200000, according to the international rating platform Similarweb.com: 9 out of 25 websites mentioned their legal status, only 1 website mentioned the data of the founding legal entity as indicated in the state registration certificate, and only this website presented full imprint, whereas 7 out of 25 did not have even a mention of their addresses, however they present an email address. 18 websites did not identify any responsible person.

In the reporting period interesting developments were noted in the process of the amendments to the RA Law on Freedom of Information. Back last year a legislative amendments package circulated by the Ministry of Environment attempted at the limitation on the provision of environmentl information with no acceptable justification. Whereas on April 3, 2020, the Government approved it and sent to the NA without the draft going through a public discussion stage. On June 12 the NA Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environmental Protection discussed the draft law and the discussion on this issue was postponed for 2 months.

Besides, the draft laws on introducing amendments to the RA Law on Freedom of Information and the RA Law on Personal Data Protection, developed at the initiative of the Freedom of Information Center and jointly with the Ministry of Justice, were uploaded onto e-frat.am from May 15 to May 30, for public consultation.[[12]](#footnote-12) Hence, it is proposed to remove the clauses that require the identification of nationality and signature from among the list of mandatory requirements for an inquiry to receive information, also it is proposed to clarify the requirement for signing the inquiry submitted within the framework of the RA Law on Personal Data Protection. The adoption of the drafts is expected to make the submission of inquiry for information more accessible also electronically. The package of amendments is officially in circulation, however it has not yet been included in the NA agenda.

Another concern, related to personal data, was expressed by journalistsic and human rights organizations on April 2nd, in relation to the legislative package adopted by the National Assembly on March 31, according to which in the conditions of the state of emergency the Government shall be granted with additional online tools to prevent the pandemic, namely through the limitation of the rights to the protection of personal data, privacy, and freedom and confidentiality of communication.[[13]](#footnote-13) The RA Government and the Commandant’s Office were appealed to inform the citizens properly which institutions process personal data, how the proper protection and safety of those data are ensured, what the results of the introduction of this system are.

Apart from legislative amendments, development of freedom of information also needs the improvement of the work done by state authorities’ spokespersons and the public relations departments. Journalists continue to complain that when they send an inquiry to governmental agencies, they either do not receive replies or they are received with a violation of the set deadlines at the expense of urgency and topicality of the matter. The CPFE has registered a growing tendency of the violations of the right to receive and disseminate information as compared to the same quarter last year and the first quarter of this year. 26 such cases were reported in the reporting period.

In the course of this quarter some media outlets were concerned because of the study conducted by the State Commission for the Protection of Economic Competition, related to the dissemination of commercials through TV and digital platforms. According to some opinions, this is done with a discriminatory approach in order to influence advertising customers and refer them to pro-government press. In response to the inquiry made by the CPFE in this regard, the State Commission for the protection of Economic Competition informed that a number of inquiries were sent out to a number of business entities for the mere sake of conducting a study of the commercials sector, including TV companies, radio companies, and websites that had relatively higher rating on the international platforms – [www.similarweb.com](http://www.similarweb.com/?fbclid=IwAR28GyVx1jtENJGqDKgh70lLJ438gziKlOJYzPxC0VDuG743nnEhYGxf1-Y) and [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com/?fbclid=IwAR2aFnQx9hEQxzAuNE62fbvgVH0psBJVF8ER_tO8VDgJcogWWjMG-VSdY00). As for matters of concern, the State Commission for the Protection of Economic Competition is open and willing to discuss with the media outlets.

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

The violations of the rights of journalists and the media during the second quarter of 2020 will be presented according to the following classification proposed by the CPFE:

* physical violence against journalists,
* pressures on the media and their staff,
* 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 journalists. Such facts are classified under the group which, in the opinion of the author, is most indicative of the type of the violation. 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 the second quarter of 2020, as well as developments related to the previous incidents.

***In total, 62 cases of violations of the rights of journalists and the media were recorded during the reporting period. 2 of them were cases of physical violence, 34 were cases of pressure on the media and their employees, 26 were violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.***

Below we present the quantitative data of the violations of the second quarter and the comparison with the same period last year and the first quarter of 2020.

**Quantitative data of the violations in the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2020**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter | 2nd quarter |
| Physical violence against journalists | **0** | **2  (6 injured)** |
| Pressure against media outlets and their staff | **50** | **34** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **21** | **26** |

**Quantitative data of the violations in the second quarters of 2019 and 2020**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2nd quarter, 2019 | 2nd quarter, 2020 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **0** | **2  (6 injured)** |
| Pressure against media outlets and their personnel | **42** | **34** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **15** | **26** |

In the table below we have presented the quantitative data on the lawsuits, with the involvement of media outlets and journalists.

**Court cases with the involvement of media outlets and journalists in the 1st and 2nd quarters of 2020**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of court cases** | **1st quarter** | **2nd quarter** |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 12 | 22 |
| On the grounds of the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information | 0 | 1 |
| Other disputes | 2 | 0 |

**Court cases with the involvement of media outlets and journalists in the 2nd quarter of 2019 և 2020**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of court cases** | **2nd quarter, 2019** | **2nd quarter, 2020** |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 25 | 22 |
| On the grounds of the violation of the right to receiveand disseminate information | 2 | 1 |
| Other disputes | 0 | 0 |

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 the second quarter of 2020 2 cases of physical violence with 6 injured media employees were registered in the second quarter of 2020. Below we present the cases of violence and their development in both the reporting period as well as before in chronological order.*

**On April 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a hearing on the criminal case of violence applied against Artak Khulyan, a reporter at Shantnews.am news website, and Hovhannes Sargsyan, a cameraman for Factor.am news website, and a number of citizens.

We should remind that the criminal case is related to the violence that took place during the 2018 April Revolution. It was sent to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan with an indictment against 8 people. (For details see the CPFE annual reports for 2018 and 2019 in the "Reports" section of khosq.am website).

This year, court hearings on the case were held on April 16th, May 14th, and June 11th. The next session is scheduled for July 9th.

**On April 21,** the Special Investigation Service, based on the relevant act adopted by the RA Criminal Court of Appeal, resumed the criminal case initiated in April 2018 on the cases of violence against a group of journalists.

We should remind that this case is about the occasions of obstructing the lawful professional activities of reporters (Alina Nikoghosyan, Anatoly Yeghiazaryan, Hambardzum Papoyan, Armen Petrosyan, Naira Bulghadaryan and Narek Kirakosyan) covering the demonstrations in Baghramyan Avenue, Artsakh, Erebuni, Abovyan and other streets in Yerevan through the use of violence or threats thereof by the police and other law enforcement officers and officials. (For details see CPFE’s 2018 and 2019 annual reports in khosq.am's Reports section). The Special Investigation Service suspended the case twice on the grounds of “unidentified offenders.”

According to the information provided by the SIS, the inquiry into the case continues, there is no person who has the status of the accused and the suspect.

**On May 5,** 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. [[14]](#footnote-14)

A court session on the case took place on June 4th, too, and the next one is scheduled on February 19.

**On May 21,** the case with the indictment of one person, namely the perpetrator, within the separate action of the criminal case launched in accordance with Article 164, Part 1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, on the occasion of the attack on Artur Hakobyan, Kentron TV reporter and Simik Mayilyan, operator, in Hovtashen community in Ararat marz and the obstruction of their professional activity, was sent to the General Jurisdiction Court of Ararat marz, and the other part of the criminal case was suspended.

We should remind that on December 24, 2019, dozens of residents in Hovtashen community in Ararat marz attacked Kentron TV employees, hitting them and damaging the camera.[[15]](#footnote-15) On December 25, a criminal case was launched 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.

On May 26, the case was accepted into proceedings of the General Jurisdicatrion Court of Ararat and Vayots Dsor Marzes (seat in Masis). On June 5th the first court session on the case was held. The next session is scheduled for July 13.

**On June 14,** during the protect organized by the supporters of the leader of Prosperous Armenia Party Gagik Tsarukyan the Police impeded the professional activity of Lucy Sargsyan, a correspondent of *PhotoLur* agency. She reported of this incident on her Facebook page, mentioning that the Policeman snatched her by the arm and threw her onto the pavement.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**On June 16,** while the police were dispersing the supporters of Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of Prosperous Armenia party, from in front of the premises of the National Security Service, the journalists covering the protest were injured, too. Some of them received various bodily injuries. Particularly, News.am website journalist Liana Sargsyan’s leg was hurt, Tert.am website journalist Ani Gevorgyan, Kentron TV reporter Artur Hakobyan, MegaNews.am website editor Margarita Davtyan, Yerkir.am’s correspondent Tatevik Kostandyan received blows, the representatives of a number of other media outlets appeared in the jostle.

The RA Prosecutor General’s office informed the CPFE that on June 17 an internal investigation was appointed into the cases of injured journalists as a result of Police’s actions at the administrative building of the NSS. Data indicating features of alleged crime on hitting media representatives were obtained. They were sent to the Special Investigation Service, where materials are being prepared in the established manner.

**On June 26,** a regular court session on the case of Ani Keshishyan, reporter of 168.am website, Liana Yeghiazaryan, a Public Radio correspondent and a number of citizens against Levon Yerabosyan, the former commander of the RA Police troops, was held in Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court.

We should remind that a criminal case was initiated against Levon Yeranosyan 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 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 the CPFE Annual reports for 2018 and 2019, see also khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The next court session on the case is scheduled for August 27.

**On June 29,** the court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of Levon Gasparyan and Julieta Kokolyan, who hindered the professional activities of *Radio Liberty* journalist Sisak Gabrielyan and *Araratnews.am* news website reporter Shoghik Galstyan.

We should remind that on April 2nd, 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 campaign headquarters, at Rustaveli 15, Kond district, Yerevan (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2017, 2018, 2019, 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.[[17]](#footnote-17) The court decided to suspend the case until Julietta Kokolyan were located and to continue the investigation into the other defendant, Levon Gasparyan within separate proceedings.

The court hearings on this case were held on June 30, and the next one is scheduled on July 16.

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

*In the second quarter of 2020, a total of 34 cases of pressure on media outlets and their employees were recorded, 22 of which came in the form of lawsuits, 4 were hacker attacks, and 8 were various other types of pressure applied by officials and related persons or state authorities. 7 of the new lawsuits filed against media and journalists were initiated by citizens, 5 by business people, 6 by incumbent and former officials, 1 by a political figure, 1 by a charity fund, and in case of the remaining 2 the dispute is taking place between journalists. This section of the report contains 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 April 1,** the owner of Channel 5 TV company Armen Tavadyan filed a lawsuit aith the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against the President of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression NGO Ashot Melikyan with a claim to refute factual data considered slander and pay a compensation of 2 million AMD. The lawsuit was caused by an idea voiced by Ashot Melikyan during a discussion on the topic of “Transparency of beneficial owners in media sector”, held on March 4, as reported by Aravot.am: “I do not think that Armen Tavadyan was arrested to be silenced. We know how he hit the protester with a bottle, how he tried to bribe.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

The suit was accepted into proceddings on April 10. Initially, a court session on the case was appointed on June 22, however, it did not take place, since the court had not ensured notification. The next session is scheduled for August 26.

**On April 1,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on the case of Vahe Parazyan against Tert.am LLC, the founder of Tert.am news website, with claims of public refutation of defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit filed by Vahe Parazyan on August 15, 2019, was an article titled "Vahe Parazyan, Who reported Against Samvel Karapetyan’s Nephew, Has a Criminal Backgound", and published on the website on July 16.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The next hearing is scheduled for August 12.

**On April 2,** Gevorg Gorgisyan, a deputy from the National Assembly, submitted a lawsuit to the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against the *Chorrord Ishkhanutyun* news outlet with claims of obligation for public apology, a compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation and confiscation of 1 million AMD. The cause of the lawsuit was an article published in 4rd.am on Feburay 29, titled “Gorgisyan could be a pickpocket.”[[20]](#footnote-20) “We officially declare that unless Michael Minasyan has established the Bright Armenia party and Georgisyan’s surname as his competitive advantage, the latter would definitely be a pickpocket”, the website wrote.

On April 6, the lawsuit was returned because of the deficiencies in the documents. It was resubmitted on April 27 and was accepted for proceedings on May 7. The preliminary date of the court session is scheduled for July 23.

**On April 2,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdictionheld a regular session on the case of NA MP Hayk Sargsyan against the *Irates* newspaper with claims of compensation of damage caused to honor and dignity through slander and insult.

We should remind that the lawsuit was submitted on October 11, 2019, caused by an article, published in the September 6 issue of the newspaper, titled “‘You are only the one who held a bottle for Nikol,’ Anna Hakobyan said” which particularly stated that “A noteworthy episode took place at a session with Anna’s participation. Hayk Sargsyan who felt angry at Anna’s expression “Someone who held a bottle of Nikol” and decided to file a lawsuit against the media, spoke against the exploitation of Amulsar mine and Anna Hakobyan reminded him of his status: ‘You are only the one who held a bottle for Nikol.’

No date for the next session was appointed as of June 30.

**On April 6,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction ruled to dismiss the civil case filed by Eduard Hambardsumyan against Aravot Daily Ltd. On the grounds trhat the plaintiff had dropped the claim.

The lawsuit was filed on January 8th, demanding a public apology, refutation of defamatory data, and a confiscation of 2 million AMD as compensation for the damage caused to his dignity. The lawsuit was caused by an article "The dream of having a child cherished by an Armenian family from France was shattered in the motherland" published by the *Aravot* daily on November 23, 2019 and *Aravot website* on November 25, 2019 which claimed that a family from France had fallen prey to the fraud of Eduard Hambardzumyan, the director of “Fertility Center.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The case has been transferred to the court archive.

**On April 6,** the Civil Court of Appeals rejected citizen Emma Kirakosyan’s appeal against the judgment of the first instance court, which turned down the citizen’s motion on the application of a means to secure the claim against the “Public TV company of Armenia” CJSC on the case claiming a compensation for the damage to her honor and dignity and demanding refutation.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit was “The Single Window” program broadcast on Public Television First Channel on December 10, 2018.[[22]](#footnote-22) The plaintiff believes that the program contained "false factual information" about her (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2019 in khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The plaintiff brought forward a motion, requesting to oblige the Public Television of Armenia CJSC to completely remover "The Single Window" program broadcast at 19:30 on December 10, 2018 from http://www.1tv.am//, https://www.facebook.com, https://www.instagram.com, http://youtube.com websites. The court, however, rejected the motion on the grounds that the means to secure the claim was disproportionate to the claim, and “the use of means to secure the claim will lead to a disproportionate intervention into the Constitutional right of freedom of expression.”

On February 27, the citizen filed an appeal against the rejection of the motion. On May 18, Emma Kirakosyan applied to the Court of Cassation.

A trial on the main claim was appointed on September 1.

**On April 6,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court session on the case of citizen Khachatur Khachatryan against Shamshyan Media LLC with claims of public apology for damage caused to honor and dignity and compensation of damage at 1 million AMD.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit filed on April 17, 2019, was 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."[[23]](#footnote-23) published on Shamshyan.com website on March 13.

In the last session the case was reassigned because of the change of the judge, and on April 9th it was accepted for new proceedings. The next court session is scheduled for July 6.

**On April 6,** citizen Artur Vardanyan filed a lawsuit with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against “168 zham” Ltd. And citizen David Pirumyan with claims of obliging to apologize, refute the defamatory data and confiscating a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by an aticle titled “Nikol Pashinyan talked to Artur Vardanyan during his campaign” and published on March 6.[[24]](#footnote-24) The website wrote: “In the course of the campaign, as noted by the active user David Pirumyan, Nikol Pashinyan greeted and talked to Artur Vardanyan, who was the leader of the group neutralized in 2015”, and they quoted Pirumyan: “The Prime-Minister warmly greeted the terrorist Artur Vardanyan who was incomprehensibly released by the court during the former’s rule.”

On April 15, the application was returned for corrections. On May 7the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeals, however, on May 22, the Court of Appeals returned both the complaint submitted by the plaintiff to appeal against the decision “to return the application” and the complaint against the decision to discuss the motion on postponing the payment of the state duty. On June 3, the amended complaint was resubmitted and was accepted for proceedings on June 9. On June 24, the appeal was rejected.

**On April 7,** Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO appealed to the Court of Cassation against the judgment of the Court of Appeals which rejected his appeal against the judgment of the first instance court which obliged Daniel Ioannisyan to refute the information about Samvel Harutyunyan, Chairman of the State Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, on his Facebook page and on Tert.am news site, and to pay 500000 AMD to the plaintiff Samvel Harutyunyan as compensation for the damage caused to the latter’s honor and dignity by slander.

**We should remind that** Samvel Harutyunyan filed a lawsuit on June 19, 2018, claiming compensation for the damage to his honor and dignity and confiscation of 2 million AMD. The reason for the lawsuit was the status posted by Daniel Ioannisyan onto his Facebook page on June 12, 2018[[25]](#footnote-25) and a related interview, published on Tert.am website on June 13 ("The Minister of Education and Science should also say to what extent his friendship with Samvel Harutyunyan's son influenced the decision of appointing Harutyunyan in this position: Ioannisyan”).[[26]](#footnote-26) The third party to the case is Panarmenian Media Group CJSC as the rightholder of Tert.am website.

On May 6, the Court of Appeals turned down Daniel Ioannisyan’s motion on deferring the payment of the state fee and returned the appeal against the judgment of the Court of Appeals on the same grounds. This appeal was resubmitted on June 8, however it was not accepted for proceedings as of June 30.

**On April 8,** Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court held the first session on the case of the former NSS Intelligence Colonel Eduard Harutyunyan 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.

We should remind that the suit was filed on September 18, 2019, and 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." [[27]](#footnote-27)

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for August 24.

**On April 8,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court session on the case of Lyova Abrahamyan, head of Sarukhan Community in Gegharkunik Marz against Narine Hasratyan, a reporter at the *Haykakan Zham* news site, claiming refutation of the information damaging his honor, dignity and business reputation.

The suit was filed o**n February 13**, 2019, triggered by an article titled "Who Sponsors Sarukhan Mayor and Has Been Preventing Preliminary Investigation since August," published on the website on January 10 and containing villagers’ complaints about their mayor. [[28]](#footnote-28)

A case hearing was held on June 23, and the next hearing is scheduled for September 30.

**On April 8,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on the lawsuit of citizen Ashot Parazyan against Tert.am LLC, the founder of Tert.am news website, with claims of public refutation of defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit, filed on August 16, 2019, was an article titled "Vahe Parazyan, who reported against Samvel Karapetyan’s nephew, has a criminal past", and published on the website on July 16.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The next hearing is scheduled for August 24.

**On April 9,** the Civil Court of Appeals rejected the appeal of Artur Vanetsyan, the former head of the National Security Service against the judgment passed by the court of first instance, which rejected the motion on the application of a measure to secure the claim on freezing the assets of Dareskizb Ltd., the founder of the *Armenian Times* daily and Armtimes.com website, at the value of the claim at 2 million AMD and removing the disputed article from the website.

We should remind that the suit against the media outlet was filed on February 10, claiming a public refutation of slanderous information, the removal of the article from the “Armtimes.com” website, the publication of the refutation statement and a compensation of the non-pecuniary damage caused. The lawsuit was filed in reaction to a publication in Armtimes.com website and in the *Armenian Times* daily on January 12, with the title of “Do I or Don’t I Have Honor: Mishik, Arthur, Arik”, according to which the former head of the National Security Service Arthur Vanetsyan and his supporters organized a media campaign against Nikol Pashinyan's family.\

On June 19, the motion was sent to the Court archive, and a hearing on the main part of the claim was scheduled for July 13.

**On April 9,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court session on the case of David Adyan, Head of Social Sector Control of the RA State Control Service against the Skizb Media Kentron LLC as founder and publisher of the *Zhamanak* daily.

The suit was submitted on May 29, 2019, and 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.[[30]](#footnote-30) 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.

A court session was held on June 4, too, and the next one was scheduled for July 8.

**On April 9,** the Civil Court of Appeals accepted for proceedings an appeal by lawyer Aram Orbelyan against the judgment by the court of first instance, which returned the lawsuit filed by the lawyer against the Republic of Armenia, in the person of the National Security Service and the Public Television of Armenia CJSC, claiming for a refutation of the defamatory information and a compensation of the damage caused by defamation.

The reason for the lawsuit was the report within the main news program on the Public Television on January 30, which, according to its author Gevorg Tosunyan, was based on official explanations. The report contained information provided by the NSS, stating that lawyer Aram Orbelyan regularly visited the Constitutional Court without presenting an ID, and his entries were not recorded.[[31]](#footnote-31)

A new lawsuit was filed on March 18 and was accepted for proceedings on March 30. The preliminary court hearing was scheduled for July 3.

On April 23, the Court of Appeals upheld Aram Orbelyan's appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance to return the lawsuit filed by him on March 3, stating that the law did not require to mention the address of the plaintiff's representative in the lawsuit, which had led to the return of the lawsuit.

**On April 9**, Lori Marz General Jurisdication Court held a regular court session on the case of teacher Susanna Sargsyan against Hraparak.am website correspondent Shushanna Grigoryan, claiming public apology and refutation of factual data that were deemed defamatory.

We should 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"[[32]](#footnote-32) (October 4, 2013) and "A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time"[[33]](#footnote-33) (December 5, 2013) in Hraparak.am (details can be found in CPFE 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 annual reports at www.khosq.am *Reports* section).

Court hearings on this case were also held on April 28, and according to the judgment made on May 12, the court examination of the case was resumed. A court hearing on the case was held on June 16, and the next one was scheduled for July 9.

**On April 10**, "Exclusive Store" LLC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the journalist, actress Arus Tigranyan, with claims of refutation of the false information that defamed business reputation, without monetary compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was Arus Tigranyan's post on her "Instagram" page, where she called to the public not to buy phones or accessories in the shops belonging to the LLC because of the poor quality of service. Before filing a lawsuit, Arus Tigranyan was offered to publish refutation, which she refused.

On April 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A hearing on the case was held on June 11, the next one is scheduled for September 29.

**On April 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld the first court hearing on the case of citizen Babken Ghazaryan against Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens with claims of refutation of information considered slander and compensation thereof.

The suit was caused by Daniel Ioannisyan's statement at Media Center on May 22, 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".[[34]](#footnote-34)

On May 12, the court made a decision on the division of the burden of proof. The court session on the case took place on June 16, the next one was scheduled for August 26.

**On April 13**, citizen Tigran Tsaturyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Kotayk Marz against citizen Sevada Khachatryan and "Aravot Daily" LLC with claims of public refutation of factual data considered defamatory and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was an article titled "A fight in Kotayk Marz because of a post on the coronavirus," published on "Aravot.am" website on March 19.[[35]](#footnote-35) Accordingly it was stated that, the director of "Ginats" restaurant Sevada Khachatryan gave an interview to the media outlet, where, according to the plaintiff, he presented obviously false and slanderous information.

On April 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The first court session is scheduled for July 27.

**On April 13**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular session on the case of the Chairman of the RA NA Standing Committee on Defense and Security Andranik Kocharyan 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 lawsuit was filed on March 7, 2019, caused by an article titled "Who really is Andranik Kocharyan?" [[36]](#footnote-36) 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.

A court hearing was held on May 25, and on June 16 the court ruled to reject Andranik Kocharyan's lawsuit, citing the fact that the article could not be considered defamatory because it was based on the information provided by a citizen.

**On April 13,** Investigative Journalists NGO filed an appeal against the judgment of the first instance court on tne case of the former Chairman of the State Revenue Committee Vardan Harutyunyan against Investigative Journalists NGO which obliged Hetq.am website founded by the NGO to publish a refutation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 5, 2019, with claims of compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity and public refutation of the factual information considered defamatory. 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.[[37]](#footnote-37)

On May 25, the appeal was accepted for proceedings, and the court hearing is scheduled for July 9.

**On April 13**, the editor of "Pastinfo.am" website Sona Truzyan alerted that the Police had initiated an administrative proceeding against "Pastinfo" for copying information from another media outlet, stating that a patient at Martuni Medical Center had a coronavirus infection.[[38]](#footnote-38) No demand was made by the Commandant’s office to remove it, nr any refutation or clarification on the matter was sent. Later, according to the editor, "Pastinfo" talked to Martuni MC and the head of the community on this matter and prepared an original report, making reference to the above-stated sourced, and published the report, in the manner established by the governmental decree "On declaring a state of emergency." [[39]](#footnote-39)

According to the clarification provided by the RA Police to the CPFE, however, no notice was submitted to any news website demanding the immediate removal of the publication from April 1 to April 13. At the same time, the police informed that no administrative penalty was imposed on journalists or news websites after the declaration of the state of emergency.

**On April 14**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of businessman Vahe Parazyan against Virtual Media LLC, founder of Slaq.am website, and the founder of the company 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.[[40]](#footnote-40) The next court hearing is scheduled for August 20.

The businessman filed **another lawsuit** against Armenia TV CJSC, journalist Shake Ghazaryan and lawyer Armen Feroyan. This lawsuit, too, was caused by the publications on the incidents between businessmen Vahe Parazyan and Samvel Karapetyan. A court session on this case took place on June 26, the next one is scheduled for September 25.

**On April 14**, the Court of General Jurisdiction in Shirak Marz held a regular hearing on the case of citizens of Susanna Minasyan and Arkadi Boyajyan against ATV LLC, demanding confiscation of 2 million AMD in compensation for violating the right to privacy of personal and family life.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 30, 2018, caused by a regular issue of the "Semi-open Window" program on the aforementioned TV channel, uploaded onto the Internet on October 1, 2018, about a housing dispute between neighbors.[[41]](#footnote-41)

On September 10, 2019, the court suspended the proceedings until a final ruling was reached on another case between the parties. The proceedings were resumed on February 25, 2020. The case was reappointed on April 20, the case was handed over to another judge, being accepted for proceedings on April 23. As of June 30, no court hearing date was set.

**On April 15**, the Civil Court of Appeals made a judgment to uphold the appeal of Alvina Gyulumyan, a member of the Constitutional Court against the first instance court judgment which rejected her lawsuit against the founder of the *Armenian Times* daily "Dareskizb" LLC, claiming refutation of slander and compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 22, 2018, 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. (For details see CPFE’s 2018 and 2019 annual reports in khosq.am's Reports section).

Thus, the Court of Appeal overturned the decision of the first instance court and returned the case to the same court for a new investigation in the volume provided by this decision. The day of the trial is set for September 16.

**On April 16,** citizen Ara Sukiasyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Shamshyan.com news website for the third time, claiming an apology for the factual data, considered defamatory and insulting. The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled "Police officers, investigators and military police officers tracked a 27-year-old employee of the RA Ministry of Defense down on suspicion of brutal murder of a 16-year-old girl in Yerevan”, published on the website on January 6, 2012, where based on his own information, the author published data about the plaintiff’s son, the person arrested on suspicion of murder.[[42]](#footnote-42)

On April 28, the court returned the third lawsuit for the same reason as the previous two, filed on February 19 and March 27: "Taking into account the fact that the plaintiff's motion on the exemption from the payment of the state fee is subject to rejection, as no privilege in this case is provided by the law, the court found that the documents attached to the lawsuit are also subject to return to the plaintiff." On May 23, the plaintiff applied to the Civil Court of Appeal, on June 1, the appeal was accepted for proceedings. On June 15, the Court of Appeal decided to uphold the appeal, overturning the decision of the first instance, establishing that the plaintiff's right to a fair trial guaranteed by the RA Constitution and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was unnecessarily restricted.

**On April 17**, the Civil Court of Appeal decided to reject the appeal, submitted by "MIG" TV journalist Karine Vanesyan against the decision made by the court of first instance, which obliged the journalist to apologize to the governor of Lori Andrei Ghukasyan on her Facebook page.

We should remind that on May 15, 2019, the Governor of Lori Marz Andrei Ghukasyan filed a lawsuit against MIG TV journalist Karine Vanesyan for insulting him and demanded to oblige her to apologize. The suit was prompted by a Facebook note made by the journalist: "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…"

The Court of Appeal did not give reasons for its decision. On May 23, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation.

**On April 17,** the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of Lydian Armenia CJSC against Skizb Media LLC, founder of 1.am news website with claims of compensation for the damage caused to the business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 11, 2019, caused by an article entitled "What is the way out? Armen Sargsyan can change the situation" published on "1in.am" news site where the author wrote specifically 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.

The court hearing of the case is scheduled for July 10.

**On April 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular session on one of the three lawsuits filed by NA deputy Hayk Sargsyan against Hraparak Daily LLC, seeking compensation of damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through defamation and insult.

We should remind that on June 21, 2019, the MP filed **3** lawsuits against the founder of the daily, caused by 22 publications against him. According to the website of the *Hraparak* daily, "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,[[43]](#footnote-43) besides, he took some girls to Baghramyan 26.[[44]](#footnote-44) (For details see CPFE 2019 annaul report in khosq.am *Reports* section).

A court hearing on the case was held on June 25.

There were no development during this quarter in relation to the second lawsuit, the next court session was scheduled for July 9, and as for the third case, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation on May 6, where, as of June 30, no development in relation to the case could be registered. We should remind that on February 28, the court of first instance decided to leave the lawsuit without examination, on the grounds that the plaintiff and the defendant had not appeared at 2 consecutive hearings. The plaintiff filed an appeal against this decision with the Civil Court of Appeal on March 12, but on March 24 the latter rejected the appeal.

**On April 17,** the RA Court of Cassation made a decision not to accept the appeal against the January 23 decision of the Court of Appeal in the criminal case initiated and examined by the Special Investigation Service in connection with the publication of data containing pretrial secret data in *the Zhoghovurd* daily.

We should remind that the daily went to Court of Appeal questioning the judgment of the first instance court, which allowed the Special Investigation Service to decipher the telephone calls made by the editor-in-chief Knar Manukyan to find out who called the journalist or, who the journalist called herself, and who shared March 1 case testimony with the journalist. Earlier, on March 16, 2019, the Special Investigation Service initiated a criminal case against the *Zhoghovurd* daily, accusing it of publishing pretrial secret data.[[45]](#footnote-45) It was triggered by a publication in the March 16 issue of the newspaper, under the heading “Serzh Sargsyan Would Issue Command 0038. Serzh Sargsyan’s Testimony to ‘March 1’ Case”, which contained excerpts from the records of the interrogation of the RA third President Serzh Sargsyan as a witness. On Januray 23, the RA Court of Appeal ruled that the SIS actions within the case of deciphering the phone calls of Knar Manukyan, the *Zhoghovurd* daily’s editor-in-chief, were illegal. On February 26, however, the RA Prosecutor General Arthur Davtyan appealed to the Court of Cassation and petitioned to overturn the January 23 decision of the Court of Appeal. .

**On April 19**, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced live on Facebook: "Now they are not afraid of being beaten, beaten under the walls. Even 90 percent of the media and 70 percent of the journalists received money from the government, now everyone is furious that they received it before, now they do not receive it or if they still do, they are scared of doing so… the whole media is furious that they used to get money, and now they do not receive it any more."

A number of editors demanded that the Prime Minister publish names, otherwise they deem anonymous accusations to be an attempt at pressure.

**On April 20**, Arevik Anapiosyan, former Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Media Plus LLC, seeking public refutation of defamatory information and claiming 2 million AMD in compensation from the plaintiff. The lawsuit was prompted by articled published on the *Yerevan.Today* website owned by the LLC on March 26 ("Arevik Anapiosyan Speaks about Her Involvement in the Case under Investigation by the NSS and Her Resignation")[[46]](#footnote-46) and on April 8 ("NSS confirms it is investigating a criminal case against MoESCS officials”)[[47]](#footnote-47) that the NSS is preparing materials on a criminal case related to Arevik Anapiosyan, and that her resignation had to do with this case. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on April 30, a preliminary court hearing is scheduled for September 29.

**On April 20,** theCourt of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of Karen Karapetyan, the former head of the Operational Intelligence Department at the State Revenue Committee, 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, filed on August 2, 2019, is the article “Someone related to SRC Deputy Head Appointed as Head of the Operational Intelligence Department”, published in the *Zhamanak* on July 5, namely the following statement contained in it: "... 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 a corruption scandal."[[48]](#footnote-48)

A court hearing on the case was held on April 20, too. The next one is scheduled on July 6.

**On April 21,** The Court ofGeneral Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the suit of citizen Narine Abrahamyan against journalist Kristine Aghalaryan seeking a public refutation of defamatory factual information and an obligation for paying compensation.

We would like to remind that the reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "Meghri Medical Center Against the State Revenue Committee" on Lurer.com website, published on May 17, 2011, which described Narine Abrahamyan at the center of numerous scandals during her career.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The next hearing is scheduled for September 14.

**On April 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of the penitentiary service of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia against the founder of *Zhamanak* daily claiming for a public refutation of the information considered slander.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 11, 2019, caused by 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.” [[50]](#footnote-50)

The next session is scheduled for September 22.

**On April 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary hearing on the case of Yerevan Zoo Director Ruben Khachatryan against journalist Narine Kirakosyan, claiming refutation of information considered slander and monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damage.

We should remind that the lawsuit was first filed on September 24, 2019, then it was returned upon the demand of the plaintiff and was resubmitted on Novermber 13. 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. (For details see CPFE 2019 annaul report in khosq.am *Reports* section).

The next court hearing was scheduled for July 7.

**On April 23,** the Civil Court of Appeal returned the appeal filed by *the Hraparak daily* Ltd. against the judgment of the first instanc court of Fabruary 28, which obliged the newspaper to refute the defamatory information that the plaintiff, YSU Geography and Geology Department Dean Marat Grigoryan had embezzeled salaries and demanded public apology.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by an article titled "A Scandal at YSU? Has a New “Sashik" Come Forth?” which referred to a certain letter and stated that the dean of YSU Faculty of Geography and Geology Marat Grigoryan in charge of embezzling 50 percent of faculty members and researchers’ salaries.[[51]](#footnote-51) (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2018 and 2019 in khosq.am's Report section). According to the decision of the first instance court, 100,000 AMD was to be confiscated in favor of Marat Grigoryan as compensation for slander and 100,000 AMD for insult. On March 27, the defendant appealed the judgment.

The appeal was rejected on the ground that the appellant had not motioned for a waiver of the unpaid amount of the state duty.

On June 1, the founder of the daily resubmitted the complaint, and on June 12 it was accepted for proceedings.

**On April 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction in Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes divided/reappointed the case of Lydian Armenia against journalist Tehmine Yenokyan. It was moved from the Masis seat of the court to Vaik.

We should remind thatthe lawsuit was filed on September 5, 2018, triggered by the Facebook Live broadcast by Tehmine Yenokyan from the drinking gallery in the town of Jermuk on August 12, 2018. The plaintiff claims that the journalist made derogatory remarks discrediting the company's business reputation, demanding 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 (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2018 – 2019 in khosq.am’s *Reports* section).

On May 15, the reappointed case was accepted for proceedings, and the next court hearing was not scheduled as of June 30.

**On April 23** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted an appeal by Vahe Makaryan, a correspondent at *the* *Hraparak*, against the judgment of the first instance court made on February 20 which rejected the latter’s suit against MP Rubik Hakobyan, claiming protection of honour and dignity.

We should 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 on December 30, 2016 (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 reports and the first quarterly report of 2020 in khosq.am's *Reports* section).

On March 23, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal. On June 19, the Court of Appeal rejected Vahe Makaryan's complaint. Both the Court of First Instance and the Court of Appeal substantiated their decisions as follows: " The materials on the case revealed that the phrase "hooligan" was uttered after the plaintiff had cursed the NA deputy, and the phrase "plotter" was made in connection with the plaintiff's public statement that the defendant had allegedly cursed him obscenely in the NA building and punched him. However, the case materials substantiated that Vahe Makaryan presented a slap as punches, in fact slandering the defendant. " As for the phrase "ignorant" addressed to the plaintiff, the court of first instance found, and the Court of Appeal confirmed that the respondent assessed the plaintiff's actions as "ignorant" as a result of the dispute, which was the defendant's personal evaluation of the plaintiff's knowledge. Thus, the Court of Appeal reaffirmed that there was no intent in the defendant's actions to insult the plaintiff, and the defendant did not mean to pursue the aim of degrading a person’s honour, dignity or compromising his business reputation.

As of June 30, there were no other developments in relation to the case.

**On April 27,** citizen Hovsep Asoyan filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal against the first instance court judgment on the case of journalist Tehmine Yenokyan against citizen Hovsep Asoyan, which obliged the defendant to make a public apology on Facebook for insulting Tehmine Yenoyan and pay a compensaton of 200 000 AMD.

We should remind that the RA Investigative Committee dismissed the criminal case initiated on the persecution of Lragir.am correspondent Tehmine Yenokyan, for gathering and disseminating information on her private life on the grounds of absence of corpus delicti, as a result of which the reporter went to court on April 29, 2019, with claims of obliging the defendant to refute the information considered insulting and pay a compensation of 1 million AMD (For details see CPFE annual reports for 2018 and 2019 in *Reports* section on khosq.am website.)

The appeal was accepted for proceedings on May 7. There were no developments on the case as of June 30.

**On April 27,** a reappointment of the case of Nver Mnatsakanyan, a journalist and anchor at 1in.am website, vs. Hayeli Club and Garnik Isagulyan, with transfer from Masis seat of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots dsor marzes to Artasaht seat.

The reason for the lawsuit was a 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.[[52]](#footnote-52) The plaintiff demands a public apology and the publication of the court decision in the media.

The next court hearing is scheduled for August 6.

**On April 27,** journalist Hasmik Arakelyan filed a second lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Public Television of Armenia CJSC to repeal orders No. 90-A, 106-A, 147-A on imposing penalty. The first lawsuit, filed on March 10, was returned because the data contained in the documents proved incomplete.

The new lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on April 29, a court session was scheduled on July 2.

**On April 29,** journalist Hasmik Arakelyan applied to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan with another lawsuit, seeking the repeal Order 161-A on the termination of the Labor Contract and pay-off repealed, claiming reinstatement in the job and confiscation of a compensation for the forced idle time.

This is the second lawsuit of the same content, the first one was submitted on March 17 and was returned for amendments. On May 5, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A preliminary court hearing is scheduled for July 7.

**On April 28,** The Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Lara Aharonyan, head of the Women's Resource Center NGO against Hayeli Club and Live News Media Ltd., seeking compensation of the damage to her honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD.

The lawsuit, filed on May 30, 2019, was caused by a video with the heading “Member of the Your Step 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. At the February 24 sitting, the court decided to uphold Lara Aharonyan's motion to allow an addition to the subject of the lawsuit. Among other additions, the plaintiff demands to publish the text of refutation as provided by her. In addition, the "Hayeli Club" NGO and "Live News Media" Ltd. should prove, in relation to the part published on their websites, that the data are true, that they are conditioned by the public domain interest, etc.

The next court session is scheduled for July 14.

**On April 28,** journalist and founder of Medialab.am website Marianna Grigoryan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against "Analytic" Ltd. claiming compensation for the damage caused to her honor, dignity and business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit was am article titled "What does Erik Grigoryan have to do with Soros's Open Society Foundation" published on "Analitik.am" website on December 6, 2019. [[53]](#footnote-53) Referring to its own sources, the website writes that the Soros Foundation, through Erik Grigoryan's sister Marianna Grigoryan, influences the policy projects, implemented by the Ministry of Environment, adapting them to the Foundation’s interests.

On May 13, the lawsuit was returned for amendments. It was re-submitted on June 8 and accepted for proceedings on June 18. The court rejected the motion to use a measure to secure the claim by seizing the defendant's property.

**On April 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen Yura Adyan against Skizb Media Kentron Ltd. with claims of refutation of slander and 2 million AMD in compensation.

We should remindthe cause of the lawsuit, filed on June 10, 2019, 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, that during the former authorities, he was considered an “old fox” in the field of procurements and participated in tenders beyond his own field of specialization and sold the contracts to other companies after the award.

The next hearing on the case is scheduled for September 30.

**On April 29**, *the Yerevan.Today* website wrote that the Supreme Judicial Council had applied to the Prosecutor's Office on the matter of disclosing information related to the private life of Judge Anna Danibekyan, in a video report within the the program hosted by the editor-in-chief of the website Sevak Hakobyan and broadcast jointly by the *Yerevan.Today* website and Channel 5, under the title of “Briefly with Sevak”.[[54]](#footnote-54) According to the website, "they were offended by some expressions, and some expressions were considered disclosure of medical secret."

The RA Prosecutor General's Office informed the CPFE that the statement made by the RA Supreme Judicial Council on the disclosure of a legally protected medical secret about Judge Anna Danibekyan by the "Hayeli Club” and Channel 5, was sent from the RA General Prosecutor's Office to the General Department of Criminal Investigation of the Police to carry out operative measures, check the grounds for initiating a criminal case, and in case such grounds are detected, to prepare materials in the prescribed manner.

Based on these materials, on May 7, a criminal case was initiated in the General Department of Criminal Investigation of the RA Police according to Article 144 and Article 145, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code and was sent to the relevant department Yerevan Kentron and Nork-Marash administrative districts under the RA Investigative Commitee. The case was accepted for proceedings, a inquiry into the matter is underway.

**On April 29,** the Court of Cassation made a decision to return the appeal, filed by the defendant, against the ruling of the Civil Court of Appeal on the case of former adviser to the RA Prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan against Boris Tamoyan, editor of Politik.am website, as well as reject the motion on the deferral of the payment of the state duty. The Court of Cassation reasoned that the document to prove that the state duty had been paid was not attached to the appeal, and that the motion stating that Boris Tamoyan had no income and worked for a non-profit NGO, was not substantiated, since no evidence to prove the property status of the appellant was attached.

We should remind that on January 24, 2019, theformer adviser to the RA Prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan filed a lawsuit with 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 was reportedly granted $ 10,000 by criminal authority Tooy not to have scarcity of funds during the campaign.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

On February 6, 2020, the Court of Appeal decided to reject the appeal submitted by the editor of politik.am website Boris Tamoyan where he challenged the judgment of the first instance court, passed on October 14, 2019, on publishing a refutation on the Politik.am website and his Facebook page and obliging to pay the former advisor to the RA prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan a monetary compensation. On March 4 Boris Tamoyan went to the Court of Cassation.

On June 3, Boris Tamoyan submitted another appeal to the Court of Cassation. There were no developments on the case as of June 30.

**On April 29**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first hearing on the case of citizen Hayk Stepanyan against the "Hayeli" Club NGO and its founder, journalist Angela Tovmasyan, claiming to oblige her to publicly refute the defamatory information and demanding confiscation of a compensation sum.

The lawsuit was filed on January 8, and was triggered, according to the plaintiff, by an insult used by Angela Tovmasyan in his address, in particular, the journalist called Hayk Stepanyan a "scum" on Facebook, and on Channel 5 she called him a “hooligan.” We should remind that Hayk Stepanyan was among those who threw eggs on the "Hayeli" Club on October 5, 2019.

On May 19, the court made a decision on the reversal of the burden of evidence. A court hearing on the case took place on June 11, and the next one is scheduled July 9.

**On June 3**, the first hearing took place into the second lawsuit filed by citizen Hayk Stepanyan against Hayeli Club and its founder journalist Angela Tovmasyan, claiming for obligation to publicly refute information considered defamatory and demanding confiscation of a compensation.

We should remind that the second lawsuit was filed on February 24, and the reason for the lawsuit was an insult, namely, at the press conference held in "Hayeli" club on January 22, Angela Tovmasyan reaffirmed the previous insult and added: "You are not only hooligans, but also awful and perverted people."[[56]](#footnote-56) The next hearing on the case is scheduled for July 7.

**On May 4**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication held a regular hearing of the case of the Constitutional Court member Alvina Gyulumyan against Tigran Hayrapetyan and Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., seeking refutation of slander and receipt of one million AMD in compensation from Tigran Hayrapetyan. The reason for the lawsuit filed in 2018 was the interview by 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on June 14, and the next one is scheduled for July 13.

**On May 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a regular hearing on the case of former Vayots Dzor governor Trdat Sargsyan against Hraparak Daily Ltd. claiming refutation of the defamatory data and confiscation of a compensation of 2 million AMD.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 30, 2019, caused by a publication in the newspaper, according to which Governor Trdat Sargsyan was present at the brutal beating of Lieutenant Colonel Ara Mkhitaryan.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The next court hearing was not scheduled as of June 30.

**On May 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on "May there be Light-BK" Ltd. against the Public Television of Armenia and the Mayor of Charentsavan community Hakob Shahgaldyan, demanding refutation of the information considered slanderous.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 10, and the reason for the lawsuit was the broadcast of a report on issues related to the use of community owned territories during the 9 o’clock main news program on the First Channel – "News in 60 Minutes" on November 30, 2019.[[58]](#footnote-58) The plaintiff considered the following statement made by Hakob Shahgaldyan during the news report as defamation. "The park area has been rented for 25 years, and there are many commitments that have not been fulfilled by the “May there be light – BK” Ltd. company, including water supply to ensure drinking water and irrigation in the park, electricity, electricity supply.”

"May There Be Light-BK" Ltd. demanded from Public TV to publicly refute the defamatory data on air, and claimed from the mayor of Charentsavan community Hakob Shahgaldyan the payment of 2 million AMD monetary compensation.

The next court hearing was scheduled for September 22.

**On May 6,** The Investigative Committee dismissed the criminal case initiated on the case of obstructing the activity of the "Mirror" Press Club, on the grounds of the absence of corpus delicti in the act of the 4 accused persons.

We should remind that on October 5, 2019, 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, triggered by an article, titled “Aliyev's late but powerful response to Pashinyan” published on Hayeli.am.

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 (obstructing the professional activity of a journalist), which was sent to the Investigative Committee. Four people – David Hovhannisyan, Sargis Manukyan, Artak Margaryan and Hayk Stepanyan – were accused on October 14, under Article 164 Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code and a signature on non-departure was chosen as a precautionary measure.

**On May 8,** the "Analitik.am" website reported that a man called Sergey Barseghyan, who introduced himself as the brother of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's assistant Suzanna Barseghyan, called the editorial office 4-5 times on the same day, inquiring and demanding information on who had published the article about Suzanna Barseghyan on Analitik.am website. Then, the man on the phone expressed a desire to speak with the editor-in-chief․ The editorial staff promised to get back to him. Shortly afterwards, according to the website, the man called the editorial office several times again, cursing and threatening. The website published the recording of what was said.[[59]](#footnote-59)

**On May 8,** *the Hraparak daily* Ltd. submitted an appeal to the Civil Court of Appeal against the judgment of the first instance court, which partially upheld the lawsuit filed by Alina Nikoghosyan, the spokesperson of the RA Minister of Health against the founder of the media outlet, claiming public apology and confiscation of compensation at the value of 1 million AMD.

We should remind that lawsuit was filed on June 3, 2019, caused by an article published on Hraparak.am on May 9 under the heading "Ministry of Health Conceals What Happened and Practices Protectionism towards Lfik".[[60]](#footnote-60) According to the judgment, published on March 17, the lawsuit was partially upheld. The defendant was obliged to apologize to the plaintiff Alina Nikoghosyan publishing the refutation text provided by the plaintiff on "Hraparak.am" website. Besides, the court decided to confiscate 200,000 AMD from Hraparak daily Ltd. in favor of Alina Nikoghosyan as compensation for insult and 200,000 AMD as a reasonable fee for the lawyer.

On May 27, the appeal was returned since the appellant had not fully paid the state duty. The decision was not appealed.

**On May 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of citizen Lilit Martirosyan against Tesaket Ltd., with a claim for public apology for offensive expressions and 1 million AMD in compensation.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit, filed on May 16, 2019, was an article published on Irates website on April 9 and titled "A Sodomite openly Addresses the Public from the NA Platform".[[61]](#footnote-61)

According to the judgment published on June 2, Lilit Martirosyan's lawsuit was rejected, 200,000 drams were confiscated in favor of the defendant as reasonable remuneration for the lawyer. As grounds for the judgment, the court reasoned that the words of criticism used thoughout the article under discussion and in the disputed expressions, should be considered the defendant’s opinion, that is, evaluative judgment, which is in line with the journalistic mission to spread ideas. (The court referred to the judgment of the European Court in the case of Haes and Gijsels v. Belgium).

No appeal was filed against the judgment.

**On May 11**, citizen Nelli Mikaelyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the director of *the Haykakan Zham* news website Anna Gevorgyan, the users of 7or.am website Artak Stepanyan, Gor Sargsyan, and the editor-in-chief of Hzham.am website Gayane Manukyan, claiming public apology for slander, refutation and 2 million AMD in compensation from each party involved. The lawsuit was triggered by an article entitled "Who is this mysterious beauty and what does she have to do with pedophilia?"[[62]](#footnote-62) published on Hzham.am website on May 14, 2019. On the same day, the plaintiff also filed a motion for state duty exemption. On May 19, the lawsuit was returned to amend the documents, eliminating the shortcomings, and the motion was rejected. We should remind that this is the plaintiff's 4th lawsuit in relation to various articles published on the website. The previous ones were rejected for the same reason.

**On June 22,** citizen Nelly Mikayelyan filed 2 more s in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan. The first one again contained the same claims as above, and the other one demanded an apology for the published photos, slander and false information and pay 2 million AMD in compensation. The plaintiff has also submitted a motion for state duty exemption.

Therewere no developments on the first lawsuit as of June 30. And the second lawsuit was returned on June 20 because of the deficiencies in the submitted documents, and the motion for the state duty exemption was rejected.

**On May 12**, Van Charter Ltd. filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Armenia TV CJSC with claims to refute the defamation and pay compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an opinion expressed about the Ltd. in relation to the wrong declarations and insufficient quality of alcohol-based sanitizers production in the *Acute Angle* program on the TV channel on April 12.[[63]](#footnote-63)

On May 20, the lawsuit was returned because of the incomplete payment of the state duty and other inaccuracies in the submitted documents. The lawsuit was re-submitted on May 22, and it was accepted for proceedings on May 25. As of June 30, the day of the court session was not scheduled yet.

**On May 21,** Shirak Marz Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court hearing on the case of Artak Gevorgyan, the head of Ani community in Shirak marz, against Andranik Gevorgyan, a resident of Maralik town of Ani community, seeking refutation and compensation.Armlur.am news site was recognized as a third party to the case.

The lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2019, triggered by a phrase "ate it up, robbed it all" in the video and the accompanying text as follows: “The former head robbed the village college and fled. What do the people of Maralik tell us?" [[64]](#footnote-64) posted on the site on August 10. The plaintiff claims 2 million AMD as compensation from the defendant.

A court hearing of the case took place also on June 25, and the next one is scheduled for August 13.

**On May 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, in the presidency of another judge, accepted the case into proceedings based on the lawsuit of Arshak Hakobyan, former Chief of Police Vladimir Gasparyan's Chief bodyguard against Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens, demanding refutation of defamatory information and payment of compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on June 6, 2019, and was prompted by a statement made by Daniel Ioannisyan at Media center on May where he accused NSS director Arthur Vanetsyan of having close relations with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan, nicknamed "Vestrechi Apper" and Babken Ghazaryan, known as "Tokhmakhi Babo" calling them "criminal authorities."[[65]](#footnote-65)

The trial is scheduled for July 20.

**On May 13,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori marz held the first court hearing on the case of lawyer Hakob Charoyan 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, filed on October 8, 2019, 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.[[66]](#footnote-66)The plaintiff demanded to oblige Artur Mnatsakanyan to give an interview to 1in.am, refuting the information damaging his honor and dignity and business reputation, as well as apologize to him, compensating for the damage at the value of 2 million AMD.

By the judgment passed on May 15, Hakob Charoyan's lawsuit was rejected, reasoning that the defendant had only expressed his negative opinion of the plaintiff, as a matter of fact in the sense that he did not inspire trust, which did not damage the plaintiff's honor, dignity, or business reputation. Based on this conclusion, the court also found that the claim for pecuniary compensation should be rejected, too.

**On May 14**, the SOS Children's Villages Armenian Charitable Foundation filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Iravunk Media Ltd., claiming public refutation of defamatory information and for non-pecuniary compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation.

The reason for the lawsuit is the article titled "What is happening in the Ijevan branch of SOS Children's Villages?" published on Iravunk.com website on January 8.[[67]](#footnote-67) The website, citing its own sources, stated that the foundation's employees were engaged in robbery․" According to our information, the organization provides money to the employees to provide children with food, clothes, stationery, even to give them some pocket money for a school brunch, but the employees do not miss the opportunity to cheat, rob and get rich."

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on May 27. As of June 30, the date of the court hearing was not appointed.

**On May 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular session on the case of citizen Arusyak Mkrtchyan against the *Zhoghovurd* daily with claims of refuting defamatory information and compensating the damage caused.

The lawsuit was filed on August 12, 2019, caused by an article published on Armlur.am website on July 12, titled "A DJ in Healthcare Sector: Circa $ 20,000 to the Minister's Acquaintance.”[[68]](#footnote-68) The author notes that the RA Ministry of Health has allocated over 9.5 million AMD 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 Vaccina, 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 from Arusyak Mkrtchyan.

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for September 14.

**On May 18,** Ankakh.com was hacked, which resulted in changes in the content of some materials.[[69]](#footnote-69) This was reported by the website, particularly mentioning; "Hackers have made changes in some political materials, targeting especially the content of materials about Vazgen Manukyan. This fact allows us to assume that the hacker attack on the site has a political context, and is led by specific circles."

**On May 18,** the online periodical "Hetq.am" wrote that the Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan considered their inquiry as to why one of the government's decisions was retroactively applied to past procurements, absurd.[[70]](#footnote-70) "Arsen Torosyan has, in fact, insulted a few of our journalists collectively. If that insult was addressed at individuals, a lawsuit could be filed against the minister ․․․ ," the website particularly noted.

**On May 19**, citizen Anna Aslanyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the editor of Hzham.am website Anna Gevorgyan, claiming refutation of defamatory information, public apology and payment of compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article published on the website on April 13, titled "Was it OK that we took Nikol's brother's son to the resort? Fake Manufacturers."[[71]](#footnote-71) According to the plaintiff, the article contains defamatory information.

The court returned the lawsuit for corrections on June 5. On June 22, the lawsuit was filed again. On June 29, the case was reappointed because of the change of the judge.

**On May 19**, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Anna Gevorgyan, the director of the *Haykakan Zham* news website, with claims of public defamation of factual data deemed defamatory and compensation of damage. The lawsuit was triggered by an article, titled "Did he pay for silence?,” published on Hzham.am on April 20 which stated that Alen Simonyan had made a row in the restaurant, cursed, broke the table and the dishes, then gave money to the restaurant owner to keep silent.[[72]](#footnote-72)

On May 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court rejected the motion to apply a measure to secure the claim by seizing the property and funds. On June 12, the plaintiff filed an appeal against this rejection, which was not accepted for proceedings as of June 30.

**On May 25,** the head of Akhuryan community Artsrun Igityan filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction in Shirak Marz against Yurik Grigoryan, Arzuman Gapoyan, and Aravot Daily Ltd. as the third party, claiming for a public apology, refutation of factual data considered defamatory and a payment of compensation. The lawsuit was triggered by an article, titled “They are all Serzh’s followers in those positions, and we have only the streets left for the Mayor to buy and be done with.” Karnut farmers say” and published on Aravot.am website on April 29, where the farmers who had appealed to the government complained about the discriminatory attitude of Artsrun Igityan, the mayor of Akhuryan consolidated community.[[73]](#footnote-73) In particular, he did not calculate the compensation for the damage incurred by the farmers because of the hailstorm in Karnut during the summer months. In addition, the website published the following idea expressed by the farmers, among others: "Artsrun Igityan bought houses in Yerevan and Paris. Where did he get the money from? He and his extended family have privatized all the buildings in Akhuryan, including the post office, and the sanitary and epidemic center, we have only the streets left for him to buy and be done with.”

By the way, on May 8, the website published the text of Artsrun Igityan's refutation, but he demands that the farmers apologize, too, and refute the accusations.

On June 4, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A preliminary court hearing is scheduled for July 21.

**On May 26**, businessman Levon Marcos filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against "24News" Ltd., seeking refutation of the information that damages his honor, dignity and business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit is the article published on 24news.am website on May 21, titled "Fraud of 300 million dollars. How was the biggest financial fraud attempt in the country prevented?”[[74]](#footnote-74)

The article, in particular, refers to the criminal case initiated against Marcos in Armenia, and states that it was based on a certificate issued by the World Bank, which revealed that Levon Marcos issued $ 300 million counterfeit bonds, thus trying to fulfill the biggest financial fraud in the history of Armenia.

On June 1, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. There were no other developments in relation to the case as of June 30.

**On May 26**, the Governor of Lori Andrei Ghukasyan published a Facebook post containing indecent expressions about journalists, yet without mentioning specific names. He particularly wrote: "We witness more frequent cases when a self-declared journalist disseminates completely false, absurd news, leaves ... How many people who dream of high-ranking positions and complete losers, former gamblers, former pimps, current prostitutes, start to give themselves away ․․․ »: According to the CPFE, this is a generalized insult addressed at journalists and an attempt to put pressure on them.

**On May 26**, the Court of Cassation refused to accept an appeal by Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of Informed Citizens' NGO, against the decision of the Court of Appeal of January 8, which turned down his complaint about the investigator's inaction.

We should remind that 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. (For details see CPFE 2017, 2018, 2019 annual reports in khosq.am's *Reports* section).

The Investigative Committee twice suspended the criminal case of Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of Informed Citizens' NGO against Iravunk.com website, for illegally collecting and disseminating information considered a personal and family secret. On May 20, 2019, Daniel Ioannisyan filed a complaint with the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan on the investigator's inaction, which was rejected. On September 15, an appeal was filed, which was also rejected on November 8.

**On May 27**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of NA deputy Hayk Sargsyan against "Iravunk Media" Ltd., claiming confiscation of 1 million AMD in compensation of the damage done to his honor, dignity and reputation through slander and insult.

The lawsuit, filed on June 13, 2019, 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 next court session is scheduled for July 2.

**On May 30**, the server of Armversion.am website was hacked. The founder of the website Ruzan Avoyan announced this on Facebook.[[75]](#footnote-75)

**On June 1,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the lawsuit by citizen Ashot Gevorgyan against Hraparak Daily Ltd. with claims of refutation of the information considered dafamatory and confiscation of a compensation for slander.

We should remind that the lawsuit filed by Ashot Gevorgyan on July 12, 2019, was triggered by the news published, 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.

The Court based its judgment on the approach of the European Court in relation to the freedom of the journalist to disseminate information: " Mere personal conjecture or subjective perception of a publication as defamatory does not suffice to establish that the person was directly affected by the publication. There must be something in the circumstances of a particular case to make the ordinary reader feel that the statement reflected directly on the individual claimant or that he was targeted by the criticism. (see Dyuldin and Kislov v. Russia's judgment of 31 October 2007, Part 44)”.

**On June 2,** Karen Petrosyan, Acting Director of the Gyumri Branch of the Armenian State University of Economics, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Blognews.am, claiming public refutation of the defamatory information and a compensation of the moral damage. The lawsuit was triggered by the Facebook posts about Karen Petrosyan by a user named Abgar Gevorgyan, published on the "Blognews.am" website from April 7 to 20, under the following titles: "This blasphemer who curses the church has now become rector, and contrues the coronavirus using the Bible"[[76]](#footnote-76), "The odyssey of Karen Petrosyan's villainy: how he expelled a young veteran of the April war and how he beat a lecturer"[[77]](#footnote-77), "Cursing the church is profitable in the times of the incumbent government: see how rages he was before and how well-off he got ever since cursed the church,” [[78]](#footnote-78), "Arayik Harutyunyan, are you aware that you have appointed a mentally ill rector who could not even write his own dissertation?"[[79]](#footnote-79)

On June 12, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. As of June 30, no new lawsuit was filed.

**On June 4**, Arthur Vanetsyan, the former head of the National Security Service, and his parents filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Skizb Media Center Ltd., with claims of public refutation of the defamatory data and compensation for the damage to honor and dignity (2 million AMD). The lawsuit was caused by an article published on 1in.am website on May 1, titled "Vanetsyan founded the large company for transporting the Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine cargo together with Mher Sedrakyan's son: New Details", which specifically mentions as follows: "Years ago, Vanetsyan and the son of Mher Sedrakyan, i.e. Mher from Tokhmakh, jointly started a logistic company, which transports raw materials from the Qajaran Copper and Molybdenum Company to the appropriate destinations. It is as clear as light that not everyone could work in that field, and both Mher Sedrakyan and Arthur Vanetsyan's mother, who used to be a state employee and held various positions, great contributed to the making of the business."[[80]](#footnote-80)

As of June 30, the lawsuit was not accepted for proceedings.  
  
 **On June 8**, Newsmedia.am website wrote that Iravunk.com was hacked again.[[81]](#footnote-81) The website suspected that it could be done for political purposes.

**On June 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular session on the case 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.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 2, 2019, was triggered by an article titled "From Being Laid on the Asphalt to Night Celebrations; What is Going on Inside “La Scala" published on the website, where the MP is allegedly ascribed participation in night parties, along with a reference that "Hayk Sargsyan and Pzo (a criminal authority’s nickname – *CPFE*) are in pretty close relationship, and Sargsyan is thus trying to comply with criminal rules and regulations." [[82]](#footnote-82)

Court hearings on the case were held on June 24, and the next one is scheduled for August 7.

**On June 9,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Emma Kirakosyan against ATV TV Company Ltd. with claims of compensation of damage to her honor and dignity and obligation for refutation.

We should remind thatthe suit, filed on March 22, 2019, was triggered by the February 22 issue of *Semi-Open Windows* program, which was about the 20-year-old lawsuits caused allegedly by Emma Kirakosyan herself.[[83]](#footnote-83)

A court hearing on the case was held on June 22, and July 10 was appointed as the date of to publish the judgment.

**On June 11** Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marz Court of General Jurisdiction (seat in Artashat) held the first court session on the case of Ararat Governor Garik Sargsyan against 168 Zham Ltd. with claims of public refutation of factual data considered defamatory and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on December 20, 2019, and was triggered by the article "Again An Incident with the Participation of Governor of Ararat" published on the 168.am website, which stated 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 his business in Nor Kyank community.[[84]](#footnote-84)

The next court hearing is scheduled for July 14.

**On June 16**, the successors of the 9 victims of March 1 events filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Shark Ltd., founder of Channel 5 TV and Narek Mantashyan, co-founder of Alternative NGO with claims of compensation for the damage caused to their honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit is an interview on the Channel 5 set with Mantashyan's participation, during which he made slanderous and insulting remarks about the legal successors of the March 1 victims. In particular, as the plaintiffs' representative Tigran Yegoryan clarified, the statements contained declarations on hooliganism, mass disorders, and sale.[[85]](#footnote-85) The plaintiffs demand that the two defendants together compensate each legal successor 2 million AMD for defamation and 1 million AMD for insult.

As of June 30, the lawsuit was not accepted for proceedings.

**On June 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of Lydian Armenia CJSC against economic commentator Atom Margaryan and the Lragir e-newspaper.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 27, 2019, 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.[[86]](#footnote-86)

On October 29, the Court of General Jurisdiction rejected the motion to seize property or money as a measure to secure the claim, hence the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal on November 21, which returned the appeal. The Court of Cassation refused to accept Lydian Armenia CJSC’s complaint on the rejection of its appeal․The substantiation presented by the appellant was not sufficient to prove the fact of the violation of procedural legal norms.

By the way, on June 15, a counter-claim was filed with claims for reparation of the damage made to the honor, dignity, business reputation, and the previously paid state duty. On June 24, the court returned the counter-claim because the submitted documents were incomplete. In addition, the content of the counterclaim did not make it clear what facts the claims were based on. A trial on the main case is scheduled for September 4.

**On June 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court session on the case of former Acting Head of the State Control Service, currently Director of NSS Argishti Kyaramyan against the founder of the *Zhamanak* newspaper Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., seeking compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation.

The lawsuit was filed on February 27, caused by an article, titled “The One of the Old Lot: the Head of SCS annuls inspection results” and published in the *Zhamanak* daily on February 19. The newspaper wrote: "According to the information obtained by the *Zhamanak*, Kyaramyan does not stand out with his professionalism in this system. Moreover, over time, getting rid of Sanasaryan's staff and bringing in his own people, he successfully annuls the results of the inspections, revealed in various bodies, or suddenly it turns out that there are no problems in the inspected bodies. They say that he especially succeds in finding common ground with the representatives of the old regime.” [[87]](#footnote-87)

The next court hearing is scheduled for Ausgust 27.

**On June 17,** the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of citizen Azat Tovmasyan against 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 filed on October 3, 2018, 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. [[88]](#footnote-88) (For details see the CPFE annual reports for 2018, 2019 in [www.khosq.am’s](http://www.khosq.am's) *Reports* section).

The next court hearing on this case is scheduled on September 18.

**On June 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Syunik Marz held a regular court session on the case of Senior Investigator of Syunik Regional Investigation Department Narek Abgaryan against former Mayor of Meghri Arshavir Hovhannisyan (with the founder of the *Syunyats Yerkir* newspaper Syunyats Ashkhar Ltd. as third person to this case), with claims of public refutation of defamatory information, public apology for insult and slander, and compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 16, 2019, was triggered by the insulting statements about Narek Abgaryan made by Arshavir Hovhannisyan, published on June 16 in the *Syunyats Yerkir* regional newspaper.

The next court hearing is scheduled for August 19.

**On June 18**, during the discussion of the draft law on Audiovisual Media in the National Assembly, My Step faction MP Mkhitar Hayrapetyan urged one of the media outlets to either change the title of the publication or remove it. "I am not yet naming the outlet, but I give its bosses and the people supporting it half an hour to change this anti-state, shameful, treacherous behavior. Either you change the title very quickly or you remove the material," Mkhitar Hayrapetyan stated.[[89]](#footnote-89) The CPFE views this as pressure on the media. It is about an article entitled "National Assembly is discussing the bill against Russian TV channels" on News.am website. [[90]](#footnote-90)

**On June 19,** The Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of Armenian Progressive Youth NGO against Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, Editor-in-Chief of BlogNews.am and the founder of Channel 5 TV Company, SHARK Ltd., 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.

We should remind that the lawsuit filed on May 6, 2019, 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.[[91]](#footnote-91) (For details see the CPFE annual report for 2019 in [www.khosq.am’s](http://www.khosq.am's) *Reports* section).

The next hearing is scheduled for August 19.

**On June 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session օn the case of News AM Ltd. against Dareskizb Ltd., the founder of *the Armenian Times* daily.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit is the article published on August 21 by “HZh” under the heading “Ararat, Armnews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media, fakes: which media outlets were “bought” by Kocharyan” [[92]](#footnote-92). According to the plaintiff, with a number of expressions in the publications about “News.am”, as well as with the heading of the article damage was caused to its business reputation. “News AM” Ltd. brought a claim of compensation of 200,000 AMD to the founder of *the Armenian Times*.

The next court session is scheduled for October 19.

**On June 22,** The Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of Anriva Tour Ltd. against Ani Alexanyan (with Public Television of Armenia CJSC, Educational Planet LLC as third party) with claims for the protection of business reputation.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit were the statements made on the "One Window" program about "Anriva-Tour" on Public Television channel on July 1, which the plaintiff considers to be defamatory.[[93]](#footnote-93)

The next court hearing is scheduled on October 15.

**On June 22**, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against "Anna Gevorgyan" Private Entrepreneur ("Haykakan Zham" news website) claiming public refutation of the defamatory data and payment of compensation. The lawsuit was prompted by an article published on Hzham.am on May 15, entitled "My Step party members are interested in the real estate market", which states in particular that the governors, led by Minister Suren Papikyan, are buying houses in the capital "without paying,” as they provide services, demanding an apartment as a donation.[[94]](#footnote-94) The "sources" of the website also mention that Suren Papikyan personally received an apartment as a gift from one of the leaders of his native community in exchange for a favour.

On June 30, the court returned the lawsuit, citing unclear wording.

**On June 22**, the Swedish company GN Tobacco Sweden AB filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Golos Ltd., claiming compensation for the damages (3 million AMD) caused to its business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit is the article published on Golosarmenii.am website on May 23, under the heading "A bowl of press cake, or why Swedish snus was brought to Armenia." The author referred to the Swedish product called "snus", a tobacco substitute that, in the opinion of the author, is of dubious reputation and is sold in the supermarket chain belonging to businessman Samvel Aleksanyan. Its sale is prohibited in the European Union (except Sweden) and in the Russian Federation. According to the plaintiff, some views presented in the article contain insult, slander, and damage the company's business reputation.

On June 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

**On June 24**, the *Hraparak* daily's editorial office received a call from the General Department of Criminal Investigation of the RA Police saying that they had received the prosecutor's letter instructing them to "investigate the circumstances in the article published by Edik Andreasyan in the *Hraparak* titled "The dictator and us" and to solve the issue of bring the author to criminal liability.” According to the newspaper, the article is publicistic, which does not contain any factual data, the main idea is that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan should be removed from office.

In this regard, the Prosecutor's Office clarified that on the basis of a letter received from the RA Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, the RA Police was instructed to check the publication for features of apparent crime and the grounds for initiating a criminal case accordingly. The reason for this decision was the published information, according to which the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia "... in close cooperation with the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia misappropriated the social security benefits of our most needy citizens ...".

**On June 24**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of citizen Yura Adyan against News AM Ltd. (News.am website) claiming refutation of slander and a compensation of 2 million AMD.

The reason for the lawsuit filed on August 16, 2019, is the article titled "The "old fox" of Old and New Armenia" published in the May 9 issue of *the Zhamanak* daily, re-published by the website.

The next court session is scheduled for October 12.

**On June 26,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the preliminary court hearing on the case of the former NSS colonel Eduard Harutyunyan against former NA deputy Taron Sahakyan (with the involvement of the founder of "1in.am" website "First News Agency" Ltd.), with claims of public apology, as well as a refutation of the information considered slander and payment of compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was accepted for proccedings on July 3, 2019, caused by the May 29 article titled “The Harutyunyans dynasty is still rooted in the state administration system: who occupies a post, what post and where?” [[95]](#footnote-95)

The next hearing is scheduled for September 16, 2020.

**On June 26**, Golosarmenii.am, the website of the Russian-language newspaper *Golos Armenii*, was hacked. The database of 20 years was almost completely destroyed. The editor of the newspaper Flora Nakhshkaryan informed about this.[[96]](#footnote-96) It is not known whether the hackers are from Armenia or abroad. On June 29, the content of the website and its operation restored.

**On June 29**, Olymp Construction Ltd. filed a lawsuit in the Court of First Instance of Yerevan against Hetq Ltd., claiming refutation of defamatory information and seeking compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "The construction company building a new house refuses to hand over the pumping station to the Water Committee: residents are complaining" and published in Hetq.am. [[97]](#footnote-97) Though the author of the article incorporated the comment from the representative of the construction company, too, the plaintiff does not agree with the complaint. As of June 30, the lawsuit was not accepted for proceedings.

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

*In the second quarter of 2020, the CPFE recorded 26 facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information, and a lawsuit has been filed in relation to one of these facts. As compared to the same period of time last year, the number of such violations has increased by 11, and by 5, as compared with the previous quarter.*

*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 April 1,** Union of Informed Citizens NGOappealed to the Court of Cassation to challenge the judgment of the Admiistrative Court of Appeal of February 19, which rejected the judgment of the first instance court on partially upholding the NGO’s lawsuit against the Municipality of Yerevan.

We should remind that on January 8, “Union of informed citizens” NGO brought a lawsuit to the RA Administrative Court against Yerevan Municipality with claims of complete answers to the written inquiries. The NGO asked to provide information whether the External design and advertisement department of Yerevan Municipality considered the dashboards with the content “Called and conscripted for one purpose” as a social advertisement: if yes, then they inquired whether it was based on a certain document. The municipality gave an incomplete answer to the inquiry.

On May 22, the Court of Cassation rejected the appeal of Yerevan Municipality against the decision of the RA Administrative Court of Appeal of February 19, 2020.

**On April 6,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Environment asking for information on inquiries about the breeding grounds of rare species with potentially negative impact on the environment for the period og 2010 - 2020. The answer was received with delay on April 14.

**On April 8**, the *Iravunk.com* website reported that during a press conference at the government press center, their question to Deputy Prime Minister's Adviser Bagrat Badalyan about American virological laboratories in Armenia remained unanswered. The website writes that it is not the first time that their questions remain unanswered during press conferences held at the Government Press Center, but this time the unanswered question differed from the previous ones in the sense that the Armenian Unified InfoCenter had registered the question.

**On April 13,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Civil Aviation Committee requesting the submission of a report by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) on the RA Civil Aviation and/or a link to the full text of the report. In a reply sent on the next day, the CAC stated that the report was not subject to publication. The FOICA repeated the same inquiry on April 15, but was again rejected due to state secrecy, which the FOICA assessed as an unfounded refusal.

**On April 13**, the *Politik.am* website sent an inquiry to the Prime Minister's Office to get information on when Nikol Pashinyan was going to leave for Moscow, with what agenda, and what agreements would be signed. "The Prime Minister's Office did not respond to our inquiry in violation of the Law on Freedom of Information," the website wrote. [[98]](#footnote-98)

**On April 14,** "Hetq.am" online periodical sent a written request to the Government, asking for clarification regarding one of the government's decisions, which was retroactively applied to the past procurements. For reasons unknown to the website, the inquiry was sent to the Ministry of Health, which did not provide clear information within 31 days.[[99]](#footnote-99) The website writes that in the recent months, the Ministry of Health has adopted a policy of delaying the answers to inquiries and, ultimately, not providing them. "To answer even the simplest question, which can be done within 1-2 hours, the Ministry asks for a 30-day period, as a result of which the topic loses its relevance. We assume that the Ministry thus wants to prevent unwanted publications. Hence, the workstyle of the Ministry has made inquiries for information inexpedient, just a waste of time," Hetq.am notes.

**On April 14,** Hetq.am online journalist Tirayr Muradyan sent an electronic inquiry to Arman Ghazaryan, the head of Zolakar community of Gegharkunik marz, asking to provide the copies of the decisions made by the mayor and community council in 2015 - 2020, as they are not published on the official website of the municipality. During both this and the previous quarter, Tirayr Muradyan failed to receive that information. The journalist mentions that the Gegharkunik regional administration, which is supposed to receive and publish the decisions of the communities, as established by the law, did not receive them either.

**On April 14,** Sona Amiryan, a journalist with the *Antifake.am* website, sent a request to the RA Civil Aviation Committee asking for information on the Committee Chair's salary and the bonuses received. The Committee refused to provide the requested information, citing the Personal Data Protection Act. The FOICA sent a new inquiry with the same questions and again received a rejection with the same reasoning, which it deems groundless.

**On April 15**, the Freedom of Information Center sent a request to the Ministry of Health, asking to provide information on how many people infected with the new coronavirus in Armenia were hospitalized, how many were in intensive care, and how many were on lung ventilators. On the same day, the FOICA also sent a request to the Corruption Prevention Commission, asking to inform how many people had not submitted a declaration as of June 5, 2020 The answers received from both state bodies were incomplete, not all the questions were answered.

**On April 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of Hetq.am website ("Investigative Journalists" NGO) against 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.

We should remind that **o**n July 8, receiving a refusal from the Foundation, the website filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court, and 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 also held on May 4, and on May 22 the judgment was published, according to which the lawsuit brought by Investigative Journalists NGO was partially upheld. The National Scientific Laboratory after A.I. Alikhanyan (Yerevan Institute of Physics) Foundation was obliged to provide the copies of all decisions passed by the Board of Trustees in the period of 2011 – 2019, in compliance with the requirements set in Article 8, Part 1, Clauses 1 – 5 of the RA Law on Freedom of Information. Besides, the court ruled to confiscate 4000 AMD in favour of the NGO as initially paid state duty and 70000 AMD as reasonable remuneration for the lawyer.

**On April 27**, the Factor.am news website wrote that they tried to get an explanation from Erebuni Medical Center about the number of people infected with the new coronavirus, but the press department of the Medical Center offered to verify the figures from the Ministry of Health. The ministry, in its turn, refused to provide any information. The Health Ministry spokesperson Alina Nikoghosyan told "Factor.am" that they did not provide information about individual cases. "It should be clarified with the hospital management, as it is a private hospital," she said.

"In fact, the hospital says that the ministry should provide that information, and the ministry says that the hospital should do that. And so, by shifting the responsibility of providing data on the issue from one institution to another, we are deprived of the opportunity to submit officially verified information," the website wrote.

**On April 28,** Hetq.am online journalist Tirayr Muradyan warned that incorrect e-mail addresses posted on the official website of the Armenian government were obstructing journalistic work. "We send the letter, and only 10 days later do we find out the e-mail has not worked for a long time, but that does not prevent the non-functioning e-mail from remaining on the Government's website."

**On April 29,** Narek Kirakosyan, a journalist with the Factor.am news website, sent an inquiry to the National Security Service regarding the criminal case against Gurgen Khachatryan, the son of former SRC Chairman Gagik Khachatryan, in particular, inquiring into the location, the number of interrogations, and the criminal investigation results. The NSS press center, the director's staff, including the director, said that they would answer the inquiry, but they did not, without even asking for additional time defined by the law.

The journalist applied to the NSS with the same question on May 4, but this inquiry had the same fate as the previous one.

**On May 1,** the *Armenian Times* daily sent two inquiries to the National Security Service, requesting information on criminal cases being investigated by the NSS Investigation Department in connection with the abuse of office by SRC officials. The answer to one of the inquiries was received on May 11 with a delay. The website applied to the NSS press center, asking if additional time was needed for the second inquiry, but did not receive a clear answer.[[100]](#footnote-100) Only after alerting after this practice in the media did the NSS provide the answer to the second inquiry on June 5, violating the 30-day period requirement.

**On May 5,** the Freedom of Information Center sent a inquiry to a number of government agencies requesting information on internal and external whistleblowing cases, responsible persons, and their positions, as well as asking the link to the page of the official website where the above data were presented. The answers were received with a delay on May 20.

**On May 7,** the Administrative Court held the first court hearing on the case of the President of the Asparez Journalists' Club, Levon Barseghyan against the National Security Service, claiming the provision of the information requested by an inquiry. The lawsuit was first filed on February 26 and returned on March 4 for corrections. The second lawsuit was filed on March 17 and was accepted on March 24.

The plaintiff had demanded the NSS to provide all the information it had about him. The answer to the inquiry did not satisfy Levon Barseghyan, he applied to the court with the aim of creating a precedent so that those who owned information would provide it to the citizens upon request.

The next court session is scheduled for July 3.

**On May 18,** the online media outlet Hetq.am wrote that in the first days of the spread of Covid-19 infection, they decided to create a database, hence they applied to the Ministry of Health, but did not receive answers to their inquiries. As a response to the written inquiries, they were told that it would be possible to respond within 30 days, which was inexpedient for creating a database. In addition, some of the requested information was considered personal data, for example, the sex of the infected, while, at some point later, the Ministry began to specify that information in its own published data.

The website made another inquiry, asking the Ministry of Health to provide information about the companies that imported medical equipment and supplies to Armenia. The ministry replied that they did not have such information.

**On May 20**, 168․am sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Health, asking for information on the ban on paid testing for coronavirus and several other related issues. Violating the deadlines, only on June 1, the ministry said that additional time was needed to respond to the inquiry.

On June 20, the newspaper wrote that even the extra time was probably not enough to give exhaustive answers to all the questions.

**On May 23**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Nature Protection and Subsoil Inspection Body, requesting to provide information about the money spent to reward the employees of the agency in 2019 – 2020. The response given on June 8 mentioned that the information about the budget could be found under the relevant link on their website. The FOICA considered the answer incomplete, as the provided link was empty, and the necessary complete information on the website was unavailable.

**On May 25,** Shushan Doydoyan, President of the Freedom of Information Center, and Isabella Sargsyan, a civil activist, sent a request to the Prime Minister's Office requesting information on the company (or individuals) who had developed the software to legally track and monitor phone calls to fight the spread of coronavirus in Armenia. The Prime Minister's Office forwarded the request to Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan's office, who refused to provide the required information, reasoning in a reply letter that the programmers did not want the fact of their pro bono contribution and their names to be made public. The FOICA considered this answer an unfounded refusal.

**On May 27**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to Shirak State University, requesting information about the amount paid for the services of a lawyer who represented the University in one of the civil cases. The response of June 4 denied the provision of information, citing the Law on Personal Data Protection. The FOICA considers this a groundless refusal.

**On June 1**, the Freedom of Information Center sent a request to the Ministry of Health, requesting some statistics on COVID-19 tests. The answer was incomplete, not all the questions were answered.

**On June 1**, journalist Narine Kirakosyan applied to the Ministry of Health for information. All 9 questions posed by the journalist referred to different data about the new coronavirus epidemic. On June 8, the Ministry asked for additional time to answer the questions, indicating the deadline of June 30. However, no answer was received on that day.

**On June 10**, 168․am journalist Aksanna Hayrapetyan sent a request to the RA Police asking for information on whether former RA Police Chief Arman Sargsyan had awarded himself with a weapon before his resignation, and if so, with what weapon.

According to the Freedom of Information Center, the Police refused to provide the requested information, noting that it contained personal data.

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

**On April 10,** Syunik Marz Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court hearing on the case of Samvel Alexanyan, editor of the *Syunikats Yerkir* newspaper against 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 shouldd 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 in khosq.am's *Reports* section).

Court hearings on the case were also held on June 26, and July 10 was appointed as the date of judgment publication.

**On May 6,** the RA Administrative Court held a regular hearing on the case of A1+ TV company against the RA Government and Commission on Television and Radio during which it was decided to remove TV FIVE CJSC and Cinemax Ltd. from the list of the parties to the litigation, taking into account that that they are liquidated (TV FIVE CJSC, Armenia TV CJSC, Mo TV Media Holding CJSC, ArmenAkob Ltd., AR TV company Ltd., Cinemax and Husaber CJSC were involved in this case as the third party).

We should remind that on December 18, 2019, the founder of "A1+" TV company "MELTEX" Ltd. 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. As early as in 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on June 4, the next one is scheduled for September 17.

**On September 16,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular 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 should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 4, 2019, 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. [[101]](#footnote-101)

The next hearing is scheduled for July 2.

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95. [**https://www.1in.am/2567780.html**](https://www.1in.am/2567780.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. [**https://youtu.be/vNNLhBpsRlM**](https://youtu.be/vNNLhBpsRlM) [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/117483?fbclid=IwAR0hsTR937FaVgio0ipQqDWOCWaowzo-wrFssO3DmGQSjifkf41bwR9js04**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/117483?fbclid=IwAR0hsTR937FaVgio0ipQqDWOCWaowzo-wrFssO3DmGQSjifkf41bwR9js04) [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. [**https://bit.ly/3cMm0b6**](https://bit.ly/3cMm0b6) [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/117198**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/117198) [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. [**https://bit.ly/2BRlADn**](https://bit.ly/2BRlADn) [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. [**https://www.panorama.am/am/news/2019/03/05/%D4%BC%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%BD%D5%A1-%D5%84%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6/2081488**](https://www.panorama.am/am/news/2019/03/05/%D4%BC%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AB%D5%BD%D5%A1-%D5%84%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6/2081488) [↑](#footnote-ref-101)