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

**2020 annual report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression**

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

***BRIEF SUMMARY***

2020 was the toughest and most difficult period for the Armenian media and journalists compared to all previous years of CPFE monitoring. This was due, first of all, to the large-scale war in Artsakh, unleashed by Azerbaijan and the difficulties of its coverage, and also the unfounded restrictions on freedom of speech in the fight against the coronavirus ever since the beginning of the year.

Both during the state of emergency due to the pandemic and during the martial law declared since the beginning of the war, an RA Governmental decree banned the publication of any but official information in the media outlets and on the social media, too. Moreover, the fact that the implementation of these decrees was controlled by law enforcement agencies, interfering in the activities of the media, often with subjective and arbitrary approaches, caused a lot of concern.

During the state of emergency caused by the coronavirus, 32 cases were recorded with the police demanding the removal of their publications and comments from the media and journalists. Fines were envisaged, too, however, they were not applied. The government, following the calls of journalistic organizations, first significantly softened the provisions of the decree regarding the activity of media outlets, dated March 16, and then entirely canceled them.

As for the restrictions applied in the conditions of the martial law, envisaged by the RA Governmental decree of September 27, the penalties were tightened by legislative amendments, and 13 media outlets were subjected to various fines. The RA Police did not provide the list of these media outlets, reasoning that the information contained personal data, protected by the law. In fact, providing the list of fined media outlets, the police would not reveal any personal data, as there was no need for it.

In 2020, the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the National Assembly came up with a number of media-related initiatives that were not always acceptable to the journalistic community. The most significant of these processes during the year was the adoption of a new law regulating the broadcasting sector. The previous Law On Television and Radio had long exhausted itself, hindering the introduction of modern approaches, and the new draft law developed by the CPFE and partner organizations and submitted to the parliament in 2019 was never officially put into circulation. Instead, three MPs of the National Assembly proposed a bill on Audiovisual Media, which was sharply criticized by journalistic organizations, as the document was not aimed at implementing reforms in the sector and would not contribute to the solution of existing problems. However, on July 16, the National Assembly adopted the *Law on Audiovisual Media*, giving rise to a number of follow-up activities, namely authorization of TV companies, followed by licensing tenders. Applications were submitted for 6 national, 9 capital-city and 8 regional broadcasts (it was declared that the tenders in Vayots Dzor and Ararat marzes failed due to lack of applicants). In January, the CTR shall announce the names of the winning companies through a rating evaluation.

The legislative initiative of NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan, proposing to increase the amount of monetary compensation for insult and slander fivefold, caused serious concern in the journalistic commuity. This bill caused dissatisfaction specifically against the background of the large flow of lawsuits against the media, especially since the current amounts for compensation provided by law are already significant.

The developments around the amendments and supplements to the Law on Media, being improperly coordinated and very slow, cause a lot of concern, too. A relevant working group, established in the National Assembly, which the CPFE has also submitted a bill to, is handling the process. The law is very urgent, especially in terms of ensuring the transparency of media ownership and regulating the activities of online media.

During the year, another working group functioned at the National Assembly to discuss the criminalization of the spread of hate speech, but so far this process has been confined to heated debates. In the second reading and in its entirety, on April 15, the parliament adopted the package of bills on making amendments to the RA Criminal and the RA Criminal Procedure Codes, envisaging criminal liability for public calls for violence, public justification or propaganda of violence.

The new draft of the Criminal Code proposed by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia was sharply criticized due to Article 450 on false denunciation, envisaging strict liability, even imprisonment, for publishing untrue information in the media. A number of journalistic and human rights organizations considered this amendment a threat to the media.

According to the reports published in 2020, Armenia has maintained its position in the international ranking of press freedom, but the situation in the country is not favourable, given the violations of the rights of journalists and media. ***The number of different kinds of pressure during the reporting year totalled to 273. 6 cases of physical violence and 90 violations of the right to receive and disseminate information were registered. The number of new court cases involving media outlets and journalists totalled to 74․ The vast majority, namely 61 of them, are on the grounds of insult and defamation under Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code, 13 are labor and other kinds of disputes.***

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

The restrictions on the freedom of speech due to the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 and the coverage of the Artsakh war from September to November proved a serious ordeal for Armenian journalists and the media.

On March 16, the Government of the Republic of Armenia passed a decree, restricting freedom of expression, along with a number of other rights. The aim was to ensure no panic was caused among the public with publications about the coronavirus. This resonated very negatively among the media and journalistic organizations. International organizations also expressed their concern in that regard.

In particular, on the very day of adopting the above-mentioned decree, *Reporters Without Borders* human rights organization responded with a Twitter post. “[#Coronavirus](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Coronavirus?src=hashtag_click) [#Armenia](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Armenia?src=hashtag_click) declares state of emergency and compels media to quote only official sources. Controlling infos doesn’t help to fight epidemia but spread rumors and fear!” the tweet said. [[1]](#footnote-1) The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe also expressed concern over the decree, passed by the Armenian Government. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media stated in particular: "Publishing only information provided by the authorities is a very restrictive measure which would limit freedom of the media and access to information disproportionately.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

On March 18, the heads of 25 media outlets sent open letters to the RA Commandant Tigran Avinyan, expressing concern that the media outlets, covering the coronavirus situation, might find themselves in a desperate situation. “The provisions of the decree and their potential interpretations are devoid of predictability, certainty and, consequently, can be applied arbitrarily, grossly violating the freedom of expression, guaranteed by the Constitution, along with a number of other constitutional principles.” [[3]](#footnote-3)

On March 20, 11 journalistic and human rights organizations issued a statement, according to which the application of the restrictions imposed by the government was inefficient and disproportionate, contradicting the principles of common sense and failing to contribute to the exercise of public interests in the conditions of the pandemic. [[4]](#footnote-4)

The statement was followed by joint discussions between the above-mentioned 11 NGOs and government representatives, after which, on March 24, the Government of the Republic of Armenia reviewed the provisions of its decree, released on March 16, regarding the activities of the media, mitigating them significantly. However, the document again failed to specify the requirements, put forth for the media, and the authority, entitled to provide official information or commentary to the media on behalf of the Commandant’s Office, remained unknown. This triggered another statement[[5]](#footnote-5) by the same organizations. Finally, on April 13, the provisions on the media, contained in the decree, were repealed.

If no administrative sanctions were imposed on the media during the restrictions due to the pandemic, the same did not hold true in the martial law due to the second Artsakh war. Thus, at the very beginning of the conflict, on September 27, the Government adopted a decree *On Declaring Martial Law in the Republic of Armenia*, which led to legislative amendments, thus, fines were imposed on the media for disseminating any other information than the official information on the military operations. Later, on October 9, the National Assembly adopted the package of bills "On Making Supplements to the RA Code on Administrative Offenses", "On Making Amendments to the RA Criminal Code" and other related codes, which proposed imposing penalties for the violation of restrictions established due to the martial law all over Armenia. In particular, the RA Code on Administrative Offenses stipulated that violating the rules of publication or dissemination of information by a media operator during martial law, the non-observance of the special journalistsic accreditation procedure, the violation of special rules on the use of communication means should result in a fine of up to 700-fold nominal wages (700 thousand to 1 million AMD). The failure to eliminate the disseminated publication that violated the established rules should be fined in the amount of one thousand to one thousand five hundred fold nominal salary (from 1 million to 1.5 million AMD).

The amendments made to the RA Criminal Code defined: “An act, violating the rules of publication or dissemination of information during the legal regime of martial law, thus significant damage to the rights or legitimate interests of individuals or organizations or the legitimate interests of the public or the state, shall be punishable by a fine of 2,000 to 3,000 fold of nominal salary (2 million to 3 million AMD – *Comment by the CPFE*) or imprisonment for a maximum of two years. "

The RA Police controlled the fulfillment of these requirements, as it did during the state of emergency caused by the pandemic. According to the official information of this body, as of 3:00p.m., November 9th, 401 cases of banned publications were found, 196 of which involved media operators. As a result of initiated administrative proceedings, administrative santions have already been applied in relation to 76 cases. In particular, 13 news websites were fined in the amount of 700 thousand AMD. Moreover, one of those websites failed to remove the publication, so, in addition to the mentioned 700 thousand AMD, it was also fined at 1 million 500 thousand AMD. Measures are being taken to bring the authors of other publications to administrative liability .

The written inquiry by the CPFE as to which media outlets were fined and for what posts or publications was not responded by the RA Police, only a reference was made to the news on the official website, where general information was presented without mentioning the names of the fined media outlets. By the way, later the Police referred to the protection of the right to confidentiality of personal data as a justification for this step. Meanwhile, providing the list of fined media outlets, the Police would not reveal any personal data, since there was no need for such a disclosure.

The CPFE released the opinion, referring to the above-mentioned restrictions and the measures for holding media outlets liable, that the governmental decrees and legislative amendments contained provisions in vague language, which caused a misinterpretation of the requirements set. There was also a disproportion in terms of fines, which could force the media into a financially challenging situation. Besides, the Police, given its essence, was not the right body to objectively decide whether the given publication was detrimental to the interests of the state or not, or whether that publication complied with the law or not.  
 On November 3, following a statement,[[6]](#footnote-6) released by the Union of Journalists of Armenia and the heads of more than two dozens of media outlets, Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan appealed to the Constitutional Court, challenging the constitutionality of the provisions on martial law, restrictions on freedom of the press and administrative liability.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Human Rights Defender drew particular attention to the fact that clear rules with a high degree of certainty should be set, to exclude any kind of uncertainty. On November 20, the Constitutional Court suspended the disputed provisions of the RA Government's decree.   
 The large-scale war in Nagorno-Karabakh was a serious ordeal, especially for the journalists and cameramen who covered it, doing their jobs and risking their lives and health without any proper guarantees. During the 44-day war, the enemy's military operations were aimed at the civilian population as well as the representatives of the media, performing their professional duties.  
 The CPFE and 9 partner journalistic organizations made a number of statements in relation to this. The first statement was issued in relation to the targeted attacks on Armenian and foreign journalists in Artsakh on October 1. The authors of the statement called on the international community to strongly condemn the hostilities unleashed by Azerbaijan, to demand that official Baku to refrain from infringements against the civilian population, as well as professional media representatives who were doing their jobs, and to take additional steps to ensure the safety of journalists.[[8]](#footnote-8)  
 Along with other international media and human rights organizations, *Reporters Without Borders* referred to this case on October 2, noting the fact that journalists were targeted and reminding that Azerbaijan ranks 169th and Armenia comes the 61st in the World Press Freedom Index 2020. [[9]](#footnote-9)   
 On October 4, 10 Armenian journalistic organizations issued another statement, emphasizing that intensively shelling the peaceful settlements of Artsakh, including its capital Stepanakert, Azerbaijan was grossly violating the humanitarian norms envisaged by the Geneva Convention. Besides, Azerbaijan was trying in every way to hinder the work of foreign media representatives, working on the Armenian side, thus creating threats for their life and health. This violated people’s right to information under martial law. [[10]](#footnote-10)  
 Given this situation, the authors of the statement drew the attention of international organizations and foreign partners to Azerbaijan’s actions against journalists, calling for a condemnation and practical steps to counter these actions. *Reporters Without Borders* international organization, too, commented on the Azerbaijani attacks on journalists on Twitter on October 5. [[11]](#footnote-11)  
 The year 2020 was abundant with legislative initiatives and amendments related to the Armenian media. The most significant of them was the adoption of the new law *On Audiovisual Media*. Back in 2019, the new draft law on *Television and Radio,* submitted to the Parliament by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, the Yerevan Press Club and the Media Initiatives Center, was not officially put into circulation after months of various discussions. And on May 28, the CPFE undertook an online discussion on the draft law, proposed by the legislator, with the participation of NA deputies, heads of TV companies, representatives of journalistic organizations and media experts, and titled "Problems in the Broadcasting Sector - the Need for Legislative Reforms." In general, the draft law *On Audiovisual Media* was strongly criticized.   
 On July 8, 10 journalistic organizations made a statement, again pointing out the shortcomings of the bill.[[12]](#footnote-12) In particular, no realistic opportunity was provided for creating private multiplexes. The issue with the digital broadcasting of about 10 local TV stations operating in the regions remained unresolved, the outdated and controversial licensing procedure was not changed, the currently indispensable transparency of broadcasting media ownership was not ensured, and so on.  
 Nevertheless, on July 16, the Parliament passed the law. It stipulates that before participating in the licensing competition for the inclusion in the public multiplex, one must get an authorization. Hence, the authorization process was launched on August 21. And the call for licensing competition for broadcasting in the public multiplex was opened on September 18. The slots (part of the multiplex network stream that broadcasts the programs of one TV station) are as follows:

• National coverage - 6 slots,

• Capital city coverage- 9 slots

• Regional coverage - 10 slots, one in each region.

Since no applications were submitted from Vayots Dzor and Ararat marzes, the competitions for those two slots were declared unsuccessful. In fact, the CTR received 12 applications for 6 national broadcasting slots, 13 applications for 9 slots in the capital city, and 13 applications for 8 regional broadcasting slots. Already in January 2021, through a rating evaluation, the Commission will announce the names of the winning companies. By the way, the new law requires the broadcast media to use some kind of a self-regulation mechanism, that is, to follow the code of professional ethics developed by themselves or some media group. Moreover, this information should be included in the application, submitted to the CTR. This was the reason why before the licensing competition 14 TV companies joined the current self-regulation system of the Armenian media, signing the Code of Ethics.

Prior to the adoption of the new law regulating the broadcasting sector, the Ministry of Justice proposed an amendment to the Law on Television and Radio, which gave the Public Television the right to advertise for up to 5 minutes per hour on air, which was previously prohibited, as the company was already well-funded from the budget. Despite the criticism of journalistic organizations, on April 15 the National Assembly adopted the amendments. The right to broadcast advertisements, granted to the public television, was also enshrined in the new *Law on Audiovisual Media*.

In the conditions of the polarity of the Armenian media in the post-revolutionary, and especially the post-war period, when the overwhelming majority of media outlets served this or that political force and almost ignored the public interest, the issue of media ownership and transparency of funding sources remains an imperative. In this sense, it is important to modernise the *Law on Media* by making amendmens and supplements or drafting a new law. Hence, a working group was formed in the parliament, to which the CPFE submitted a draft law amendment. Accordingly, equal requirements for transparency of ownership and funding sources are envisaged for all types of media - print, online and broadcast, the concept of media is defined anew, and a number of other issues are solved. The proposed changes are especially important for regulating the activities of online media, as the current law has obvious gaps in this regard. Many online platforms take advantage of this gap, failing to share their details and data with the audience.

One of the remarkable developments within the media-related legislative process was that on September 7 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs gave a positive opinion on the initiative of NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan, proposing a five-fold increase in the amount of monetary compensation for insult and slander. The document caused serious concerns among the Armenian journalistic community and in international organizations. On September 16, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression and 9 partner journalistic organizations issued a joint statement, evaluating the NA Deputy Speaker's initiative as a purely political approach, which cannot contribute to the exclusion of irresponsible journalism and the protection of citizens' rights to information in any way.[[13]](#footnote-13) The draft is more dangerous against the background of the fact that the number of lawsuits against the media on the grounds of insult and/or slander is increasing every month. By the way, the number of lawsuits filed against the media and journalists in 2020 is comparable to the indicator of 2019, which was unprecedented compared to the data, generated during in all the years of monitoring. Moreover, the majority of the lawsuits, 61, is based on insult and slander. International organizations such as Freedom House[[14]](#footnote-14) and Reporters Without Borders[[15]](#footnote-15) expressed concern in their reports.

In May and June, the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs of the National Assembly held a parliamentary discussion on criminalizing the spread of hate speech. Representatives of journalistic, human rights NGOs, MPs from different factions, lawyers and others expressed their views. Many media experts believe that as long as there is no clear legal definition of hate speech, any restriction may jeopardize freedom of speech. The initiative remained at the level of discussions. Meanwhile, the press, television and social media are flooded with hate speech, explicit disinformation and manipulations, especially in the post-war period.

On November 16, the Commission for Television and Radio called to TV companies not to violate the rules of ethics and fulfil the undertaken obligations․ “Exclude the spread of hate speech, threats, and rumors on air, refrain from gossip. Not to be led by often fair sentiments, not to give air time to people who make provocative calls. Contribute to the establishment of social solidarity by means of news programs and interviews, exclude calls for violence against government institutions, political forces and figures, various civic groups, and simply people, differing in their opinions․․․”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Taking all this into account, the CTR, however, did not initiate administrative proceedings against any TV company during that period, except for one case. About a month before the above-mentioned statement, on October 19, a decision was made to suspend the broadcast of “In Front of the Mirror” program on ArmNews channel for 30 days. According to the CTR act, the reason was that there were many distortions of facts, obvious falsifications, threats, calls for violence, and panic-mongering assumptions.

The provisions on the media, contained in the new draft of the Criminal Code, that the Ministry of Justice developed and published on the official website "e-draft.am" on February 28, caused serious concern among journalists. Thus, Article 450 on false denunciation provides for criminal liability for publishing false information about a crime or an offender, including imprisonment. Journalistic and human rights organizations issued a statement, highlighting that the transfer of false denunication as a crime to the media sector was not previously practiced (it does not exist in the current Criminal Code) and was an unnecessary innovation that could seriously jeopardize freedom of expression and impede journalistic activity. Moreover, it would also hinder journalistic sources from providing valuable information on cases of public interest in a confidential manner.[[17]](#footnote-17)

This initiative, undertaken by the authorities, was halted at the stage of discussions, however, in contrast to this, on April 15, the Parliament adopted the bill "On Making Amendments to the RA Criminal Code" and a package of draft amendments to several related laws, which envisages criminal liability for public calls for violence, public justification or preaching of violence.

During the observed year, there were developments for the amendments and supplements to the RA Law on Freedom of Information. Back in 2019, a bill drafted by the Ministry of Environment made an attempt, with an unacceptable justification, at limiting the provision of environmental information. And on April 3, 2020, the government approved it and sent it to the parliament without a public discussion. On June 12, the NA Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environment discussed the draft law, and the voting was postponed indefinitely.

In addition, from May 15 to 30, the “e-draft.am” website launched a public discussion on the draft amendments to the RA *Law on Freedom of Information* and the RA *Law on the Protection of Personal Data*, developed on the initiative of the Freedom of Information Center jointly with the Ministry of Justice.[[18]](#footnote-18) Accordingly, it is proposed to remove the provisions on mentioning the citizenship and providing signature from the list of mandatory requirements for inquiries of information, as well as clarify the requirement for signing the inquiry in the light of the *Law on Personal Data Protection*. It is expected that the adoption of the drafts would facilitate the submission of inquiries electronically. The package of proposals is officially in circulation, but it has not been incorporated into the agenda of the National Assembly yet.

The CPFE proposals submitted to the three parliamentary factions back in 2019 were aimed at eliminating the unfounded restrictions on freedom of information. In particular, the *Law on Procurement* proposed to cancel the secrecy of expenses related to the activities of the top 3 officials in the country, namely the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Armenia and the Speaker of the National Assembly. On February 21, 2020, the parliament organized hearings on state procurements, during which Artak Manukyan, Deputy Chairman of the NA Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs assured that those proposals had not been ignored and would be included in the parliamentary agenda after some amendments, which, however, was not done.

During the reporting year, violations of the right to receive and disseminate information increased in number. Journalists were still dissatisfied with the press secretaries of departments, especially during the state of emergency related to the coronavirus and the martial law conditioned by the Artsakh war. 90 violations of the right to receive information were registered, which is 18 cases less than in 2019.

Journalists were intimidated with manifestations of unfriendly attitude or insults. NA Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan, NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan, PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan, MP Kristine Poghosyan, initiator of the VETO movement Narek Malyan, former RA Chief of Police Vladimir Gasparyan and others could be mentioned in this context.

During the year, 6 cases of physical violence against media workers were registered, with 11 victims. Though criminal cases were initiated, none of them reached the court, the offenders were not brought to justice.

72 lawsuits were filed against media outlets and journalists, the overwhelming majority of which, namely 61, were on the grounds of insult and defamation under Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code.

In 2020, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression continued to monitor the the progress of criminal cases, initiated in relation to the events of “Electric Yerevan” on June 23, 2015, and Sari Tagh from July 17 to 30,2016, with more than 40 journalists and cameramen recognized acting as victims. The decision of the Special Investigation Service to suspend the preliminary investigation of the “Electric Yerevan” for the second time was appealed to the Prosecutor's Office on July 29 with the support of the CPFE, and after rejection, it was filed with the Court of First Instance on August 25. A hearing on the case was held on December 10, and the investigation is over. The parties are waiting for the publication of the court decision. As for the SIS decision to suspend the case of Sari Tagh, it also became possible to annul through the court back in 2019, and the preliminary investigation was resumed. No other developments were registered during the year.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2020 by the following CPFE classification:

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

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

The relevant sections of the report list the facts on the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2020, as well as developments related to the previous incidents.

***In total, there were 273 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2020. 177 were cases of pressure against the media and staff members, 90 were cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information, and 6 were cases of violence.***

Below these data are presented comparatively by the quarters of 2020 and in comparison with the indicators of the past years.

**Quantiative data on violations in 2020 per quarter**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter | 2nd quarter | 3rd quarter | 4th quarter | Total |
| Physical violence against journalists | **0** | **2  (6 victims)** | **0** | **4 (5 victims)** | **6 (11 victims)** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **50** | **34** | **47** | **46** | **177** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **19** | **25** | **34** | **12** | **90** |

**Quantiative data on the violations in 2019 – 2020**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2019 | 2020 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **4** | **6 (11 victims)** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **134** | **177** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **108** | **90** |

We present the quanitiative data of lawsuits with the involvement of media and journalists.

**Lawsuits, involving media and journalists in 2020**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter | 2nd quarter | 3rd quarter | 4th quarter | Total |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 12 | 22 | 20 | 7 | 61 |
| On the grounds on the right to receive information | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Other disputes | 2 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 11 |

**Lawsuits, involving media and journalists in 2019 and 2020**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 2019 | 2020 |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 89 | 61 |
| On the grounds on the right to receive information | 4 | 2 |
| Other disputes | 3 | 11 |

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 2020 there were 6 cases (with 11 victims) of physical violence against media workers, which is 2 more than last year. Below we present the facts recorded in 2020, as well as the developments related to past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

**On January 22**, the court of first instance of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (seat in Yeghegnadzor) published the judgment on the case of violence used against journalists when they were performing their professional duties in Shatin community.

We would like to remind that when the employees of the *Zhoghovurd* daily Syune Hambardzumyan and Knar Manukyan visited Shatin community to learn more about the tense situation after the local government elections in 2017, to be assaulted by some residents of the community. They snatched the journalists’ certificates, hit the other cameraman on the hand and pushed them.[[19]](#footnote-19) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 and 2019, in the *Reports* section of khosq.am website).

According to the judgment of the court, 4 residents were found guilty under Article 164, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code. Each of them was fined in the amount of two hundred fold the minimum wage. On February 20, the respondent filed an appeal with the Criminal Court of Appeal against the decision of the first instance court. On March 2, the appeal was accepted for proceedings, with several court sessions, initially scheduled for July 10, September 22, October 28, November 26 and delayed for different reasons. No other developments were registered as of December 31.

**On February 1**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of Levon Gasparyan and Julieta Kokolyan, who were hindering the professional activities of *Radio Liberty* journalist Sisak Gabrielyan and *Araratnews.am* news website reporter Shoghik Galstyan.

We would like to remind that on April 2, 2017, on the National Assembly Election Day, violence was used against Radio Liberty journalist Sisak Gabrielyan and Araratnews.am correspondent Shoghik Galstyan at RPA candidate Hakob Beglaryan's headquarters, at Rustaveli 15, Kond district, Yerevan. Shoghik Galstyan is represented by CPFE's lawyer. The court declared Julieta Kokolyan, accused of obstructing Shoghik Galstyan's professional activity on February 5, 2018, wanted.[[20]](#footnote-20) The court decided to suspend the case until Julietta Kokolyan were located and continue the investigation with the other defendant, Levon Gasparyan within separate proceedings. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2017, 2018, and 2019, and quarterly reports for 2020, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

In 2020, court hearings were held on June 29 and 30, July 16, and August 17, and the court ruled to reconsider the defendant Leon Gasparyan’s accusation under Article 149, Part 2, Clause 3 of the RA Criminal Code, qualifying it under part 1 of the same article, suspend the prosecution against him on the grounds that the statute of limitations for criminal liability had expired and terminate the proceedings of this case.

On October 1, the victim's representative appealed the judgment to the Court of Appeals, demanding to overturn it and impose a proportionate sentence on Levon Gasparyan. On October 13, the complaint was accepted for proceedings, hearings were held on October 26, December 14, and the next one was scheduled for on January 13, 2021.

**On February 6,** Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court held a trial on the case of violence against Shantnews.am reporter Artak Khulyan and Factor.am cameraman Hovhannes Sargsyan.

We should remind that the criminal case is related to violence, used during the April revoluation in 2018. The case was sent to Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court with an indictment of 8 people. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 and 2019, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

This year, court hearings on the case were held on February 20, March 5, April 2, April 16, May 14, June 11, July 9, August 27, September 10, October 22, November 5 and 19, and December 17, with the next one scheduled for February 18, 2021.

**On February 24**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court session on the case of 168.am website correspondent Ani Keshishyan and Public radio correspondent Liana Yeghiazaryan and others v. former commander of RA Police armed forces Levon Yeranosyan.   
 We should remind that Levon Yeranosyan was charged under Article 309, Parts 2 and 3 of the RA Criminal Code for using special measures against demonstrators and journalists and 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 CPFE’s annual reports for 2018, and 2019, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).  
 A hearing on the case was held also on June 26, with the next session scheduled for January 14, 2021.

**On March 16,** 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 (seat in Spitak).

We should 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.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Court hearings were also held on May 5, June 4, July 9 and 16, August 10 and 24, and on August 25 the court passed the verdict on the criminal case, according to which Tigran Nazaryan was found not guilty and was acquitted on the grounds that his involvement in the crime was not proven. And the employee of the organization Vrezh Khachatryan was released from criminal responsibility due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. The verdict was appealed at the Criminal Court of Appeals on September 28, and on October 9 it was accepted for proceedings. The day of the court session was appointed for January 12, 2021.

**On April 21,** the Special Investigation Service resumed the criminal proceedings on the case of violence against a group of reporters in April 2018, based on the relevant act passed by the RA Criminal Court of Appeals.  
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) through the use of violence or threats thereof by the police and other law enforcement officers and officials in Baghramyan Avenue, Artsakh, Erebuni, Abovyan and other streets in Yerevan from April 18 to April 23. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018, and 2019, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).  
 The Special Investigation Service suspended the criminal proceedings twice, on the grounds of “unidentified offenders.”  
 According to the information provided by the SIS, the preliminary investigation of the case continues with no one involved as an accused or a suspect.

**On May 21,** the case with the indictment of one person, namely the perpetrator, within the separate action of the criminal case launched on the occasion of an attack on Artur Hakobyan, Kentron TV reporter and Simik Mayilyan, operator, in Hovtashat 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.[[22]](#footnote-22)

On May 26, the case was accepted into proceedings of the General Jurisdicatrion Court of Ararat and Vayots Dsor Marzes (seat in Masis). Court sessions were held on June 5, July 13, August 13, September 14, October 29, December 4, with the next one scheduled for January 20.

**On June 14,** during a protest 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.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**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 the next day of the incident, namely on June 17, an internal investigation was appointed. Data indicating features of alleged crime on hitting media representatives were obtained. They were sent to the Special Investigation Service for the preparation of relevant case materials. The SIS informed the CPFE that in the course of materials prepatation, the investigator had made a decision to reject the initiation of a criminal case on the grounds of the lack of corpus delicti.

**On October 1**, Aram Grigoryan, the cameraman of Armenia TV, and Sevak Vardumyan, the journalist of 24news.am news website, were wounded in the shelling of Martuni town in Artsakh by Azerbaijan.

**On November 16**, in the evening, Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, editor-in-chief of the BlogNews.am website and a member of the Adekvad Brotherhood, was attacked in the Davtashen district of Yerevan. According to the information provided to the CPFE by the Prosecutor's Office, a dispute had happened between the parties over the situation in the country, during which the parties gave each other blows. According to the information provided by Ter-Nakalyan and published in the press, he was stabbed by an unknown person.

Materials on the case were prepared, investigative and procedural measures were taken, forensic medical examinations were appointed. All the participants of the incident were found out, one person was brought to the police on November 17 and provided an explanation. Due to the fact that the parties did not file a complaint and refused to file a report against each other, on December 17 a decision was made to refuse the initiation of a criminal case, which was not appealed.

**On December 1**, during a rally demanding the resignation of the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the Police obstructed the journalists’ activities and tried to arrest Yerkir Media TV cameraman Hayk Sukiasyan.

As Gegham Manukyan, the director of the TV's political and news program, told reporters the camera of Yerkir Media TV company was broken.

In response to the statement, made by 10 journalistic organizations in this regard, on December 4, the RA Police informed the CPFE that the case had been sent to the Investigative Committee for investigation, and on December 8, the Internal Security Department of the Police informed that they were conducting an internal investigation on the case. Later, on December 15, the same department reported that the investigation had not confirmed the fact that Hayk Sukiasyan’s professional activity, an employee at Yerkir Media TV, was obstructed on December 1. According to the Police, during the rally, the cameraman behaved actively, pushed the law enforcement officers, trying to get to the centre of the road, so the Police officers, using proportional physical force, put him in a patrol car. Here, it was clarified that that citizen is an employee of Yerkir Media, and he was immediately released. The Police found out that Hayk Sukiasyan's camera was not damaged, but on the day of the incident he lost the live broadcast device (modem) due to hassle and chaos around, which was later found and returned to him. Gegham Manukyan said that message was a lie.

**On December 19**, the situation was tense at Yerablur military pantheon in Yerevan, due to the potential clash between those participating in the mourning march with the representatives of the government and the “supporters of the opposition.” The latter formed a chain to ban the participants of the march from entering the territory of the pantheon. In this situation, the crew of Radio Liberty was attacked. Unknown people shouted “There is Liberty”, started pulling the cameraman of the radio station Davit Harutyunyan and threw him on the ground.

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

*In 2020, there was a total of 177 cases of pressures on the media and their staff, more than double the number recorded last year due to a sharp increase in new lawsuits. They are presented below, in this subsection of the report, along with the developments and outcomes of similar facts, registered in the previous years, in chronological order.*

**On January 8 and February 24,** citizen Hayk Stepanyan filed lawsuits in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the defendants Angela Tovmasyan and *Mirror Club* Democracy Support NGO. Under the first case the plaintiff claimed to obligate Mirror Club and Angela Tovmasyan to publish on Hayeli.am website a refutation of the defamatory information contained in the video, titled "The Talkative Prime Minister Is Still Silent (video)" and published on December 2, 2019, as well as confiscate 500.000 AMD as compensation from the two co-defendants for slander under the principle of liability in solido. Under the second court case the plaintiff claimed the following: to obligate *Mirror Club* and Angela Tovmasyan to refute the defamatory and insulting information about him as contained in the video, titled “You are worse than hooligans, you are perverts. Angela Tovmasyan(video)” and published on Hayeli.am website on January 22, 2020 as well as confiscate 500.000AMD as compensation from the two co-defendants under the principle of liability in solido.

The first lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on February 26, and court sessions were held on April 29, May 19, June 11, July 9 and August 10, 2020. The second lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on March 5, and court sessions were held on June 3, July 7 and August 17. The court rejected the lawsuits in their entirety on August 31 and September 7, respectively.

As for the first case, the court justified its judgment, stating that no data proving that the mentioned expresson was addressed at the plaintiff, was obtained during the investigation, hence, it was abstract and without a clear addressee.

The judgment for the second case is based on the explanation that “it was unacceptable to forbid a journalist to make a critical and value judgement”, moreover, in politics, such judgments “enjoy special protection as a condition for ensuring pluralism, and the opposite approach may have a restricting effect on the media and journalists.”

Both judicial acts entered into legal force.

**On January 8**, Dr. Eduard Hambardzumyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Aravot Daily LTD., demanding a public apology, refutation of defamatory information data, and a 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 the family from France had fallen prey to the fraud of Eduard Hambardzumyan, the director of “Fertility Center”. [[24]](#footnote-24)

The lawsuit was accepted for proceeding on February 3, and on April 6 the court made a decision to dismiss the case on the grounds of the plaintiff’s refusal from the claim.

**On January 8**, Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the "Union of Informed Citizens" NGO, filed a complaint with the Court of Cassation against the decision of the Court of Appeals, rejecting his complaint against the investigator’s inaction.

We should remind that on March 25, 2017, Iravunk.com website 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. On May 18, 2019, the Investigative Committee suspended the criminal case of *Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of Informed Citizens' NGOs v. Iravunk.com website* for the second time. The case was initiated for illegally collecting and disseminating information considered a personal and family secret. On May 20, Ioannisyan filed a application with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction, questioning the investigator's inaction. The application was rejected. On September 15, an appeal was filed, which, too, was rejected on November 8. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2017, 2018, and 2019, and quarterly reports for 2020, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

On May 26, the Court of Cassation accepted Daniel Ioannisyan’s appeal for proceedings.

**On January 9,** the “ArmLur.am” news website was down due to a cyber attack (DDoS) on the server. There were numerous attacks on the website from around the world for hours. According to a statement issued by the media, the cyberattack aimed to block uploads and dissemination of materials from the website. "According to experts, for hours on, different IPs from different countries accessed the site at the same time, thus disrupting the work of the server," the statement read.

**On January 9,** Alvina Gyulumyan, a member of the Constitutional Court, filed an appeal against the judgment of Yerevan Court of First Instance, which rejected her claim for compensation for defamation against Dareskizb LTD., the founder of the *Armenian Times* daily.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was the article published in the newspaper, according to which in her position of an ECHR judge representing Armenia, Gyulumyan spared no effort to postpone the trial of one of the cases, related to the events of March 1, 2008, and filed with the ECHR.

On April 15, the Court of Appeals made a judgment to uphold the Alvina Gyulumyan’s appeal against the first instance court judgment, overturning it and sending the case to the same court for a new trial. Court sessions on the case were held on September 16, and the next one was scheduled for January 22, 2021.

**On January 10**, Yeghitsi Luys-BK Ltd. filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Public Television of Armenia and the head of Charentsavan community Hakob Shahgaldyan, demanding refutation of the information considered slanderous. 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 of Public TV – "News in 60 Minutes" on November 30, 2019.[[25]](#footnote-25) The plaintiff considered Hakob Shahgaldyan’s comment on the quality of his work slanderous. Yeghitsi Luys-BK Ltd. demanded from Public TV to publicly refute the slanderous information on air, and claimed from the head of Charentsavan community Hakob Shahgaldyan the payment of monetary compensation of 2 million AMD.

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on January 22. Court sessions were held on May 5, September 22, and the next one was scheduled for March 10, 2021.

**On January 10**, the Civil Court of Appeals accepted for proceedings an appeal, submitted by Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, against the judgment of the Court of First Instance, according to which Daniel Ioannisyan was obligated to refute the information about Samvel Harutyunyan, the President of State Committee of Science, by a post on his Facebook page and on Tert.am news website, and pay 500,000 AMD as compensation for the damage caused by defamation to the plaintiff’s honor and dignity.

We should remind that the cause of Samvel Harutyunyan's lawsuit was Daniel Ioannisyan's post on his Facebook page of June 12, 2018[[26]](#footnote-26) and an interview based on it and published on “Tert.am” website on June 13 ("The Minister of Education and Science should also answer the following question: To what extent did the friendship between Samvel Harutyunyan's son and himself influence his decision of appointing Samvel Harutyunyan in that position? Ioannisyan asks”)[[27]](#footnote-27). The third party to the case is Panarmenian Media Group CJSC as the rightholder of Tert.am website.

On March 10, the Court of Appeals rejected Daniel Ioannisyan's complaint. Later, on April 7, he filed a complaint with the Court of Cassation. 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, and the Court of Cassation refused to accept it for proceedings on July 1.

**On January 13**, citizen Nelli Mikaelyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the director of the *Haykakan Zham* news agency Anna Gevorgyan, the editor-in-chief of Hzham.am website Gayane Manukyan and 7or.am website, claiming for public apology, refutation of defamation and monetary compensation. The lawsuit was triggered by publications – an article “Nikol's Discredited Guard”[[28]](#footnote-28) on Hzham.am on June 19, 2019 and an article “Nikol Pashinyan Has to Rely on Sausage Thieves”[[29]](#footnote-29) on 7or.am and the photos attached thereto. The plaintiff claims compensation in the amount of 2 million AMD. The lawsuit was rejected due to faults in the documents. The lawsuit was resubmitted on **January 31** to be returned again. **2** more lawsuits, containing the same claim, were filed by the same plaintiff on March 16. Both were returned on the grounds of being flawed. **On May 11**, citizen Nelli Mikaelyan filed **2** more lawsuits 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 how is she related to child molestation?” 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 for corrections, and the motion was rejected. **On June 22,** citizen Nelly Mikayelyan filed **2** more lawsuits with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan. The first one was again triggered by the above-mentioned article, 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.

The lawsuits were returned again, because of flaws in the documents, and the motion on the deferral of the state duty payment was rejected. The same plaintiff went to court with **2** more lawsuits and the same claims on **August 4.** All **10** lawsuits were returned and sent to the court archive.

**On January 13,** MIG TV journalist Karine Vanesyan filed an appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance, which obligated the journalist to publish an apology to Lori Governor Andrey Ghukasyan on her own Facebook page.

We should remind that on May 15, 2019, Governor of Lori Marz Andrey Ghukasyan filed a lawsuit against MIG TV journalist Karine Vanesyan for insulting him and demanded to oblige her to apologize in the same manner. The lawsuit was triggered by a post on the journalist’s Facebook page: “…People smarter than you are sitting at home in a state of uncertainty, and homeless morons like you are taking advantage of the moment and get to devouring like pigs. Shame on you, if you know what shame is…"

On April 22, the Civil Court of Appeals decided to reject Karine Vanesyan’s appeal without any justification. On May 23, the defendant filed a complaint with the Court of Cassation, and on July 22the latter decided to reject and not to accept the complaint for proceedings.

**On January 13**, the Public Television and Radio Company Council appealed the decision of the RA Administrative Court of December 9, 2019, which settled the lawsuit of journalists Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan against the Public Television and Radio Company Council (by the decision of April 30, 2019, Armenian Paublic Television CJSC was involved as third party).

We should remind that on January 24, 2019, the journalists filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against the Public Television and Radio Company Council with a claim for repealing Administrative Act No. 46-L of December 25, 2018. This act concerns the termination of these journalists’ employment contracts. On December 9, the court settled the journalists’ claim.

The appeal of the Public Television and Radio Company Council was accepted for proceedings by the Court of Appeals on February 17, and on October 13 the Court of Appeals ruled to uphold the appeal, to overturn the judgment of December 9, 2019, and send the case to the RA Administrative Court for a new trial. On Novembr 5 the plaintiffs went to the Court of Cassation where the case was received on November 12. No other developments were registered as of December 31.

**On January 15**, the Court of Cassation refused to accept the appeal of NewsAM Ltd. against the decision of the Court of Appeals, rejecting the acceptance of the appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance. The latter obligated News.am to publish a refutation on its website, in accordance with lawyer Gevorg Mkrtchyan's lawsuit.

We should remind that lawyer Gevorg Mkrtchyan filed a lawsuit against NewsAM Ltd. on March 30, 2016. The cause of the claim was an article published on the News.am website on March 18, 2016, titled "Ridiculous Situation in the Chamber of Advocates -2. Retaliation Continues.” The publication states that lawyer Gevorg Mkrtchyan gave obviously false testimony[[30]](#footnote-30) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website). The plaintiff demanded that the website published a refutation.

On February 10, the judgment of the Court of Cassation was sent to the parties, and the case was sent to the archive.

**On January 22**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on *Citizen Armen Arakelyan v. Asekose AM Ltd.* case with claims of public refutation of the slanderous information published on Asekose.am website.

We should remind that the reason of the suit was an article, titled “The Moral Image of the Hieromonk Demanding the Resignation of the Catholicos,” published on August 6, 2018.[[31]](#footnote-31) By the way, at the end of the article the website expressed its readiness to publish the opinion of the other party, too, but defrocked hieromonk Koryun Arakelyan (also known as Armen Arakelyan) preferred to go to court.

A court session was held on January 29, and on February 12 the court decided to reject Armen Arakelyan's lawsuit against Asekose Ltd. No appeal was filed against the judgment.

**On January 23,** the RA Court of Appeals held a closed-door court session on the case of the editor-in-chief of the *Zhoghovurd* daily, journalist Knar Manukyan’s telephone calls deciphered by the RA Special Investigative Service. The court ruled the actions of the SIS illegal.

We should remind that the daily appealed to the Court of Appeal against the decision of the first instance court, which allowed the Special Investigative Service to decipher Knar Manukyan's phone calls 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 a pre-investigation secret.[[32]](#footnote-32) It was triggered by the publication of an article 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 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 17, the Court of Cassation made a decision not to accept the application for proceedings.

**On January 23**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected citizen Emma Kirakosyan's motion to apply a measure for securing the claim against the Public Television of Armenia CJSC within the framework of the case on obliging to compensate the damage caused to honor and dignity and publish a refutation.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit is the December 10, 2018 edition of The One Window program, broadcast on Public Television First Channel.[[33]](#footnote-33) The plaintiff believed that the program contained "false factual information" about her (For details see CPFE’s annual report for 2019 and the quarterly reports for 2020, see *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The plaintiff motioned to obligate Public Television of Armenia CJSC to completely remove the given edition of the *One 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. However, the court rejected the motion on the grounds that the measures for securing the claim were not proportionate with the claim, and the application of the measures to secure the claim would result in a disproportionate interference with the constitutional right to freedom of expression.

On February 27, the citizen filed an appeal against the rejection of the motion, which was rejected on April 6. Court sessions on the main suit were held on September 1 and December 8, with the next one scheduled for April 27, 2021.

**On January 29,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of the *Chairman of the RA NA Standing Committee on Defense and Security Andranik Kocharyan v. the Hraparak daily* with claims of public apology for an insult, compensation in the amount of 1 million AMD, and public refutation of defamatory information.

The reason for the lawsuit was the article, titled "Who really is Andranik Kocharyan?"[[34]](#footnote-34) 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.

Court sessions on the case were held on February 17, April 13, May 25, and on 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 July 7, the defendant, and on July 13 the plaintiff filed appeals challenging the ruling of the first instance court.

On August 5, the appeals were returned to for corrections. On September 4 and 15 the appeals were re-submitted, and were accepted for proceedings on September 28. On December 14, the Court of Appeals rejected the appeals of both the plaintiff and the defendant, leaving the first instance decision unchanged. Besides, a decision was made to confiscate 40,000 AMD from Andranik Kocharyan in favor of *Hraparak Daily* as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

**On January 31,** journalist Sona Harutyunyan, in pursuance of the court decision, posted a refutation of her Facebook post about News.am website.

We should remind that on September 26, 2018, NewsAM Ltd. filed a lawsuit against the journalist, based on a post on her Facebook page where Sona Harutyunyan associated News.am with Robert Kocharyan's name.[[35]](#footnote-35) The founder of News.am demanded from the journalist to publish the judgment of the court on Facebook. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 and 2019, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website). The defendant appealed the court's judgment in the Court of Appeals, but the appeal was rejected, and the defendant did not go to the Court of Cassation.

**On January 31,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court session on the case of *Pargev Ltd. v. Iravunk Media Ltd.* on the protection of business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 22, 2019, triggered by an article entitled "SSFS Shall Follow up on the Alarming News Reported in the *Iravunk*”, published on Iravunk.com website on July 19 which, according to the plaintiff, contained inaccurate and groundless information, discrediting the business reputation of Pargev Ltd.[[36]](#footnote-36) By the way, the RA State Commission for the Protection of Economic Competition launched proceedings based on this publication and fined the organization at 2.3 million AMD for the violations. As a result, Pargev Ltd. withdrew the claim against the media outlet. On February 14, the case was dismissed, the court ruled to confiscate 200.000 AMD from Pargev Ltd. in favor of Iravunk Media Ltd. as an attorney’s reasonable fee. On April 10, the plaintiff filed an appeal, challenging the court expenses, which was accepted for proceedings on May 4 and was rejected on June 12. The judicial act entered into legal force.

**On February 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of Vardan Harutyunyan, former chairman of the State Revenue Committee against the Investigative Journalists NGO, with claims of compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity and public refutation of the factual information considered as slander. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled “Cash registers were obtained at a high cost by a secret decision of the government: a criminal case has been launched.” This article was published on Hetq.am on August 7, 2019.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Court hearings on the case were also held on February 20 and March 11. At the last hearing, the court ruled to partially settle Vardan Harutyunyan's claim against the Investigative Journalists NGO and obligated the latter to publish a refutation on Hetq.am website.

On April 13, Investigative Journalists NGO filed an appeal which was accepted for proceedings on May 25. On July 31, the Court of Appeals upheld the defendant's appeal, fully rejecting Vardan Harutyunyan's claim. Besides, it ruled to confiscate the advance payment of the state fee at 10,000 AMD from Vardan Harutyunyan in favor of the Investigative Journalists NGO. The Court of Appeals found that the impugned article did not contain any untrue information, in order to be qualified as defamatory to the plaintiff in accordance with the provisions of Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code.

On September 2, the plaintiff, and on September 24, the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation. On September 30, the latter’s application was left without examination. And the application of the plaintiff was returned on October 5, and it was submitted again on October 15, and on November 18 Vardan Harutyunyan’s application was rejected and was not accepted for proceedings.

**On February 4,** a regular hearing of the case with claims of compensation for insult and slander of the *Citizens Marat Grigoryan, Sargis Kelyan, Levon Harutyunyan, Liana Manukyan, Esther Manukyan, Tatevik Boyakhchyan v. the Hraparak* *newspaper* was held at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by an article, titled “A Scandal at YSU? Has a New “Sashik" Appeared?” which, based on a letter, accused the dean of YSU Faculty of Geography and Geology Marat Grigoryan, of embezzling 50 percent of the academic staff’s salaries.[[38]](#footnote-38) By the way, the site published Marat Grigoryan's comment to the letter, too, along with the October 19 publication of the academic staff’s refutation of the facts presented in the preceding article. This, however, did not satisfy the plaintiffs. [[39]](#footnote-39)

Court hearings of the case were also held on February 27, and the claim was partially settled by a judgment passed on February 28. The *Hraparak* was obligated to refute the defamatory information published in the above-mentioned article regarding the misappropriation of salaries by plaintiff Marat Grigoryan and publicly apologize to him. Besides, according to the court judgment, a compensation of 100,000 AMD for defamation and 100,000 AMD for insult should be confiscated from the newspaper in favor of Marat Grigoryan.

On March 27, the defendant appealed the judgment. On April 23, the Civil Court of Appeals returned the appeal. The appeal was rejected on the grounds 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 appeal, and on June 12 it was accepted for proceedings. On July 24, the Civil Court of Appeals ruled to uphold the appeal submitted by the *Hraparak Daily* Ltd.. This instance noted that the case contained no separate act with the decision by the Court on the distribution of the burden of proof between the parties. The appeal was accepted for proceedings on October 13. Sessions on the case were held on November 23, with the next one scheduled for January 20, 2021.

**On February 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of *Vahe Hakobyan v. Mirror Club Democracy Support NGO*, the founder of Mirror Press Club with claims of compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity and obligation of refutation.

We should remind that the plaintiff sought to obligate the defendant to pay 3 million AMD in compensation for damage to his honor and dignity, as well as publish a refutation. The CPFE did not manage to find out the reason for the lawsuit. Moreover, the defendant was not even aware of the appointed court hearings.

On February 17, by the decision of the court, the case was dismissed because the plaintiff had withdrawn the lawsuit.

**On February 4**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Mher Derdzyan, the head of the Under One Roof housing project against the *Zhoghovurd* Newspaper Editorial Office Ltd. with claims for a public apology and obligation for 1,5 million AMD compensation for insult and slander. The lawsuit, filed on April 15, 2019, was caused by the newspaper’s concerns that the project could be a well-designed and deliberate hoax.[[40]](#footnote-40) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019 and the quarterly reports for 2020, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Hearings on the case took place on August 19 and October 9. By a judgment of October 28, the lawsuit was completely rejected. The court concluded that the statements made by the defendant, regardless of their negative connotations, could not be considered as an insult or a slander from a legal point of view. The plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeals on December 7. As of December 31, no other developments were registered.

**On February 4** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the first case of the NA Deputy Hayk Sargsyan against Hraparak Daily Ltd. with claims of compensation of damage to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

We should remind that Hayk Sargsyan filed **3** lawsuits against the founder of the media outlet. The first lawsuit was caused by an article, titled “A New Schmeiss has Appeared in the Parliament.” [[41]](#footnote-41) Court hearing on the case were also held on March 24, July 9, and August 27, and by the judgment of September 16 Hayk Sargsyan’s claim was partially settled. The newspaper was obligated to refute the defamatory information, stating “Hayk Sargsyan is called New Schmeiss in the Parliament, as Hayk Sargsyan is dealing with human resources and business lobbying, he is doing clinker lobbying in the Parliament in favour of Mher Sedrakyan who he is interacting with.” Besides, it was ruled to confiscate 50.000 AMD in favor of Hayk Sargsyan as compensation for non-pecuniary damage and 150000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. On October 16, the defendant filed an appeal which was returned on November 11. On December 16, it was re-submitted and was accepted for proceedings on December 23.

The second lawsuit was an article, titled “Pashinyan Showed a Yellow Card to Hayk Sargsyan” where the MP is portrayed as “an odious figure”, notorious for scandals.[[42]](#footnote-42) Court hearings were held on February 17, April 17, June 25, December 15, the next one was scheduled for March 15, 2021.

The third lawsuit was caused by an article , titled “Hayk Sargsyan "made a row" on the Yerevan-Moscow plane.” [[43]](#footnote-43) Court hearings on the case were held on February 6 and 28. At the last hearing, the court decided to dismiss the claim without examination, on the grounds that the plaintiff and the defendant had failed to attend two successive hearings. On March 12, the plaintiff filed an appeal against this judgment with the Civil Court of Appeals. However, on March 24, the Court of Appeals rejected the appeal. The plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation on May 6, and on September 2 the appeal was accepted for proceedings. As of December 31, no other developments were registered.

**On February 5**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of the *Hraparak* daily correspondent Vahe Makaryan against the former MP Rubik Hakobyan, with claims of protection of honor and dignity.

We should remind that on December 7, 2016, the National Assembly MP Rubik Hakobyan, after applying 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. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and the quarterly reports for 2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

On Feruary 20, Vahe Makaryan's lawsuit was rejected. On March 24, he filed an appeal, and on June 19, the Court of Appeals rejected his appeal, reaffirming that the defendant's actions did not contain an intention to insult the plaintiff, and the former did not initially seek to damage the plaintiff’s honor, dignity or business reputation. On July 24, Vahe Makaryan filed an appeal with the Court of Cassation. On September 7, the appeal was returned for corrections. The appeal was re-submitted on September 29, and on November 25 the Court of Cassation rejected it.

**On February 5**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of businessman Vahe Hakobyan against lawyer Hovik Arsenyan and Yerkir Media TV company, claiming a compensation of 2 million AMD for the damages caused to honor and an obligation to publish a refutation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 21, 2019, caused by a question raised by the attorney during the talk show *Yerkri Harts* as to why the former Governor of Syunik Vahe Hakobyan was not subject to criminal prosecution as of then, namely October 18, 2018. [[44]](#footnote-44)

According to the decision published on February 25, the lawsuit was left without examination due to the plaintiff’s failure to stand before the court during the last 3 sessions, regardless of the relevant notifications.

**On February 5**, the Court of Cassation decided to return the appeal submitted by Politik.am website editor Boris Tamoyan against the decision of the Court of Appeals, which had left the First Instance Court judgment unchanged, upholding the claim of RA Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan against Boris Tamoyan. Accordingly, the defendant was obliged to publish a refutation, as well as pay 1 million AMD to the plaintiff as compensation for defamation.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit was the publication of the following articles in “Politik.am”: "Deputy PM Avinyan Used Marijuana in the Government" (October 26, 2018), "Avinyan is Afraid. Marijuana Put Him into Trouble”, (October 27, 2018)”, and “A Surprise is Awaiting Avinyan in Court. He will Have to Undergo an Examination” (October 29, 2018) (For details see CPFE's annual reports for 2018 and 2019 and quarterly reports for 2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The Court of Cassation also rejected Boris Tamoyan's motion to defer the payment of the state fee.

**On February 6,** the Court of Appeal rejected the appeal filed by Boris Tamoyan, the editor of Politik.am website, disputing the First Instance Court judgment of October 14, 2019, obligating him to publish a refuation on Poltik.am website and his Facebook page and pay monetary compensation to Mesrop Papikyan, former adviser to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia.

We should remind that on January 24, 2019, the former adviser to the RA Prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan filed a lawsuit in the Ararat and Vayots Dzor Court of General Jurisdication against Boris Tamoyan, editor of Politik.am website, claiming compensation for the damage to honor and dignity and public refutation of information considered as slander. The suit was caused by an article titled “Criminal Authority Tuy Granted $10000 to Pashinyan's Aadviser,” posted on the website on January 17 and stating that "according to word of mouth Prime Minister Mesrop Papikyan has reportedly been granted $ 10,000 by criminal authority Tuy not to have scarcity of funds during the campaign.” [[45]](#footnote-45)

On March 4, Boris Tamoyan applied to the Court of Cassation, and on April 29, the latter decided to return the complaint brought by the defendant and reject the motion on the deferral of the state fee payment. On June 3, Boris Tamoyan again filed an appeal, which was rejected on August 12.

**On February 6**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of *Khachatur Khachatryan v. Shamshyan Media Ltd.*, claiming a public apology for the damage caused to honor and dignity and a compensation of 1 million AMD.

The lawsuit filed on April 17, 2019, was prompted by an article, titled “Shirak marz police operation against drug addicts. Two of the detained have just been released under amnesty. Deputy Director of one of the Diaspora Ministry's SNCOs is among the Detained.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

Court hearings were also held on April 6, August 28, November 6, December 8, the next one was scheduled for April 5, 2021.

**On February 7**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the regular court session on the case of *Erik Yeghinyan v. Pastinfo news website*, with claims of 1 million AMD to be confiscated in his favor, a written apology and published refutation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 14, 2019. The reason for the lawsuit was a publication of September 10, 2018, entitled “The detainee tried to commit a suicide in order not to be taken to a dentist.” [[47]](#footnote-47) (For details see the annual report of the CPFE 2019, in the *Reports* section of khosq.am website).

Court hearings were also held on March 20, July 1, November 13, with the next one scheduled for February 3, 2021.

**On February 10**, Artur Vanetsyan, the former head of the National Security Service, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Dareskizb Ltd., the founder of the *Armenian Times* daily and Armtimes.com website, claiming a public refutation of slanderous information, the removal of the article from the Armtimes.com website, the publication of a refutation statement and compensation of the non-pecuniary damage caused. The lawsuit was filed in reaction to a publication on Armtimes.com website and in the *Armenian Times* daily on January 12, under the following heading: “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 had organized a media campaign against Nikol Pashinyan's family.

On February 21, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. On the same day, the court rejected the motion to secure the lawsuit, freezing Dareskizb Ltd.’s assets in the claimed amount of 1 million AMD and removing the impugned article from the website. The plaintiff appealed this decision in the Court of Appeals on March 6, which was rejected on April 9. Hearings on the case were held on July 13 and December 3, with the next one scheduled for on January 15, 2021.

**On February 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of businessman *Vahe Parazyan v. Virtual Media Ltd.*, the founder of Slaq.am website, *and Menua Harutyunyan*, the founder of the company, claiming a public apology, refutation of the defamatory information, and a compensation of the damage to honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, under the heading “Follow-up on a scandalous incident. Narek Karapetyan Shares Details” published on the website on July 17, 2019, with a video attached to it.[[48]](#footnote-48) Court hearings were held on April 14, July 8, October 19, and the lawsuit was rejected on November 4.

The businessman has initiated **another lawsuit,** this time against Armenia TV CJSC, journalist Shake Ghazaryan and lawyer Armen Feroyan. This lawsuit was caused by the publications about the incidents between businessmen Vahe Parazyan and Samvel Karapetyan. Court hearings on this case were held on March 13, June 26, September 25, November 11, December 7 and 23. January 21 was set as the day of publishing the judgment.

**On February 10**, Infocom.am co-founder Sevak Mamyan alerted the CPFE that Liana Ashrafyan, former principal of Yerevan's Nikol Aghbalyan School No. 19, had threatened to sue Infocom․am’s correspondent Arpi Avetisyan and her mother who taught at the school. The reason was the journalist's activity.[[49]](#footnote-49) Earlier, Arpi Avetisyan had made an inquiry to one of the banks about the position occupied by the former principal's father. “I ask to tell Arpi not to bother my family, and I will hold both of you accountable, I will go to the police,” Liana Ashrafyan had said.

The editorial office also went to the police to report on the threats to the journalist. The police summoned the co-founder of the website Sevak Mamyan, the journalist and her mother for questioning.

**On February 10**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first hearing on the case of Vega World Ltd. against Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., the founder of the *Zhamanak* newspaper, claiming a public refutation of defamatory information, without monetary compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on September 30, 2019, prompted by the article, titled “Planned: SRC was Going to Audit Vega Before the Fire” and published in the August 30 issue of the newspaper.[[50]](#footnote-50)

A court hearing was held on August 26, and on November 23 it was announced that the plaintiff had filed an application on November 12, requesting to dismiss the case, as the defendant had already published a refutation. On December 14, the case was dismissed on the grounds that the plaintiff had withdrawn the lawsuit.

**On February 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz held the first court hearing on the case of *Artak Gevorgyan, the head of Ani community in Shirak region, v. Andranik Gevorgyan,* a resident of Maralik town in the same community, seeking a refutation of slander and compensation. *Zhoghovurd* Newspaper Editorial Office Ltd. (Armlur.am news website) was recognized as a third party to the case.

The lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2019, caused by the phrase "ate it up, robbed it all" in the video and the accompanying text posted on the site on August 10: “The former head robbed the village college and fled. What do people in Maralik tell us?"[[51]](#footnote-51) The plaintiff claims a compensation of 2 million AMD from the defendant.

Court hearings on the case were held on March 26, May 12, June 25, August 13, October 7, November 11, with the next one scheduled for January 27, 2021.

**On February 12**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of *Alvina Gyulumyan*, *a member of the Constitutional Court,* *v. lawyer Tigran Hayrapetyan and the founder of 1in.am news website Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.* with claims of refutation of slander and a compensation of 1 million AMD, to be paid by Tigran Hayrapetyan. The reason for the lawsuit filed on August 7, 2018, was Tigran Hayrapetyan's interview with "1in.am" on July 7, where the latter spoke about the activities of Alvina Gyulumyan in her capacity as ECHR judge, in particular stating that she had made a cunning move to prevent cases versus Armenia to be heard at ECHR.[[52]](#footnote-52) The plaintiff rendered this statement to be slander.

Court hearings were also held on May 4, June 12, July 13, September 25 and 30, November 3, December 14, with the next one scheduled for on January 15, 2021.

**On February 12**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first hearing on the case of *NA Deputy Hayk Sargsyan v. Armday.am Ltd.*, the founder of Armday.am news website, with claims of compensation for the damage to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult. The lawsuit was filed on July 8, 2019, prompted 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 was allegedly ascribed information about night parties. The article also contained information that "Hayk Sargsyan and Pzo are in pretty close relationship, and Sargsyan is trying to comply with criminal rules and regulations."[[53]](#footnote-53)

There were court hearings on the case on March 23, June 8 and 24, August 7, and the claim was partially settled by the judgment of August 28. Armday.am website was obligated to make a public apology to Hayk Sargsyan for the above-mentioned expression. In addition, it was decided to confiscate 100,000 AMD in favor of the deputy as compensation for defamation, 6,000 AMD as state duty, and 100,000 AMD as an attorney reasonable fee. The judicial act was not appealed, and it entered into legal force.

**On February 13,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Region held the first court hearing on the case of *lawyer Hakob Charoyan v. citizen Arthur Mnatsakanyan* (with 1in.am news website involved as the third party) with claims of refuting the information that damaged honor and dignity and compensating the damage caused.

The reason for the lawsuit, filed on October 8, 2019, was an interview by the defendant about the case of Vardan Antonyan, accused of an attempted murder Vahagn from Alaverdi, which specifically contained a statement that the shootings in Akhtala were intended to kill Vahagn from Alaverdi and his supporters.[[54]](#footnote-54)

The plaintiff asked to obligate Artur Mnatsakanyan to give an interview to 1in.am, refuting the information damaging his honor and dignity and business reputation, apologize and compensate for the damage at the value of 2 million AMD.

There were court hearings on the case on March 25 and May 13, and according to the verdict published on May 15, Hakob Charoyan's lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the defendant was only expressing his negative opinion about the plaintiff, which does not tarnish the plaintiff's honor, dignity, and business reputation. Based on this conclusion, the court found that the claim for pecuniary compensation should be rejected. The judicial act was not appealed, and it entered into legal force.

**On February 14**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of *Azat Tovmasyan v. ATV and citizen Sirvard Avoyan*, claiming for acknowledging the violation of the right to privacy and family, obligating the defendant to refute the information deemed defamatory and compensating at the value of 2 million AMD.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on November 22, 2018, and was caused by an accusation addressed at Azat Tovmasyan during the *Half-Open Windows* on July 30, 2018. Sirvard Avoyan accuses the father, Azat Tovmasyan, of abducting his daughter.[[55]](#footnote-55) (For details see the CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 and 2019, in the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am website).

Court sessions were also held on March 20, June 17, September 18, November 20, and on December 10, the lawsuit was dismissed on the grounds that the plaintiff had not substantiated that the submitted factual data had disgraced his honor, dignity or business reputation.

**On February 14**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of *citizen Babken Ghazaryan v. Daniel Ioannisyan*, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens with claims of refutation of and compensation for information considered slander. The suit was caused by Daniel Ioannisyan's statement accusing NSS Director Arthur Vanetsyan of having connections with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan known as "Vestrechi Aper" and Babken Ghazaryan known as "Tokhmakhi Babo", calling them "criminal authorities" at Media Center on May 22.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Court hearings were held on April 10, June 16, August 26, October 8, December 4, and on December 24 the court partially settled the claim. Accordingly, Daniel Ioannisyan was obligated to deny the information about Babken Ghazaryan in the presence of the media, pay 200,000 AMD to the plaintiff as compensation for damage to his dignity through slander, 8,000 AMD as state duty, and100,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

**On February 15**, the Ararat regional department of the Compulsory Enforcement Service applied to Aravot.am news website, claiming a refutation of the article, titled "The conflict between Alik Sargsyan and Vardges Hovakimyan has a history of many years" and published in the July 6, 2018 issue of the *Armenian Times.*[[57]](#footnote-57) The website quoted the article in the *Armenian Times* in the *Press Review* section, adhering to the code of ethics, it did not repeat the insulting remarks contained in the original source. On July 24, *Aravot Daily* Ltd. received a letter from Gevorg Balyan, a Judge at the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes, in which he, too, claimed a refutation of the same publication.

This demand for refutation by the state body is unfounded and can be qualified as an attempt to put pressure on the media outlet.

**On February 18**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of the *Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia v. the Zhamanak daily*, claiming for a public refutation of the information, considered defamatory.

The lawsuit filed on January 11, 2019, was caused by an article published in the *Zhamanak* daily on December 12, 2018, under the headline “No control whatsoever: guards earn money for keeping cell doors open in penitentiary institutions” [[58]](#footnote-58)

There were court hearings on the case on April 23, September 22, November 25, and the judgment made on December 10 settled the claim. The defendant, the *Zhamanak daily,* was obligated to publish a refutation.

**On February 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Marz (seat in Vanadzor) held a regular court hearing on the case of the *teacher Susanna Sargsyan v. Shushanna Grigoryan, the correspondent of Hraparak.am website.*

We should remind that the case is being re-examined in the court of first instance. The lawsuit was caused by articles, titled “Head of Vanadzor School N8 was Fired”[[59]](#footnote-59) (October 4, 2013) and “A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time”[[60]](#footnote-60) (December 5, 2013) and published on Hraparak.am (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 and the quarterly reports for 2020 in the *Reports* section on the khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were held on March 5, April 9 and 28, May 12, and June 16. The case was reassigned on August 26, on September 1 the case was accepted for proceedings by the new judge, and a court session was held on November 18. The next one was scheduled for March 2, 2021.

**On February 18**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first 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 Ltd. with claims of compensation for damage caused to honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled “Someone related to SRC Deputy Head Appointed as Head of the Operational Intelligence Department” and published in the *Zhamanak* on July 5. The article contained an impugned statement as follows: “... Before this appointment, Karen Karapetyan, Valeri Osipyan's godfather, was the head of the operational intelligence department at SRC. He left against the backdrop of a corruption scandal.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

Court hearings on the case were held on April 20 and July 6. On July 20, the court ruled to uphold Karen Karapetyan’s lawsuit against Skizb Media Ltd. The latter was obligated to publish a refutation and to pay 150000 AMD to the plaintiff as an attorney’s reasonable fee. The following substantiation underlay the judgment: no position or proof had been presented by the defendant on the facts he provided, and the position of the plaintiff showed that the correlation of his resignation and a corruption scandal, in fact, had damaged his honor and dignity. The judgment entered into legal force.

**On February 19,** Hraparak.am website wrote that Andranik Kocharyan, Chairman of the NA Standing Committee on Defense and Security, manifested a discriminatory and unpleasant attitude towards some journalists during a briefing: "... he regularly complained about the questions raised by the journalists, tried to prevent us from asking questions, hindered the Q&A, and after every question he leaned towards Naira Zohrabyan, the facilitator of the briefing, and muttered something in her ear with a displeased look in his eyes. His whisper was quite audible in the hall, and we could hear that Kocharyan was complaining about Zohrabyan’s manner of facilitation, namely, why she allowed the journalists of the oppositional media to pose questions to the head of the General Headquarters."[[62]](#footnote-62)

**On February 19**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of David Adyan, Head of Social Sector Control of the RA State Control Service, against Skizb Media Kentron Ltd. as founder and publisher of the *Zhamanak* daily. We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia” and published in the May 9 issue of the daily newspaper.[[63]](#footnote-63) The plaintiff is seeking a refutation of the information contained in the article, a public apology and a compensation of 2 million AMD for defamation, and 1 million AMD for insult.

Court sessions on the case were also held on April 9, June 4, and July 8, and on July 29, the claim was partially settled. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd. was obligated to publish a refutation, it was ruled to confiscated 4,000 AMD, the amount of the state fee, in favor of David Adyan, along with 50,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. The plaintiff's claim for a compensation of 3 million AMD was rejected. On September 4, the defendant appealed the judgment of the first instance court to a higher court. On September 23, the appeal was returned due to incompliance with the law. The plaintiff filed another appeal on October 14, which was accepted for proceedings on October 22. January 15, 2021, is appointed for the publication of the judicial act.

**On February 19**, the Civil Court of Appeals rejected Norik Sargsyan’s appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance, which dismissed the case of a group of lecturers at the Armenian State University of Economics against Norik Sargsyan, while the claim of one of the lecturers, namely Lyuba Mehrabyan, was settled and the *Aravot* daily was obligated to publish a refutation.

We should remind that the claim was caused by Norik Sargsyan’s articled, titled “An Open Letter to Mr. K. Atoyan, Rector of the Armenian State University of Economics” published in the *Hraparak* daily on April 15, 2016, and “Where the Shoe Pinches” published in the *Aravot* daily on June 15. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Defendant Norik Sargsyan filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal on December 9, 2019, claiming that the court of first instance had not examined and had not considered some pieces of evidence in its judgment.

According to the Court of Appeals, however, the defendant's statements published in the *Aravot* daily were defamatory in nature, and the defendant initially pursued the purpose of defaming the plaintiff's honor and dignity, with an intent to demean and humiliate the plaintiff. That is why the Court of Appeal upheld the decision of the first instance. On July 8, the Court of Cassation, too, rejected Norik Sargsyan’s appeal due to insufficient reasoning.

On December 17, the *Aravot* daily received an order from the Compulsory Enforcement Service on December 14 to initiate enforcement proceedings. According to the order, the court had *Aravot* daily Ltd. to publish a refutation on Norik Sargsyan’s behalf. However, the court had not not obligated Norik Sargsyan to refute anything within this case, as there was no such claim by the plaintiff. And Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code establishes that only the defendant can refute the information as he was the author of the letter published in the daily. The daily considered the compulsion of the Compulsory Enforcement Service unnecessary pressure and refused to publish a refutation.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**On February 19**, citizen Ara Sukiasyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Shamshyan.com news website, claiming for 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. [[65]](#footnote-65)

On February 28, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. It was re-submitted on March 18, but was returned on March 27 for the same reason. Lawsuits were again filed on February 28, March 18 and April 16 and all were returned on the following grounds: “Given the fact that the plaintiff's motion on the exemption from the payment of the state fee should be rejected, since no privilege is provided for by the law in this case, the Court found that the lawsuit and the attached documents, too, should be returned to the plaintiff.” On May 23, the plaintiff appealed to the Civil Court of Appeals, and on June 15, the Court of Appeals decided to uphold the appeal, overturning the decision of the first instance and 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 September 8,Ara Sukiasyan’s third lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The preliminary court hearing is scheduled for February 11, 2021.

**On February 20**, ORSIS ARMS Ltd. filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Public Television of Armenia, seeking refutation. The plaintiff's representative Alexander Sirunyan informed the CPFE that the reason for the lawsuit was the news published on Public TV on February 11, according to which ORSIS ARMS Ltd. deceived the army and sold hunting weapons instead of combat arms.[[66]](#footnote-66) As a matter of fact, as the author of the news piece Gevorg Tosunyan told the CPFE, the video contains the company’s clarification on the matter.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on March 5, a court session was held on November 5, with the next one scheduled for February 17, 2021.

**On February 24,** Bari Samaratsi Ltd. filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against journalist Teresa Asatryan (Sargsyan), demanding a refutation and a compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation. Bats TV Ltd. was involved in the case as third party. The reason for the lawsuit was Teresa Asatryan's statement about Bari Samaratsi’s production, voiced during *Bats Or* program, according to which this meat product was inedible, even though it was told to be a leader on the market, because its owner was in close relations with Serzh Sargsyan. The plaintiff claims that this is not true, and demands 2 million AMD in compensation. On March 2, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court hearings initially scheduled for June 11, September 15, and November 24 were postponed, and the next one is scheduled for February 9, 2021.

**On February 24**, the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Lara Aharonyan, head of the Women's Resource Center NGO against Mirror Club and Live News Media Ltd., seeking compensation of damage to her honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD. The lawsuit was caused by a video with the heading “Member of the CC Board of Trustees Lara Aharonyan Involved in Sexual Profanity of Childern: Hayk Ayvazyan” published on April 24, 2019, in which one of the guests of Mirror 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.

Court sessions were also held on April 28, July 14, October 6, November 30, with the next one scheduled for March 2, 2021.

**On February 24,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (seat in Masis) held a regular hearing of the case of Nver Mnatsakanyan, a journalist and anchor at 1in.am website against Mirror Club and Garnik Isagulyan, with claims of a public apology and publication of the judgment in the media.

The reason for the lawsuit was the video under the heading of “Hey, Nver, aren’t you ashamed: you will serve whoever pays you: Garnik Isagulyan” published on Hayeli.am website on April 14, where the latter made his assessment on a number of processes in Armenia, including Nver Mnatsakanyan's activity.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Court hearings on the case were held on April 27, August 6 and October 20. The next session is scheduled for February 22, 2021.

**On February 25**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of citizen Hayk Mkrtchyan against ArmNews TV CJSC, with claims of refution of the data considered defamatory and compensation of the damage caused.

The reason for the lawsuit filed on May 13, 2019, was the news published in the above-mentioned media outlet, stating that Hayk Mkrtchyan, a 32-year-old resident of Yerevan's Nor Nork administrative district, used counterfeit banknotes. The plaintiff considers this a slander and demands a refutation.

Court hearings were held on July 15, August 17, October 26, with the next one scheduled for March 2, 2021.

**On February 25**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing 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 cause of the lawsuit, filed on February 13, 2019, was an article, titled "Who Sponsors Sarukhan Mayor and Prevents Preliminary Investigation Since August."[[69]](#footnote-69)

Court sessions on the case were also held on April 8, June 23, September 30, with the next one scheduled for February 25, 2021.

**On February 25**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of theRA Health Minister's spokesperson Alina Nikoghosyan against *Hraparak* daily Ltd. with claims of public apology and confiscation of 1 million AMD as compensation.

The cause of the lawsuit, filed on June 3, 2019, is an article published on Hraparak.am on May 9 under the heading "Ministry of Health Conceals What Happened and Practices Protectionism for Lfik."[[70]](#footnote-70)

According to the judgment, published on March 17, the claim was partially settled. The defendant was obliged to apologize to plaintiff Alina Nikoghosyan publishing the text of refutation as 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 an attorney’s reasonable fee. On May 8, the defendant filed a complaint with the Civil Court of Appeals. The latter rejected it on September 25, considering that the appellant's arguments were unfounded. On October 28, the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation, where the case was received for proceedings on November 17. No other developments were registered as of December 31.

**On February 26**, the Court of Cassation rejected and did not accept for proceedings the appeal of Lydian Armenia CJSC against the rejection of the appeal by the Court of Appeals. We should remind that the subject of dispute is the decision of the first instance court to reject the motion to secure the claim within the case of Lydian Armenia CJSC against Atom Margaryan and “Lragir.am” online newspaper by means of freezing of the defendant’s assets. It was upheld and kept unchanged by the Court of Cassation, too.

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, titled "In case of impartial investigation, Lydian's leaders will face a problem" and published on “Lragir.am” on September 15.[[71]](#footnote-71)

By the way, on June 15, a counterclaim was filed, claiming compensation of the damage caused to the honor, dignity, business reputation, and the pre-paid state duty. The counterclaim was returned once and was later accepted for proceedings on July 28. Sessions on the case were also held on June 16, September 4, with the next one scheduled for March 10, 2021.

**On February 27**, Acting Head of the State Control Service Argishti Kyaramyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan 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 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 bodies inspected. They say that he especially succeds in finding common ground with the representatives of the old regime.” [[72]](#footnote-72)

The lawsuit was accepted on March 12, hearings were held on June 17 and August 27, and on September 11, the court dismissed the case, based on the motion of the plaintiff's representative to waive the claims.

**On February 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the lawsuit of actress Ani Yeranyan against BlogNews.am news website and its founder Datablog Ltd., seeking an obligation of public apology, and ruled to confiscate 500000 AMD in favor of Datablog Ltd. as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

We should remind that on January 9, 2019, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction accepted the lawsuit filed by actress Ani Yeranyan against BlogNews.am news website's chief editor Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan and Karen Antinyan, director of Datablog Ltd., on obliging them to public apology. The reason for the lawsuit was the published information about Ani Yeranyan's personal life, in particular the following expression: "Ani Yeranyan seems to follow Meline Daluzyan's path".[[73]](#footnote-73) By the court decision as of September 26, the case was split into 2 between BlogNews.am and Datablog episodes. In case of BlogNews.am, the case was dismissed. (For details see CPFE’s annual report for 2019 and quarterly reports for 2020 in the *Reports* section of khosq.am website).

The plaintiff did not file an appeal against the decision of the court of first instance in relation to Datablog Ltd.

**On February 28,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first hearing on the case of Lydian Armenia CJSC against Skizb Media Ltd., the founder of 1in.am news website, claiming for a compensation of the damage caused to the good business reputation of the company.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit, filed on October 11, 2019, was the article, titled "What is the way out? Armen Sargsyan can change the situation" published on 1in.am news website where the author specifically wrote as follows: “It is obvious, for example, that a comprehensive legal and political assessment of the former system's performance will inevitably affect Lydian, who has, of course, obtained the right to exploit the mine as a result of corrupt deals and such arrangements that the current Armenian government may terminate the deal, having in general all the political and legal grounds for doing so." The plaintiff claims a confiscation of only one AMD from the defendant as compensation for the damage caused to the business reputation of the company.

Court hearings on the case were also held on April 17, July 10, September 18, and on October 12 the court decided to satisfy the lawsuit, obligating the defendant to publish a refutation, confiscate 1 AMD in favor of the plaintiff as compensation for defamation, and 5500 AMD to pay the state duty. The judicial act was not appealed and entered into force.

**On March 15**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction ruled to launch new proceedings on the case of businessman Ashot Grigoryan vs. 24 News Ltd., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tigran Seyranyan, seeking compensation for the damage to one’s honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by a video under the heading of “Chance Comer in Yerevan: Who is the Big Schemer, Initiating the Restart of Nairit?” that was published on the YouTube channel of the website.[[74]](#footnote-74)

The lawsuit was first filed on August 27, 2018, it was accepted for proceedings on September 6, with no further developments. All sessions on the case in the reporting year were postponed, with the next one scheduled for February 3, 2021.

**On March 3,** lawyer Aram Orbelyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Republic of Armenia, in the person of the National Security Service and the Public Television of Armenia CJSC, claiming 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 logged.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on March 30. The hearings on the case took place on July 3, September 25, October 9, November 13, with the next one scheduled for January 29, 2021.

**On March 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of attorneys Lusine Sahakyan, Aramazd Kiviryan, and Armen and Armine Poghosyan against Lakmoes.am founder Lakmoes NGO and Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., claiming compensation for the damage caused to their honor, dignity, business reputation and the infringements on their right to privacy in their personal and family life. We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 15, 2019, caused by an article, titled "‘Hunters’ for Diaspora Armenians Seize the Military Doctor’s Son" published on Lakmoes.am website on December 3, 2018, and 1in.am on December 4, 2018.

Court hearings were held on July 3, October 7, November 3, whereas November 24 was appointed as the day of the judicial act publication, yet it was not published on Datalex information platform as of December 31.

**On March 10**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session 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 that the suit was triggered by the February 22 edition of Half-Open Windows TV show. The topic was the lawsuit, pending for 20 years and the hassle caused allegedly by Emma Kirakosyan herself. [[76]](#footnote-76)

Court sessions on the case were also held on June 9 and 22, and the judgment passed on July 10 rejected the claim. According to the judgment, Emma Kirakosyan was obligated to pay 44,000 AMD into the state budget as a deferred state duty and 50,000 AMD as an attorneys reasonable fee. The Court found that the broadcast contained a number of evaluative judgments made by several citizens who had exercised their rights in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of which freedom of expression is a part. As for Emma Kirakosyan's request to obligate the TV company to refute the factual data defaming her honor and dignity, the Court found that the statements forming the factual basis of the lawsuit were made by the citizens who were defendants in this case, and in case the claim was potentially settled, they should be the ones to refute that information.

On August 17 the defendant appealed this judgment at the Court of Appeals. The appeal was accepted for proceedings on October 7, settling the claim on December 18 – the judgment of the first instance court was overturned and the lawsuit was returned to the same court for a new examination.

**On March 10,** journalist Hasmik Arakelyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the repeal the orders No. 90-A, 106-A, 147-A on administering sanctions against Armenian Public Television CJSC. On March 19, the lawsuit was returned because the data contained in the documents proved incomplete. On April 27, the journalist filed a lawsuit again, and it was accepted for proceedings on April 29. Several hearings scheduled for the case were postponed with the next one scheduled for January 27, 2021.

A week later, on March 17, the journalist filed a second lawsuit against Public Television to have 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. By the decision of the court, this lawsuit was returned for corrections on March 20. On April 29, it was resubmitted and was accepted for proceedings on May 5. Court sessions on the case were held on July 7, 21 and 27. The date of the next session was not scheduled as of December 31.

**On March 11**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen Yura Adyan against NewsAM Ltd. (News.am website), seeking refutation of slander and 2 million AMD in compensation.

The reason for the lawsuit filed on August 16, 2019, was the article, titled “The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia,” published in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily newspaper that was reprinted by the website.

Court hearings were also held on June 24, October 12, November 20, with the next one scheduled for February 12, 2021.

**On March 13**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary hearing on the case of former NSS intelligence colonel Eduard Harutyunyan against former MP Taron Sahakyan (First News Agency Ltd., the founder of 1in.am website was involved as the third party), seeking a public apology for the insult, as well as refutation of defamatory information and a compensation. We should remind that the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on July 3, 2019, caused by an article, titled “The Harutyunyans dynasty is still rooted in the state administration system: who occupies a post, which one and where?”[[77]](#footnote-77)

Court hearings were also held on June 26, September 16, November 16, with the next one scheduled for February 8, 2021.

**On March 13,** citizen Entsa Davtyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Shamshyan Media Ltd., claiming a public apology, obligation to refute and monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "An extraordinary case in Yerevan. Police are looking for 31-year-old Entsa forcing his wife to have sex with strangers and give him the money for 4 years” [[78]](#footnote-78) and published on Shamshyan.com website on February 11.

On March 23, the lawsuit and the attached documents were returned by the decision of the court.

**On March 20**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian Progressive Youth NGO v. Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan,* Editor-in-Chief of BlogNews.am and the founder of Channel 5 TV Company, SHARK Ltd., with claims of refution of a defamatory statement, apology for insult and compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit filed on May 6, 2019, was caused by a statement made by Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan at “Channel 5”'s "Face to Face" TV show edition of April 5 that Progressive Youth NGO implemented LGBT campaign in a Kotayk region school.[[79]](#footnote-79) (For details see the *Reports* section on khosq.am website.)

Court hearings were also held on June 19, August 19, November 18, with the next one scheduled for March 5, 2021.

**On March 20,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on the case of former Vayots Dzor Governor Trdat Sargsyan against *Hraparak* Daily Ltd., claiming refutation of the information considered slander and confiscation of 2 million AMD as compensation.

We should remind that the suit 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.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Court hearings were held on May 5, June 17, the date of the next hearing was not set as of December 31.

**On March 21**, Mediaroom.am website was hacked. Harutyun Mkrtchyan, the editor of the website, informed that 100,000 Chinese and Malaysian IPs per second attacked, and that specialists worked all night to resolve the issue. Eventually, the website was restored.

**On March 23**, Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of the Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) faction in the National Assembly, demonstrated a disrespectful attitude towards journalists. In response to the question posed by Ani Gevorgyan from Tert.am as to what he was doing as an employer and whether he was paying his employees for the idle time due to the coronavirus pandemic, Tsarukyan said: “Get concerned about your employers.” And in response to Public Television journalist Shoghik Galstyan’s clarifying question, whether the businessman was not going to pay for the forced idle time, Tsarukyan answered: "Hey, girlie, how long can you keep this empty talk going on?"[[81]](#footnote-81)

**On March 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of citizen *Yura Adyan v. Mitk Media Ltd.* (the founder of Mitk.am website), claiming refutation of slander and a compensation of 2 million AMD. The lawsuit was cuased by the article “The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia” published in the May 9, 2019 issue of the *Zhamanak* newspaper, also reprinted by the website.

Court hearings were held on July 2 and October 5, and on October 9 the court decided to suspend the case pending the issuance of a final court judgment on the case of *Yura Adyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.* (*Zhamanak* daily).

**On March 25**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Syunik Marz held a regular court hearing on the case of Senior Investigator of Syunik Regional Investigation Department *Narek Abgaryan v. former Mayor of Meghri Arshavir Hovhannisyan* (with Syunyats Ashkharh Ltd., founder of the *Syunyats Yerkir* newspaper as the third party to the 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 was filed on July 16, 2019, caused by the insulting statements made by Arshavir Hovhannisyan about Narek Abgaryan, published in the June 16 issue of the *Syunyats Yerkir* regional newspaper.

Court hearings were also held on June 18, and on August 28 the case was reassigned from Goris residence to Meghri residence. As of December 31, there were no other developments.

**On March 26**, the Civil Court of Appeals upheld the appeal of citizen Armen Khachatryan against the decision of the Court of First Instance, which decided to dismiss the case and levy 100 thousand AMD from the citizen.

We should remind that on September 10, 2018, citizen Armen Khachatryan filed a lawsuit against editor-in-chief of the *Irates* newspaper Piruza Meliksetyan, claiming public refutation of slander. The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled "The goal is to see a Gay Catholic on the Enlightener’s throne which will destroy not only the church but will also become the end of the Armenian gene,"**[[82]](#footnote-82)** published on Irates.am on July 17, 2018. On October 10, the case was dismissed based on the plaintiff's request.

The decision of the first instance court on levying a state duty was overturned by the Court of Appeals.

***Pressures Applied Agaianst Media Outlets and Journalists during the State of Emergency due to COVID-19***

**On March 18**, the Aravot.am news website reported that citing the government decree on the State of Emergency, the Police had asked to remove the news piece that contained Russian political scientist Valery Solovey’s commentary on the spread of coronavirus in Russia, broadcast on *Ekho Moskvi* radio station. By the way, the Police demanded to remove only the Armenian version of the news piece.

**On March 18**, Police Colonel A. Karapetyan sent a letter to the *Hraparak* daily, demanding to remove the news on the lack of cigarettes in prisons from the newspaper and from the homonymous website. According to that publication, the editorial office had received a call from Armavir penitentiary institution, informing that a revolt was brewing among the convicts because of the ban on receiving parcels from relatives due to the state of emergency. Notifications, resulting in the removal of news pieces related to the state of emergency, were received by Mamul.am and Iravunk.com websites, since the latter had republished this news.

**On March 19,** the Cybercrime Department of the RA Police paid a visit to the editorial office of the *Iravunk* newspaper and informed that the article published on page 5 of the March 18 issue of the *Iravunk* newspaper, titled “Coronovirus caused serious shocks in the United States and Europe” as well as the publication, titled "I did not create that virus, I am surprised at how evil and heartless people are: The woman from Etchmiadzin, who arrived from Italy, opens up brackets." and pubished on Iravunk.com at 14:48 on March 18, in fact, contained a risk of causing panic among the population and had to be removed immediately.

**On March 20**, the RA Police sent an e-mail to the editorial office of the *Hraparak* newspaper to notify that it was necessary to remove the Facebook post, made by the former Prime Minister Hrant Bagratyan, which was republished on the newspaper's homonymous website and already had 25,000 views. In addition, the Police demanded to remove 2 publications, namely "Weddings and Funerals Attended by Several Hundred People Continue. No Control Whatsoever” and “A Woman Sick with the Coronavirus Calls for PPE use and Warns against Self-Treatment.”

**On March 20,** Satik Seyranyan, editor of the 168.am website, told Aravot.am: "Yesterday they called from the 6th department of the Police, tried to force our employee to remove the material, namely the publication, quoting Hrant Bagratyan's Facebook post, from our website. I demanded that there be only a written notice, because we will need some grounds for the future and they must substantiate and explain why they demand the removal of that material. "

Notifications, seeking the removal of Hrant Bagratyan's Facebook post, were also sent to Armday.am, Hayeli.am and Yerkir.am websites.

**On March 20**, the RA Police demanded the removal of journalist Marine Kharatyan's Facebook post, which stated that some employers forced employees who were running a fever to show up. The journalist also told about the probability of having the coronavirus spread in one of the large factories in Yerevan. In a conversation with Aravot.am news website, Marine Kharatyan said that at first the police called and asked to remove the post. The journalist told us as follows: “I replied that I had been asked to help, how could I remove it? They said that if I did not remove it, they would hold me administratively liable. At first, I said I would consider it. A few hours later, the police came to our house and said, "On behalf of the Commandant we would like to ask you to remove the post and showed the decree on the state of emergency." I asked what if I didn't remove it. They said they would not leave until we removed it.”

**On March 20**, Araratnews.am editor-in-chief Harutyun Mkrtchyan announced on his Facebook page that he had been asked by the Commandant’s Office to remove journalist Marine Kharatyan's post, stating that some employers forced employees running a fever to show up. The editor had to fulfil the demand.

**On March 20,** Tert.am's editor-in-chief Aram Antinyan told Aravot.am that since the declaration of the state of emergency, the police had already forced them to remove 4 pieces, contacting them directly. For example, the editor was asked to remove a material where Hollywood actor Idris Elba did not rule out the possibility that he had contracted the infection from the first lady of Canada. In another notification, the RA Police demanded that the material, which stated that a citizen who arrived in Russia from Armenia tested positive for the coronavirus be removed from the website. By the way, the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the news hours later. The editor said that he did not agree with the claim that the pieces the Police forced to remove were panic-mongering. “Of course we remove them, but on the condition of challenging these decisions in the future.”

**On March 20**, the Police sent a notification to Infocom.am website, demanding the removal of an article, titled “Coronavirus. A Real Threat or Handy Panic?” In that publication, the author Suren Sahakyan analyzes the data related to the global pandemic. However, the publication was not removed from the website.

**On March 20**, the Police sent a notice to the editorial office of Yerevan.today to remove the news report, titled "An Armenian died of coronavirus infection in Pasadena", but the publication was not removed from the website. By the way, the news was copied from Asbarez.com website.

**On March 20,** Aravot.am news website reported that the Commandant’s Office had asked to remove the article, titled “An Elderly Resident of Etchmiadzin Is Diagnosed with Pneumonia, Runs a Fever but is neither Tested nor Hospitalized” from Pastinfo.am.

**On March 21**, Mamul.am website published Facebook user Artak Shirinyan’s post with the caption: “Nothing in Zvartnots Could Hint at the So-Called Quarantine.” The Police sent a notification to the editorial office to remove it, however, the news piece was not removed from the website.

**On March 28**, Blognews.am website published an article, composed by Narek Malyan and titled: "A man died three days ago without being tested. In our country, the tests are not for sick villagers, but for healthy Soros-supporters.” The website received a notification from the Police on this matter. However, the website did not remove the publication.

**On March 31**, Hraparak.am published the news of the *Hraparak* daily with the headline "Lockdown Continues", where unofficial information about the number of isolated people from Alapars village in Kotayk region was published, referring to anonymous sources. The Police sent a notification to remove this publication, but, unlike other cases, the editorial office did not remove this one.

The Police sent notifications on 5 reports, which were removed from the Internet. Two of them were on News.am, and one article was removed from Lurer.com, Zham.am, Hraparak.am websites each.

**On April 13**, the editor of Pastinfo.am website Sona Truzyan alerted that the Police had initiated administrative proceedings against Pastinfo.am for copying information from another media outlet, stating that a patient at Martuni Medical Center had a coronavirus infection.[[83]](#footnote-83) No demand was made by the Commandant’s office to remove it, nor any refutation or clarification on the matter was sent. Later, according to the editor, Pastinfo.am 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." [[84]](#footnote-84)

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 July 3,** the Police visited ArmNews and Channel 5 TV companies, aiming to initiate administrative proceedings for not wearing a mask on air. The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations considered the incident to be an abuse of power by the law enforcement agency, as the issue of restrictions on air could be resolved in other ways, namely through discussions and mutual agreements.[[85]](#footnote-85)

**It is noteworthy that in all the cases no sanction was applied to the editorial offices that failed to remove the questioned publications.**

**\* \* \***

**On April 1,** the owner of Channel 5 TV company Armen Tavadyan filed a lawsuit with 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.”[[86]](#footnote-86)

The defendant claimed that the quote was not accurate and that his statement was distorted.

The suit was accepted into proceedings on April 10. Court sessions on the case were held on June 22, August 26 and 28, November 3 and 23, with the next one scheduled for February 22, 2021.

**On April 1,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on *Vahe Parazyan v, Tert.am Ltd.*, 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 Past”, and published on the website on July 16.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Court sessions were held on August 12, November 9, December 7 and 23, with the next one scheduled for January 29, 2021.

**On April 2,** Gevorg Gorgisyan, a MP of the National Assembly, submitted a lawsuit to the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan against the *Chorrord Ishkhanutyun* news outlet (4rd.am website) with claims of 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 on 4rd.am on Feburay 29, titled “Gorgisyan could be a pickpocket.”[[88]](#footnote-88) “We officially declare that unless Michael Minasyan has established the Bright Armenia Party and but for 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. Court hearings took place on July 23, September 8, 24 and 30, October 23, and December 8. The next court session was not scheduled as of December 31.

**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 the 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 feels angry when Anna calls hima “Someone who held a bottle for Nikol” and who is constantly suing 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.’”

Court hearings were also held on June 10, November 26, with the next one scheduled for February 16, 2021.

**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 obligating the defendant to apologize, refute the defamatory data and confiscating a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled “Nikol Pashinyan talked to Artur Vardanyan during his campaign” and published on March 6.[[89]](#footnote-89) The website wrote: “In the course of the campaign, as noted by the active Facebook 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 7,the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeals, on June 24, the appeal was rejected. On July 10, citizen Arthur Vardanyan filed a **second** lawsuit in court. A court session was held on October 1, with the next one scheduled on February 23, 2021.

**On April 8,** Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court held the first session on the case of theformer NSS Intelligence Colonel *Eduard Harutyunyan v. former NA deputy Taron Sahakyan* (founder of A1plus.am website Meltex Ltd. is third person to the case) with claims of public apology for insult, refutation of information considered slander and compensation.

The suit was filed on September 18, 2019, 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." [[90]](#footnote-90)

Court hearings on the case on August 24 and November 16, with the next one scheduled for February 8, 2021.

**On April 8,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on the lawsuit of citizen *Ashot Parazyan v. Tert.am Ltd.*, 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.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Court hearings were also held on August 24, November 18, December 16 and 23. The day of the publication of the judicial act was scheduled for January 21, 2021.

**On April 9,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular session on the lawsuit of citizen Gagik Gevorkyan v. the founder of *the Armenian Times* daily Dareskibz Ltd. and three other citizens with claims of refuting the information damaging honor and dignity and paying a compensation for insult and slander. The reason for the lawsuit, filed on July 24 and accepted for proceedings on September 30, was an article, titled "They are trying to take advantage of our patriotism and deceive us." Serzh Sargsyan's adviser 'dumped' a Canadian-Armenian businessman”[[92]](#footnote-92) published in the *Armenian Times* on May 22 and on Armtimes.com website on May 24.

In 2020, court hearings were held on July 28, September 18, November 25, with the next session scheduled for March 16, 2021.

**On April 10**, Exclusive Store Ltd. 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, where she called to the public not to buy phones or accessories in the shops belonging to the company 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 and November 5, with the next session scheduled for February 2, 2021.

**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 Ltd. 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.[[93]](#footnote-93) Accordingly, it was stated that the manager of Ginats restaurant Sevada Khachatryan gave an interview to the media outlet, where, according to the plaintiff, he presented obviously false and slanderous information in his address.

On April 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was held on July 27, and on November 4, it was decided to leave the lawsuit without examination on the grounds that the plaintiff, having been duly notified of the two consecutive preliminary hearings, had not shown up without any prior notice to the Court.

**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 v. ATV Ltd., claiming 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 edition of the Half-Open Window program on the aforementioned TV channel, uploaded onto the Internet on October 1, 2018, about a housing dispute between neighbors.[[94]](#footnote-94)

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. No other developments were recorded as of December 31.

**On April 19**, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced live on Facebook: "Now they are not afraid of being punched and beaten secretly. Even 90 percent of the media and 70 percent of the journalists received money from the government, and now everyone is furious that they received it before, now they do not receive it or if they still do, they are scared of taking the money… 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 would deem these 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 articles published on the *Yerevan.Today* website owned by the company on March 26 ("Arevik Anapiosyan Speaks about Her Involvement in the Case under Investigation by the NSS and Her Resignation")[[95]](#footnote-95) and on April 8 ("NSS confirms it is investigating a criminal case against MoESCS officials”).[[96]](#footnote-96) The articles stated that the NSS was 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.

On September 29, Arevik Anapiosyan filed a motion to prohibit the defendant Media Plus Ltd. from disseminating any information about the plaintiff in relation to this case until the judgment entered into legal force. Media Plus Ltd. objected, stating that it was a means of restricting free expression. The court rejected the plaintiff's motion. The next court session is scheduled on February 18, 2021.

**On April 21,** the Court ofGeneral Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the suit of *citizen Narine Abrahamyan v. journalist Kristine Aghalaryan,* seeking a public refutation of defamatory factual information and compensation. We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit, filed on June 2, 2017, was an article, titled "Meghri Medical Center Against the State Revenue Committee" on Lurer.com website, published on May 17, 2017, which described Narine Abrahamyan in the spotlight of numerous scandals during her career.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Court sessions were also held on September 14, December 24, with the next one scheduled for April 8, 2021.

**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’s annaul report for 2019 in the Reports section of khosq.am website).

Court hearings were also held on September 9 and October 22, with the next one scheduled for January 27, 2021.

**On April 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction in Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes reassigned 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 by means of a public address via a Facebook live from the same location (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 – 2019 in the *Reports* section of khosq.am website).

On May 15, the reasssigned case was accepted for proceedings, court hearings were held on December 23 and 25. On the day of the last session, the court rejected the defendant's motion for the judge’s recusal.

**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 an article, titled "What does Erik Grigoryan have to do with Soros's Open Society Foundation" and published on "Analitik.am" website on December 6, 2019.[[98]](#footnote-98) Referring to its own sources, the website wrote 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 rectification. 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 August 12, the journalist filed a complaint against this decision with the Court of Appeals. On September 11, this instance rejected the appeal.

The session in the Court of General Jurisdiction was scheduled for February 17, 2021.

**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 an article, titled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia”, published in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily. The plaintiff seeks a refutation of the statement 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, selling the contracts to other companies after the award.

A hearing on the case was held on September 30, with the next one scheduled for February 11, 2021.

**On April 29**, *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 program hosted by the editor-in-chief of the website Sevak Hakobyan and broadcast jointly by *Yerevan.Today* website and Channel 5, under the title of “Briefly with Sevak”.[[99]](#footnote-99) 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 Mirror 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 were detected, to prepare materials in the prescribed manner.

Based on these materials, a criminal case was initiated at the Police and was sent to the investigation department of Yerevan Kentron and Nork-Marash administrative districts under the RA Investigative Commitee. The case was accepted for proceedings, an inquiry into the matter is underway. The Investigative Committee informed the CPFE that on December 15 the case was suspended on the grounds an “unidenitified offender.”

**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. This act was triggered by an article, titled “Aliyev's late but powerful response to Pashinyan” and 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.[[100]](#footnote-100)

**On May 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of citizen *Lilit Martirosyan v. 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".[[101]](#footnote-101)

According to the judgment published on June 2, Lilit Martirosyan's lawsuit was rejected, 200,000 AMD were confiscated in favor of the defendant as an attorney’s reasonable fee. 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, an 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*).

On July 1, the defendant and on July 7, the plaintiff filed appeals against the decision of the court of first instance. The Court of Appeals accepted the appeals, submitted by the defendant and the plaintiff, on July 21 and September 14 accordingly. On November 13, the appeals of both parties were rejected, and the judgment entered into legal force.

**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 about the company in relation to the wrong declarations and insufficient quality of alcohol-based sanitizer production, expressed during the *Acute Angle* program on the TV channel on April 12.[[102]](#footnote-102)

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. A court session on the case was held on September 3, with the next one scheduled for January 20, 2021.

**On May 12**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction, presided by a different judge, accepted for proceedings the lawsuit filed by the former Chief of Police Vladimir Gasparyan's Chief bodyguard Arshak Hakobyan against Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Director of the Union of Informed Citizens, demanding refutation of information and compensation. The lawsuit, filed on June 6, 2019, was prompted by a statement made by Daniel Ioannisyan at Media center on May 22, where he accused NSS director Arthur Vanetsyan of having relations with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan, nicknamed "Vestrechi Apper" and Babken Ghazaryan, known as "Tokhmakhi Babo" calling them "criminal authorities."[[103]](#footnote-103)

Court hearings on the case took place on July 20, August 19, October 26, with the next one scheduled on February 3, 2021.

**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 non-pecuniary compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation.

The reason for the lawsuit was the article, titled "What is going on in the Ijevan branch of SOS Children's Villages?" published on Iravunk.com website on January 8.[[104]](#footnote-104) The website, citing its own sources, stated that the foundation's employees were engaged in robbery․

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on May 27. Sessions on the case were held on September 24, December 11, with the next one scheduled on March 5, 2021.

**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, titled "A DJ in Healthcare Sector: Circa $ 20,000 to the Minister's Acquaintance” and published on Armlur.am website on July 12.[[105]](#footnote-105) 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 benefitting from the RA state budget." By the way, the article posted on the website contains commentary from Arusyak Mkrtchyan.

A court hearing on the case was also held on September 14, with the next one scheduled for January 18, 2021.

**On May 18,** Ankakh.com was hacked, which resulted in changes in the content of some materials.[[106]](#footnote-106) 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 concrete people."

**On May 18,** the online periodical Hetq.am wrote that the Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan labeled their inquiry as to why one of the government's decisions was retroactively applied to past procurements, “absurd”.[[107]](#footnote-107) "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 noted in particular.

**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 "How did you like it when we took Nikol's brother's son to the resort? Fake Manufacturers."[[108]](#footnote-108) 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 July 7, the court returned Anna Aslanyan’s lawsuit for the second time. On July 27, the case was handed over to the court archive.

**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 paid the restaurant owner to keep silent.[[109]](#footnote-109)

On May 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court rejected the motion to apply a measure to secure the claim by seizing assets. On June 12, the plaintiff filed an appeal against this rejection, which was accepted for proceedings on July 1 and was rejected on July 10. The plaintiff’s arguments that taking measures to secure the claim might lead to the impossibility of enforcing the judicial act were not considered grounded.

The case was heard in the Court of General Jurisdiction on November 27, with the next session scheduled for March 29, 2021.

**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 by Artsrun Igityan, the mayor of Akhuryan consolidated community.[[110]](#footnote-110) 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. Court hearings were held on July 21, September 16, and on September 30 the court decision was left without examination on the grounds that the plaintiff did not show up for two consecutive hearings and did not inform the court about it.

**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?”[[111]](#footnote-111) The article, in particular, refers to the criminal case initiated against Marcos in Armenia, and states the certificate issued by the World Bank helped to reveal that Levon Marcos had 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. A court session is scheduled for March 17, 2021.

**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, and leaves ... How many people who dream of high-ranking positions and complete losers, former gamblers, former pimps, current prostitutes, are not giving themselves away ․․․” According to the CPFE, this is a generalized insult addressed at journalists and an attempt to put pressure on them.

**On May 27**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of NA deputy *Hayk Sargsyan v. 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."

Court sessions were held on July 2 and September 9, with the next session scheduled on January 22, 2021.

**On May 30**, the server of Armversion.am website was hacked. The founder of the website Ruzan Avoyan announced this on Facebook.[[112]](#footnote-112)

**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 29, the plaintiff filed a complaint with the Civil Court of Appeals, which was returned due to non-payment of the state fee. Thus, the judicial act entered into force.

**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 headlines: "This blasphemer who curses the church has now become rector, and contrues the coronavirus using the Bible"[[113]](#footnote-113), “The odyssey of Karen Petrosyan's villainy: how he expelled a young veteran of the April war and how he beat a lecturer,”[[114]](#footnote-114) “Cursing the church is profitable in the times of the incumbent government: see how ragged he was before and how well-off he got ever since he the church,” [[115]](#footnote-115) “Arayik Harutyunyan, are you aware that you have appointed a mentally ill rector who could not even write his own dissertation?”[[116]](#footnote-116)

On June 12, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. As of June 30, no new lawsuit was filed. The second lawsuit was filed on July 8, which was also returned on July 20 for the same reason. The case was handed over to the court archive.

**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 Kentron 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 logistics company for transporting minerals from Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine 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 Kajaran Copper and Molybdenum Company to 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 official and held various positions, greatly contributed to the establishment of the business."[[117]](#footnote-117)

As of June 12, the lawsuit was not accepted for proceedings, and the court session was scheduled for February 19, 2021.

**On June 8**, Newsmedia.am website wrote that Iravunk.com was hacked again.[[118]](#footnote-118) The website suspected that it could be done for political reasons.

**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 "Another Incident with the Participation of Governor of Ararat" published on 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.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Court hearings were held on July 14, August 6, November 12, with the next one scheduled for March 1, 2021.

**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 was an interview on 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 bribery.[[120]](#footnote-120) The plaintiffs demand that both defendants jointly compensate each legal successor in the amount of 2 million AMD for defamation and 1 million AMD for insult.

As of December 31, no developments on the lawsuit were recorded.

**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.[[121]](#footnote-121) The CPFE views this as pressure on the media. The article in question was a piece published under the headline "National Assembly is discussing the bill against Russian TV channels" on News.am website. [[122]](#footnote-122)

**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 was an article, published on August 21 by the *Armenian Times* under the heading “Ararat, Armnews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media, and fakes: which media outlets were “bought” by Kocharyan” [[123]](#footnote-123). According to the plaintiff, a number of expressions in the publications about News.am, as well as the heading of the article caused damage to its business reputation. News AM Ltd. brought a claim of compensation in the amount of 200,000 AMD against the founder of *the Armenian Times*.

The next court session is scheduled for March 11, 2021.

**On June 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on *Anriva Tour Ltd. v. 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* TV show about Anriva-Tour on Public Television channel on July 1, which the plaintiff considers to be defamatory. [[124]](#footnote-124)

The next court hearing was scheduled for March 10, 2021.

**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 (HZham 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.[[125]](#footnote-125) 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.

The court finally accepted the lawsuit on September 1, after returning the lawsuit twice, citing the need for corrections. A preliminary court session was scheduled for March 30, 2021.

**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 refutation and compensation for the damage (3 million AMD) caused to its business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit is an 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. Court hearings on the case were held on October 2 and November 25. The next session was not scheduled as of December 31.

**On June 24**, the *Hraparak* daily's editorial office received a call from the General Department of Criminal Investigation of the RA Police, notifying 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 address the issue of bringing the author to criminal liability. According to the newspaper, the article was publicistic, hence it did not contain any factual data. The central idea was that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan should be removed from office.

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 "... misappropriated the social security benefits of our most needy citizens in close cooperation with the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia ...․" In response to the CPFE's inquiry, the Prosecutor's Office stated that inspections had not revealed any factual data, containing features of an apparent crime, and the case was left unsolved.

**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.[[126]](#footnote-126) It is not clear whether the hackers are from Armenia or abroad. On June 29, the content of the website and its operation were 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. [[127]](#footnote-127) Though the author of the article incorporated the comment from the representative of the construction company, too, the plaintiff does not agree to the complaint, rendered in the article. On July 6, the lawsuit was returned because the plaintiff did not specify which of the expressions used in the article were perceived as slander, what he demanded to refute and in what manner. The lawsuit was filed again on July 22, and returned on July 30 for the same reason.

On August 14, the plaintiff appealed the decision on returning the lawsuit to the Court of Appeals, and on September 30, the appeal was upheld, overturning the decision of the Court of First Instance. On November 19, the case was accepted for proceedings. A court session was scheduled for January 20, 2021.

**On July 1**, Varduhi Ishkhanyan, the founder of Ankakh.com website, was summoned by the RA Police Criminal Investigation Department to give an explanation in connection with the Facebook posts about former RA Military Prosecutor and Deputy Prosecutor General Gagik Jhangiryan. [[128]](#footnote-128) Among them, Varduhi Ishkhanyan called Jhangiryan "the father of electoral fraud" and noted that he was suspected of murders in the army. Varduhi Ishkhanyan refused to come to the Police station.

**On July 1**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted the lawsuit of Livenews.am journalist Arthur Hovhannisyan against the editor-in-chief of the Public TV *Lurer* (News) show Levon Sardaryan, claiming an apology for the insult and a public refutation of the factual data considered defamatory.

The lawsuit was filed on June 22, based on Levon Sardaryan's Facebook comment, dated on May 21, on “The Situation in Armenia is Terrible: some will survive, the rest will die” article published on Livenews.am website. Sardaryan published the title of the article and wrote: “if anyone proves that after all this the owner of this website is a human being, I will agree to live in a barn. But in my subjective opinion, I will let G.I. enjoy the life in the barn.” (G.I. is Garnik Isagulyan, who is identified as the site owner. *Comment by CPFE*). Arthur Hovhannisyan responded to Levon Sardaryan's post and warned that he intended to go to court.

The first court session was scheduled for January 25, 2021.

**On July 6,** the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan received a criminal case from the Prosecutor’s Office of Kentron and Nork-Marash administrative districts against Hasmik Martirosyan, director of Skizb Media Kentron Ltd. who was charged for the deliberate failure of the execution of a legally effective judicial act in the prescribed period.

The matter in question is the execution of the judicial act passed on the case of the second President of the Republic of Armenia *Robert Kocharyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd*. Thus, on January 18, 2019, the Court of General Jurisdiction partially settled the claim, filed by *Robert Kocharyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.* to publicly refute the information considered as slander and receive compensation. The lawsuit triggered by following articles about Kocharyan, published on 1in.am news website owned by the company on June 7, 23 and 24 respectively: “Grigor Grigoryan Testified Against Kocharyan, He May Be Arrested,”[[129]](#footnote-129) “Robert Kocharyan is in Panic: the Second President is on His Way to Prison,"[[130]](#footnote-130) and "Robert Kocharyan is the Bloody Symbol of the Revolution."[[131]](#footnote-131) Skizb Media Kentron appealed the judgment on February 20, 2019, according to which 400,000 AMD should be seized to compensate Robert Kocharyan's non-pecuniary damage and a refutation should have to be published. Both the Court of Appeals and the Court of Cassation rejected the appeals of Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.

On July 7 the criminal case was accepted fro proceedings, the court hearing was scheduled for November 23, but it was not held. As of December 31, no other session was scheduled.

**On July 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted the lawsuit of MP Hayk Sargsyan against Armenuhi Hovsepyan, the founder of Newspress.am website, with claims of compensation for the damage to his honor, dignity, and reputation through slander and insult. The lawsuit was triggered by posts and live broadcasts on the defendant's Facebook page, dated March 20, where, according to the lawsuit, a number of expressions were made in the plaintiff’s address in an ironic and insulting tone, slang and jargon. In particular, "Tell little Hayk, who used to hold the water bottle for Nikol, that I have collected good bottles for him to hold", etc. The plaintiff claims an apology of at least 2 minutes, posted and available on the defendant’s Facebook page for at least 10 days. In addition, the plaintiff demands compensation in the amount of 800,000 AMD for insult.

A court session was held on October 8, with the next one scheduled for February 2, 2021.

**On July 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan decided to involve the Public Television of Armenia as a third party in the case of the Rector of Yerevan State Medical University *Armen Muradyan v. the Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan*. The lawsuit was filed on October 2, 2019, triggered by statements made by Arsen Torosyan on Public TV, according to which some of Armen Muradyan's statements were rendered as false.[[132]](#footnote-132) Arsen Torosyan also said that Armen Muradyan had organized a campaign against him. The plaintiff claims refutation of defamatory statements on Facebook and Public TV air and a compensation at 2 million AMD for the damage caused.

The next court session was scheduled for February 23, 2021.

**On July 8**, the Speaker of the National Assembly Ararat Mirzoyan showed disrespect towards Aravot.am journalist Hripsime Jebejyan. When the journalist reminded Ararat Mirzoyan's words that he could not take a loan because his account had been arrested by the Compulsory Enforcement Service for an unpaid fine, and asked if he had already paid off all the loans, the NA Speaker lost his temper and responded: "Why would you ask me such a stupid question, I continue paying off my loans and fines."[[133]](#footnote-133) Later Ararat Mirzoyan expressed his regret on the above-described occasion.

**On July 9,** the initiator of VETO movement Narek Malyan made insulting statements about journalist Hasmik Hambardsumyan on Facebook. In particular, he called her “Soros’s mercenary”, an “oligarch’s mercenary”, a liar who, in Malyan’s words, writes Facebook posts for personal gain.[[134]](#footnote-134)

**On July 9,** Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan said in a conversation with Aravot.am that he was going to be very harsh and was going to voice relevant facts about those journalists and editors who received cash of unknown origin in envelopes in order to discuss the issue of bonuses, paid to the National Assembly MPs and staff. He also noted as follows: "In the RA journalistic community, if we can call it that way, there has been a turnover of approximately 700-800 million AMD of unknown origin. This is an ungrateful environment of impudence and crime, promoted by journalists’ contribution, too."[[135]](#footnote-135)

**On July 10**, the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister Eduard Aghajanyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the founder of 168.am website 168 Zham Ltd., with claims of refutation of defamatory information and a compensation for defamation.

The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "A Party in the Government-owned Fermata Club" and published on the website on June 7.[[136]](#footnote-136) The article narrated that the club, owned by Eduard Aghajanyan, violated the Commandant’s decisions by organizing a night-club style party with the participation of several dozen people in a closed space, such as his club, which is an act prohibited during the state of emergency caused by COVID-19. By the way, Eduard Aghajanyan sent a refutation text to the editorial office, but the latter did not publish it due to disagreement with the presented arguments.

On July 17, the lawsuit was returned to rectify the violations. The plaintiff filed a new lawsuit on August 11. It was accepted for proceedings on August 21. The preliminary court sessions was scheduled for February 23, 2021.

**On July 10**, the father of the RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan, Vardan Badasyan, filed a lawsuit against Alternative NGO co-chair Narek Mantashyan and News.am, Analitik.am, 168.am, Iravunk.com, Blognews.am, Alternativ.am, Ipress.am websites to publicly refute the defamatory factual data, publish the refutation in the relevant media, compensate the damage caused to the honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was triggered by articles about Vardan Badasyan's activity of many years, published on the above-mentioned websites, according to which he assigned positions for money.[[137]](#footnote-137)

On July 20, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court upheld the motion to apply a measure to the secure the claim, namely 2,000,000 AMD equal to the claimed compensation was seized from the property owned by Narek Mantashyan. Preliminary court sessions were held on October 19 and December 4, with the next one scheduled for February 15, 2021.

**On July 12**, Hetq.am online outlet was under DDOS attack. The next morning the site was restored. According to experts, the attack was from abroad.

**On July 13**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court hearing on the case of *journalist Artur Hovhannisyan v. RA Ministry of Health* (with Aravot Daily Ltd. involved as third party).

We would like to remind that the case was prompted by “Don’t Trust Fake Information: There has been no attempt at vaccination at the Aygabats community school in Shirak marz” information piece, published on the official website of MoH, moh.am, on January 11, 2018.[[138]](#footnote-138) According to the plaintiff, this publication contains insults and slander in his address (For details see the CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 and 2019, in the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am website).

A court hearing was also held on October 19, with the next one scheduled for February 2, 2021.

**On July 13**, the father of the Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan, Vardan Badasyan, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Alternativ.am news website, with claims of confiscation of money and publication of a refutation.

The lawsuit was triggered by an article, published on the above-mentioned website on June 9, titled "The apple does not fall far from the tree. Rustam Badasyan should start the vetting process from his own father." It was particularly mentioned that Vardan Badasyan used to be the Deputy Head of the Legal Department of the Police, the First Deputy Head of the 6th Department and “the appointments in positions below his level of hierarchy were made on one condition– appointment for money.”[[139]](#footnote-139)

On July 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court session was held on November 13, with the next one scheduled for March 19, 2021.

**On July 13**, NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Ani Hovhannisyan, the founder of Analitik.am website, claiming compensation.

The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "The government needs a referendum to ratify the Istanbul Convention." Was this confirmed by Alen Simonyan?" and published on the website on February 11, stating that the present composition of the Constitutional Court would not give a positive opinion on the Istanbul Convention, hence it was crucial for the ruling power to change the composition of the RA Constitutional Court as soon as possible.[[140]](#footnote-140) On February 17, Alen Simonyan sent a letter to the editorial office, refuting the comments mentioned in the article that he meant the Istanbul Convention per se․ "․․․․․․ the journalist presented his assumption as if it were the reality and used the respective wording as the headline." [[141]](#footnote-141) However, the website reiterated the opinion it had already expressed.

On July 27, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court rejected the motion to apply a measure to secure the claim (seizure of property).

A court session was held on December 2, with the next one scheduled for March 2, 2021.

**On July 13**, citizen Zaven Hakobyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the *Zhamanak* daily, claiming a compensation for the non-pecuniary damage caused to his business reputation, a public apology and a refutation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, was published in the daily on June 13, titled "What Vanetsyan Left Behind? Who are Zaven and Sos Hakobyans?" where it was particularly mentioned that when the former head of the NSS Artur Vanetsyan was in office, “his godson Zaven Hakobyan who was notorious for being extremely corrupt was promoted from an operative inspector to the head of the super profitable Araratyan Customs, however, after Vanetsyan’s dismissal, he also managed to escape the system by a near miss.” [[142]](#footnote-142)

On August 21, the lawsuit was returned for corrections in the documents, on August 31, it was re-submitted and accepted for proceedings on September 14. A court session on the case was held on November 27, with the next one scheduled for January 19, 2021.

**On July 14**, citizen Edgar Janibekyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Gagik Shamshyan, the founder of Shamshyan Media Ltd., with claims of defamation and compensation for non-pecuniary damage.

The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled “Arabkir District Police Discover Another Large Batch of Drugs in Yerevan: the 26-year-old suspect bought it over Telegram App: A Photo Report" and published on Shamshyan.com website on June 14. In the article the website, referring to the information it availed of, wrote that Edgar Janibekyan was among the detained.[[143]](#footnote-143)

The lawsuit was returned to the plaintiff for corrections twice, and was accepted for proceedings on September 14. A court session was scheduled for January 15, 2021.

**On July 14**, Aysor.am, Tert.am, News.am, Armtimes.com, A1plus.am news websites were hacked.[[144]](#footnote-144) The attacks are related with the Armenian-Azerbaijani border clashes in the direction of Tavush. As for Tert․am, in particular, the specialists note that Azerbaijan tried to implement a DDoS attack with about 10 thousand IPs. At the same time, they report on an unprecedented event. This time it was noticed that they worked in a well-systematized and synchronized manner, and a large number of users were attacking some websites at the same time.

**On July 15**, the National Security Service issued a statement, urging media representatives, in particular, not to use Azerbaijani information resources, refrain from disseminating unchecked and unverified information. The NSS published a video where besides Azerbaijani media materials and social media users’ posts and comments they presented Hetq.am’s publication about the shelling in Aygepar, a border village in Tavush.[[145]](#footnote-145) The website considers this an attempt at censorship – an unfounded restriction, as the information provided by Hetq.am from the scene was also confirmed by the representative of the Ministry of Defense and the Human Rights Defender.

**On July 24,** the head of Arshaluys community of Armavir marz, Zarzand Grigoryan, filed a lawsuit in the Armavir Court of General Jurisdiction against citizen Virab Shahbazyan and Bats TV Plus Ltd., seeking a refutation of slander, a public apology and confiscation of a sum as compensation. The reason for the lawsuit is the broadcast on Bats TV, dated October 29, 2019․ Virab Shahbazyan, a resident of Arshaluys village, spoke about Zarzand Grigoryan's activities, in particular, noting that the latter was still continuing his illegal activities even after the revolution. "He has been persecuting, robbing and oppressing the people for 12 years, he manages the village alone, sells the lands at a high price, and the authorities and law-enforcers do not interfere in all this."[[146]](#footnote-146)

On August 6, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court session was held on December 10, with the next one scheduled for March 16, 2021.

**On July 29**, NA MP Sofia Hovsepyan filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the editor-in-chief of *Haykakan Zham* news agency Anna Gevorgyan, claiming a compensation for the damage caused to her honor, dignity, and business reputation and a refutation of the slander. As the MP informed the CPFE, the lawsuit was triggered by a number of articles published on Hzham.am website. In particular, the article titled "Velvet Corruption" and published on June 1 states that "Sofia Hovsepyan, the former Deputy governor of Shirak and now an MP from the My Step faction, used to extort gifts from the heads of regional infrastructure companies.[[147]](#footnote-147) The March 13 article, titled "They are afraid that electoral bribes will be distributed during the campaign", states that "the candidate, sponsored by Sofia Hovsepyan, will distribute monetary "gifts" in Geghanist ahead of the local elections to be held on Sunday."[[148]](#footnote-148) The July 10 article, titled "My Step Faction Members Speak about Their Achievements" also mentions that the MP bought 2 apartments due to the bonuses paid to her by the Parliament.[[149]](#footnote-149)

On August 4, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court session was scheduled for April 13, 2021.

**On July 29,** citizen Boris Gasparyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Armen Abroyan, *Hraparak Daily Ltd.* and Factor Information Center NGO claiming for protection of honor and dignity and a confiscation of a compensation. The lawsuit was triggered by the articles about the archeologist Boris Gasparyan published on Hraparak.am and Factor.am websites. Thus, the article, titled "Tomato and pepper seedlings are planted in Areni Cave under the disguise of viticulture development" and published on hraparak.am website on June 19, stated that according to Armen Abroyan, former head of the History and Monuments Protection Agency, Boris Gasparyan was allowed to lease out the cave, where tomato and pepper seedlings are planted under the disguise of viticulture development in Areni, moreover, specifically in the reserve area.[[150]](#footnote-150) Factor.am, too, published an article with the same content on June 27 under the heading of "Who planted tomatoes and peppers in the area of ​​Areni cave? Abroyan blames the archeologist, the latter names the offender." [[151]](#footnote-151)

On August 6, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The first court session was scheduled for March 4, 2021.

**On August 4**, the NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Iravunk Media Ltd., claiming a compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The lawsuit was triggered by a publication in the *Iravunk* newspaper, where thoughts were attributed to Alen Simonyan. He allegedly said that the ruling political team was not ready to work if no bonuses were to be paid. On August 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court session on the case was held on December 10, with the next one scheduled for April 13, 2021.

**On August 8**, the former Chief of Police of the Republic of Armenia Vladimir Gasparyan obstructed the professional activity of the Radio Liberty reporters.[[152]](#footnote-152) Noticing that the reporters were filming his private house on the shore of Lake Sevan, the former Police Chief, as reported by Radio Liberty, drove the car in their direction, threatening to run over them, physically destroy them, "shoot" them, "kill them", swearing and demanding not to publish the video. The editorial office submitted a report on the incident to the police. On August 9, a criminal case was initiated under Article 164, Part 3 of the RA Criminal Code (obstruction of a journalist's legal professional activity), but later Part 1 of the same article was chosen as the legal reference for the case. On September 17, Vladimir Gasparyan was charged by the General Department of Investigation of Particularly Important Cases at the Central Office of the the RA Investigative Committee, and recognizance was chosen as a precautionary measure.

On October 15, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Gegharkunik Region (Martuni residence) received the criminal case from the RA Prosecutor's Office with an indictment. On October 16, the case was accepted for proceedings. Court hearings were held on November 11, December 7 and 21, with the next one scheduled for January 11, 2021.

**On August 13,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a court session on *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Andradardz Press Club NGO* with claims of compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation by defamation and insult.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 19, 2019. It was caused by an article, titled "It is known who donated an expensive car to Hayk Sargsyan and why" published on Newspress.am website.[[153]](#footnote-153)The court hearings, scheduled for October 8 and December 17, were postponed, with the next one scheduled for February 25, 2021.

The second lawsuit was filed on June 21, 2019, caused by caused by an article, titled “Another expensive gift for Hayk Sargsyan: a phone number at the value of 20 million AMD”[[154]](#footnote-154) published on Newspress.am website of Azndradardz Press Club NGO. The trial, scheduled for December 17, was postponed, and the next session was scheduled for February 25, 2021.

**On August 18**, the Police hindered the professional activity of a group of journalists in the yard of the National Assembly, where a protest march was organized for the protection of Amulsar and Jermuk.[[155]](#footnote-155) The the law enforcement officers let some of the activists and the citizens who joined them through the open gates of the park in front of the National Assembly, they first did not allow media representatives to enter the area to cover the event and then demanded permission from the Chief of Staff of the parliament and take footage only after such permission was granted. After an argument that lasted for about half an hour, the same policemen let the journalists in, taking their names, surnames, patronymics and the names of the media outlets. Journalistic organizations issued a condemning statement on this occasion.

**On August 19,** citizen Roman Baghdasaryan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Media Plus Ltd., claiming refutation of slander and a compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article published on Yerevan.Today website on August 7: "Russian special services take interest in the editors of the "Bagramyan 26" channel that spreads disinformation."[[156]](#footnote-156) It stated that one of the admins of the mentioned Telegram channel was Roman Baghdasaryan, who lived in Russia, and had been targeted by the Russian special services. The federal government had decided to expel them from Russia. And the reason was that, according to the website, they were hiding behind secret accounts and were actually targeting Russia, a strategic ally of Armenia.

On August 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and on the same day, the motion to use a measure for securing the claim by seizing property was rejected. Court sessions on the case were held on November 6 and December 9, with the next one scheduled for February 5, 2021.

**On August 21**, Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court session on the case of politician Vahan Babayan against journalist and publicist Liza Chagharyan.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was Liza Chagharyan's Facebook post, dated April 13. "The one under the name of vahan babayan can claim the first place in the universal competition of snivellers."

A court session was held on November 18, with the next one scheduled for March 5, 2021.

**On August 21,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held the first court session on *Jirayr Sefilyan v. Armenia TV*.

We should remind that on October 18, 2019, the Court of Cassation overturned the decision of the Civil Court of Appeal based on Jirayr Sefilyan’s appeal and remitted the case to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction for a new examination. This is a case that has been going on for three years. The lawsuit was caused by a video about him in the *Acute Angle* show on Armenia TV just days before Jirair Sefilyan's arrest, broadcast on June 12, 2016, which contained information that the plaintiff considers to be slander. On January 25, 2018, the Court of Appeals rejected Jirayr Sefilyan's appeal against the judgment of the first instance court. On February 28, this decision was appealed at the RA Court of Cassation. The appeal was accepted for proceedings on June 18 and the case was on a halt for about 18 months. (For details see the CPFE annual reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 in the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am website). According to the ruling of the Court of Cassation, when publishing any value judgment, the journalist must take all reasonable measures to verify the information to be true, even if the journalist's judgment is based on the facts revealed by a certain person, the journalist must at least try to listen to the party the information is about.[[157]](#footnote-157)

On October 27, 2020, the Court of General Jurisdiction partially upheld Jirayr Sefilyan's claim of compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity through defamation and obligation of *Acute Angle* TV show to publish the plaintiff's refutation in one of the forthcoming editions of the show. The judgment was not appealed, it entered into legal force, but as of December 31, the refutation had not been published.

**On August 26,** poet Hovhannes Ghazaryan filed a lawsuit against Newspress.am website and journalist Armine Mkrtumyan with claims of refutation of slander and compensation of the damage. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "It is immoral for a writer who helped boys evade army service to talk about patriotism: not all writers are intellectuals” and published on the website on July 21.[[158]](#footnote-158) Though on August 20, at the request of Hovhannes Ghazaryan, the website published a refutation, the poet followed up on the incident by filing a lawsuit against the website. As of September 10, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. A new lawsuit was not filed.

**On August 26**, Leila Karina Yezeguelyan Majaryan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Noyan Tapan Information Analytical Center Ltd. and NT Holding Ltd., with claims of acknowledging the publication of personal information as illegal and without consent and consequently remove them. On September 9, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court session on the case was held on November 23, with the next one scheduled for January 22, 2021.

**On August 31,** Ara Harutyunyan, a former employee of the National Security Service, filed a lawsuit against the founder of 1in.am website Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., claiming refutation of defamatory facts, publication of the refutation text and a compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was an article published on 1in.am on July 31, which stated that the plaintiff had served in the RA NSS for more than 20 years, and according to rumors, was paid cash in envelopes for years by the chief accountant of South Caucasus Railway company in exchange for "turning a blind eye" to the robberies along the railways, the organized smuggling of goods․ He also engaged in protectionism.[[159]](#footnote-159)

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on September 9, and the motion for the use of a measure to secure the claim, namely by seizure of property, was rejected. A court session on the case was held on December 8, with the next one scheduled for January 11, 2021.

**On September 2,** the MPs of the NA Bright Armenia faction – Edmon Marukyan, Taron Simonyan and Armen Yeghiazaryan – filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., the founder of 1in.am news website, claiming the publication of refutation. The reason for the lawsuit was a news piece, titled “Bright Armenia met with Serzh Sargsyan in the latter's house” and published on 1in.am on June 19, which stated that the above-mentioned MPs discussed a number of events and issues of domestic policy with Serzh Sargsyan.[[160]](#footnote-160) On September 11, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for February 4, 2021.

**On September 3,** Yerevan Court of General Jurisdication held a regular court session on *Tigran Mets Publishing House v. Iravunk Media Ltd.,* during which a decision was made to apply the expedited trial. We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 22, 2019, claiming to seize 3 845 517 AMD in arrears and 77 000 AMD as advance state fee payment.

On September 14 the case was dismissed by the judgment of the court, based on the settlement agreement between the parties.

**On September 8**, the operation of one of the round-the-clock broadcasting platforms of 1in.am news website, namely the Youtube channel, was blocked. The website published a statement, according to which “A study conducted by local and international professional circles revealed that a few weeks ago, a targeted group attack was carried out to completely shut down the independent media outlet's television platform and silence it. The attack was undertaken by the former Armenian authorities and the armies of fake account holders, owned and managed by their newly launched satellites.” 1in.am worked on the backup channel for a few days.

**On September 9**, Gegham Vardanyan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, filed a lawsuit against Pastinfo Ltd., demanding that the latter be obligated to publicly refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. The reason for the lawsuit is an article, titled “The Armenian Representative in the Eurasian Economic Commission is Suspected of Abuse” [[161]](#footnote-161) and published on Pastinfo.am website on August 31. The website referred to its own sources and wrote as follows: "…Gegham Vardanyan, abusing his official position, found jobs for his relatives and tried to take advantage of their services to influence the redistribution of tenders."

On September 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, but the motion to apply a measure to secure the claim by seizure of assets was rejected. A preliminary court session was held on November 30, with the next one scheduled on March 2, 2021.

**On September 9**, Gegham Vardanyan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, filed a lawsuit against Yerkir Editorial Office Ltd. with claims of public refutation of the information considered defamatory and insulting, an apology and confiscation of a compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled “Whatever the result of the investigation initiated by Myasnikovich, the consequences will not be particularly severe for Gegham Vardanyan. REX” and published on Yerkir.am website on September 2, which accuses Gegham Vardanyan of corrupt deals.[[162]](#footnote-162)

On September 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, however, the motion to apply a measure to secure the claim by seizure of assets was rejected. A court session on the case was held on December 25, with the next one scheduled for march 5, 2021.

**On September 18**, NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Gegham Simonyan, the owner Alternativ.am website domain with claims of compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was an editorial, titled “Close Relations between Vivaro and Alen Simonyan that Cost $ 300,000. Why aren't the violations by Vivaro properly investigated?" and published on Alternativ.am website on August 20.[[163]](#footnote-163) The article particularly stated that Alen Simonyan took $ 300,000 from Vivaro company and promised to use his ties in the government to keep the company out of scandals and away from accountability for violations.

On September 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the defendant's motion to secure the claim by restriction of action was rejected. A court session was scheduled for February 10, 2021.

**On September 27,** leading Armenian news websites A1plus.am, Armenpress.am, Armtimes.com, Blognews.am, Hetq.am, Mamul.am, Mediamax.am, Zhamanak.com were attacked by Azerbaijani hackers by DDos. They attempted at spreading anti-Armenian news via these websites. The normal operation of the websites was restored hours later.

**On October 5,** NA deputy Artur Hovhannisyan left a comment under one of the reports published by Channel 5 TV, comparing the work of that media outlet with what Azerbaijani media outlets do. The MP particularly noted that the Azerbaijani media are even milder than Channel 5.

**On October 6,** MP Kristine Poghosyan, in response to the question posed by the Channel 5 TV journalist Karine Mangasaryan, moved the microphone pointed at her away, then threatened that they would face a different kind of treatment, and all would be held accountable. The deputy meant the policy of the TV company during the war.

**On October 12,** businessman Vahe Keushgueryan filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Dareskizb Ltd., demanding to refute the information considered insulting and slanderous. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, published on Armtimes.com website (owned by the company) on September 7, which particularly stated that a semi-secret auction was an attempt to sell the Chrran waterfall near the border village of Khachik, which is the most beautiful place in the village, to the Armenian American Vahe Keushgueryan. The website also wrote that the businessman was still enjoying the privilege, granted to him by the former government, and was almost the only buyer of all the grapes grown in Khachik village, this being an exceptional raw material for producing his expensive wine.

On October 20, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the court session was scheduled for January 22, 2021.

**On October 26,** former police officer Vardan Ghukasyan filed a lawsuit in the Yerevan Court of First Instance against the ArmDaily.am website, with claims of refutation of defamation and an apology of for insult by lawyer Hrant Ananyan. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled “Artur Gevorgyan was not detained within any criminal case and is not in any detention center: Lawyer Says”[[164]](#footnote-164) and published on the website on September 24. In the article, the lawyer's opinions and qualifications were used in response to the plaintiff's live Facebook broadcast, where accusations were voiced against former MP Arthur Gevorgyan. The lawyer said the following about the plaintiff: "․․․ I urge the reasonable groups of public not to be deceived by disinformation, especially when that information comes in the form of claims by a homosexual, the allegations of a discredited, condemned, failed homosexual, a person who is hostile, and he is hostile, as I understand it, is certainly because of Vladimir Gasparyan, because he was kicked out of the police. "

On November 4, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. It was re-submitted on November 26 and returned again on December 7. No other developments were registered as of December 31.

**As of November 9** (when the hostilities in Artsakh ceased), the RA Police found 401 "publications banned" under the martial law, 196 of which were posted by media outlets, the rest were posts, published by social media users. In particular, 13 news websites were fined in the amount of 700 thousand AMD. As a matter of fact, in one case, when the publication was not removed, the media outlet, in addition to the mentioned 700 thousand AMD, was also fined in the amount of 1 million 500 thousand AMD.

**On November 10**, dozens of men tried to break into Radio Liberty office in Yerevan, knocking on doors, punching and swearing at employees. According to the radio station, they said that they had come to seize the editorial staff's servers, then pushed the employees, threatening not to allow Radio Liberty to be on air again.[[165]](#footnote-165) The group left the station office when the employees called the police.

The CPFE and 9 partner journalistic organizations issued a statement, regarding the incident, demanding that the law enforcement agencies take immediate measures to bring to justice the perpetrators of the attack on the radio station. In response, on November 16 the RA Police informed the CPFE that an investigation of the case was underway, and on November 23 the Central Department of Yerevan City Police informed that the statement, issued by journalistic organizations had been sent to the NSS Investigation Department, to attach it to the criminal proceedings documents and determining the course of future action.

**On November 13,** a group of people tried to enter Tsayg TV illegally. This was announced by the management of the media outlet, urging to refrain from any kind of false speculation and not to hinder the work of the media outlet. As the executive director of the TV company Margarita Minasyan informed the CPFE, those people tried to use her to influence the political activity of her daughter, MP of the ruling My Step faction Nazeli Baghdasaryan. In particular, they demanded that the latter take steps to reach the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

**On November 17**, NA MP Hayk Sargsyan showed disrespect towards Kentron TV journalist Vachik Grigoryan. In response to the question raised by the journalist during the briefing, he first addressed the journalist by “hey, you”, then said, “you there, keep calm.”[[166]](#footnote-166)

**On November 23,** the employees of the *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun (Republic of Armenia)* daily Emil Sargsyan, Lusine Mesrobyan, Gayane Antonyan, Naira Karapetyan, Tatevik Hambardzumyan, Marine Kyureghyan, Khachik Sargsyan filed 7 lawsuits with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the legal successor of the daily Armenpress State News Agency SNCO, claiming the repeal of orders on imposing a disciplinary sanction, reinstitution in their previous jobs, and confiscation of the amount, lost due to forced idle time. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on November 27. No court sessions were scheduled as of December 31.

**On November 25**, MP Hayk Sargsyan filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against *Hraparak* Daily Ltd., claiming compensation for the damage, caused to his honor, dignity and good reputation by means of defamation and insult. The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled "Hayk Sargsyan distributes a video showing armed people, using Facebook ads"[[167]](#footnote-167) and published on Hraparak.am on November 12. The MP challenges, in particular, the phrase "one who held bottles," used in his address: "Hayk Sargsyan, a member of My Step faction at the National Assembly (better known as "the one who held bottles"), disseminates a video, showing people in military uniforms and machines guns. He is using Facebook ads."

On December 3, the lawsuit was returned. The case was handed over to the court archive.

**On November 25,** MP Hayk Sargsyan filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Armdaily News Agency Ltd., demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult. The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled "URGENT. Criminal authorities Ara and Alik Banduryans from Noratus intimidate My Step MPs. Mediaport" and published on Armdaily.am website on November 20, in particular, the phrase "the one who held bottles," used about the MP. [[168]](#footnote-168)

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on December 4. The court session was not appointed as of December 31.

**On December 5**, the legal professional activity of 1in.am news website operator Rafael Karamyan was hindered in Liberty Square in Yerevan, where the rally organized by the opposition political forces was taking place. When he came to the square and started filming, a group of demonstrators, noticing the 1in.am logo on the camera, approached and demanded to stop the work. It was accompanied by swears and threats, addressed at the operator, as well as expressions of intolerance towards the given media outlet. Rafael Karamyan had to turn off the camera and leave.

On the same day, the Radio Liberty correspondent Sargis Harutyunyan was insulted by the demonstrators while he was covering the rally and the march in Yerevan, organized by oppositional political forces. Journalistic organizations issued a statement in connection with both incidents.[[169]](#footnote-169)

**On December 9**, Mikael Zolyan, a member of the My Step faction of the National Assembly, discriminated against Suzy Badoyan, a journalist with Yerevan.Today news website. [[170]](#footnote-170) The MP refused to answer the journalist's questions, saying that he did not trust that media outlet, as it was a propaganda tool, and called the journalist unprofessional.

**On December 19**, the professional activity of Channel 5 TV journalist Lara Arakelyan was obstructed in the Republic Square of Yerevan. First, some citizens started insulting the journalist, showing intolerance, then "My Step" faction MP Andranik Kocharyan refused to answer Lara Arakelyan's questions, expressing a negative attitude towards Channel 5.

**On December 2**, Zhanna Alexanyan, President of Journalists for Human Rights NGO, filed a lawsuit against MEDIA Plus Ltd. (Yerevan.Today website), its editor Sevak Hakobyan, analyst Aharon Hambardzumyan, News AM Ltd. and Iravunk Media Ltd. (Iravunk.com website). The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled "They work in the interests of the Turks, hand in hand" and published on Yerevan.Today website, with an illustration of Zhanna Alexanyan next to the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, George Soros, Daniel Ioannisyan, and Larisa Minasyan, the head of the "Open Society Foundations-Armenia."[[171]](#footnote-171) The article, in particular, accuses the people in the picture of laying the cornerstones of the destruction of Armenia. This article was also published by News.am[[172]](#footnote-172) and Iravunk.com[[173]](#footnote-173) websites. On December 10, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. As of December 31, no other developments were registered.

**On December 7**, Styopa Safaryan, the Chair of the Public Council, filed a lawsuit against *168 Zham* Ltd. and its founder Satik Seyranyan, claiming a public refutation of the defamatory facts, removal of the publication, and compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "Vladimir Solovyov's reaction to Styopa Safaryan's post" and published on 168.am, owned by the company, on October 13, which attributed expressions insulting Styopa Safaryan to Solovyov.[[174]](#footnote-174) According to the website, Solovyov said: "One of the most notorious grant-eaters in Armenia is surprised why Europe imposes sanctions on Russia for Navalny and does not take any action against Turkey and Azerbaijan. Finally, pro-Western mentally ill are beginning to understand that the European Union and Co. are just provocateurs, and that Turkey is their rammer or infantry, you can call it whatever you feel fit."

On December 10, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, and was re-submitted on December 22 and returned again on the 28th.

**On December 21**, on the road to Goris in Syunik region, citizens made obscene remarks to the correspondent of Radio Liberty Robert Zargaryan, who covered Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's visit, thus attempting at obstructions to his work.

**On December 21**, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression received an e-mail, signed off by 9 employees of the *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun (Republic of Armenia*) newspaper – Emil Sargsyan, Lusine Mesrobyan, Gayane Antonyan, Naira Karapetyan, Tatevik Hambardzumyan, Marine Kyureghyan, Khachik Sargsyan, Mergevos Sahakyan, and Deputy Editor Samvel Sargsyan. They reported about their dismissal, in particular, mentioning as follows: "Basic human relations in the ․․․ editorial office have turned upside down after Arthur Gharagyozyan was appointed editor-in-chief. From the very first day, he tried to create an administrative relationship based on disrespect, vulgar expressions, and even swear words, the editor-in-chief has no basic respect for his staff, including employees with many years of experience, women and girls. As a result, a nightmarish atmosphere has emerged in the editorial office over the past year, which affects the quality and working routine of the newspaper…" The employees also addressed a group of NA MPs and the RA Prime Minister with the same letter. By the way, 7 of them applied to the court, claiming reinstitution in their positions, which we have referred to above.

**On December 21**, Sonya Budaghyan, Head of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of Armavir Marzpetaran, filed a lawsuit against Hzham.am, claiming refutation of information, defaming the honor, dignity and business reputation of its founder, Anna Gevorgyan Private Entrepreneur. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "Scandal! A bribe in exchange for position. Corruption, flavoured with revolution"[[175]](#footnote-175) and published on the website on December 19. According to the article, Sonya Budaghyan took a bribe from a citizen for an appointment in the position of a school principal. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on December 30.

***3. Violations of the Right to Receive and Disseminate Information***

*In 2020 the CPFE recorded 90 facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. In only 2 of these cases a lawsuit was filed with the court by the journalist or media outlet. Compared to the situation in 2019, the violations of the right to receive and disseminate information have decreases by 18.*

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

**On January 8**, the Penitentiary Service of the RA Ministry of Justice refused to provide information to Hetq.am website about the bonuses received in December 2019. Thus, the journalist of the website Seda Ghukasyan informed that the first inquiry was sent to the Penitentiary Service on December 30, 2019. On January 8, 2020, the service replied that they would not provide the requested information because it was a state and official secret.

**On January 9**, the journalist sent the same inquiry to the Ministry of Justice, but on January 14 the Ministry, too, refused to provide the requested data, reasoning that the questions required content, revealing personal data. Meanwhile, the journalist reminded that a number of agencies published orders on awarding bonuses on their websites.

**On January 9**, the *Iravunk* newspaper sent an inquiry to Yerevan Municipality with a request for information on New Year's expenses. All the deadlines for replying to the written inquiry expired, but the newspaper never received an answer. Journalist Ilona Azaryan wrote on January 22 that after her calls, the municipality informed that from now on only signed and sealed inquiries would be accepted. On January 31, the newspaper wrote that they had not received any answer, having sent the request in the required format.

**On January 9**, the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Environment asking for information on the grant program that supported the development of the draft law on supplements to the RA Law on the Freedom of Information, posted on the portal for the publication of draft legal acts – “e-draft.am” – on December 2, 2019. The answer received on January 17 was just a formality, inconsistent with the content of the inquiry.

**On January 14,** the Freedom of Information Center sent a letter to the Police of the Republic of Armenia, requesting statistical data on the inquiries made to the agency in 2018-2019. The answer was received on January 17, by the deadline established by the law, however, it was vague and incomplete.

**On January 21,** Asbarez Club journalist Ani Mkrtchyan sent an electornic inquiry to the RA Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Zaruhi Batoyan about some social issues related to and the possibility of the renovation of the apartment owned by a socially vulnerable family in Vahramaberd community, Shirak region. The response to the inquiry was received with a delay , on February 25, and the ministry did not provide any written or oral notification about that postponement or delay.

**On January 30**, the Court of Appeals examined the complaint on the case of *the Union of Informed Citizens NGO v. Yerevan Municipality*, with claims of ensuring complete answers to inquiries for information.

We would like to remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 8, 2018, caused by an incomplete answer to the NGO’s inquiry. The latter had asked to report whether the Department of Exterior Design and Advertising of the Municipality of Yerevan had considered the banners with the so-called "Devoted and Conscripted to One Purpose" as a social advertisement, and if so, whether it stemmed from a document. On December 12, 2018, the claim was partially settled, and on January, 2019, the defendant had filed an appeal.

On February 19, 2020, the Court of Appeals rejected the appeal. On April 1, the defendant went to the Court of Cassation, but this instance rejected the appeal on May 6.

**On February 15,** Hetq.am journalist Tirayr Muradyan sent a written inquiry to the Electric Networks of Armenia, requesting information on the possible compensation to the residents. The response was received 3 months later, on May 12, incomplete and with no signature.

**On February 19,** the *Iravunk* newspaper wrote that it was impossible to get any commentary from the Health Minister’s spokesperson. Once again, the editorial office tried to get clarification on the issues related to the Institute of Oncology, but the speaker Alina Nikoghosyan's phone did not answer. The newspaper wrote: "This has already become a carved-in-stone dogma, when the speaker, who is paid to answer the questions of the press, ignores calls, to put it mildly."

**On February 22**, Hetq.am journalist Tirayr Muradyan sent an electronic inquiry to Gegharkunik Water Users' Association (WUA), a public sector organization, requesting information about an irrigation network owned by them. On February 26, the acting director of the the WUA Sergey Hambardzumyan did not answer most of the questions. On February 27, the journalist applied to the same official with a written inquiry again. All the deadlines set by the law passed, and no answer was received again. Only when the journalist announced his intention to go to court, claiming receipt of information, did the official provide the document.

**On February 22**, Hetq.am journalist Tirayr Muradyan sent a written inquiry to Yerevan Municipality, requesting information on the privatization of some land spots. All the deadlines set by law had passed, and no answer was provided. Later, the municipality informed that they had not received the request, and an answer was received, after the inquiry was sent to the municipality again.

**On February 24**, the Journalists' Club Asparez sent an e-mail to Ani Amirshadyan, the head of the Social Security Service of the Republic of Armenia, requesting for clarification on the age pension of a resident in the Arevik community, Shirak Marz. The response to the inquiry was received by post, with a delay, on March 20, and it was incomplete.

**On February 26,** President of the Asparez Journalists' Club, Levon Barseghyan filed a lawsuit against the National Security Service with the Administrative Court of the RA, claiming provision of the information requested by an inquiry. The plaintiff had demanded the NSS to provide all the information they had about him. The answer to the inquiry had not satisfied 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 lawsuit was returned on March 4 for corrections. The second lawsuit was filed on March 17 and was accepted on March 24. Court hearings were held on May 7, July 3, September 17, and on October 1 the court rejected the lawsuit. The plaintiff filed a complaint with the Administrative Court of Appeals on November 9, which was accepted for proceedings on December 2. A court session was scheduled for November 25, 2021.

**On February 27**, “Hetq.am” online journalist Tirayr Muradyan sent an e-mail to Arman Ghazaryan, head of the Zolakar community, Gegharkunik Marz, asking him to provide copies of the decisions made by the head of the community and the Elders’ Council for 2015 - 2020, as they were not published on the official website of the municipality. Neither the requested information nor a notification on the need of additional time was received.

**On March 3**, the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of Hetq.am online periodical (founded by Investigative Journalists NGO) against the Board of Trustees of the National Reseach Laboratory after A.I. Alikhanyan (Yerevan Institute of Physics) Foundation, claiming to oblige the Board to provide copies of all the decisions adopted in 2011-2019.

We should remind that after the refusal from the foundation, the Investigative Journalists NGO filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court on July 8, 2019, and the case was referred to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on July 15, where a hearing was held on August 14, 2019. In 2020, court hearings on the case were held on March 6, April 27, May 4, and on May 22 the judgment was published, according to which the claim brought by Investigative Journalists NGO was partially settled. The National Scientific Laboratory after A.I. Alikhanyan (Yerevan Institute of Physics) Foundation was obligated 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 advance payment of state duty and 70000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. On June 19, the defendant appealed to the Court of Appeals. On October 23, the appeal was upheld, the May 22 verdict was overturned, and the case was sent to the same court for a new examination.

**On March 20,** Aravot.am journalist Nelli Babayan alerted that after the declaration of a state of emergency in the country and restrictions of the media's capacity to disseminate information, the spokesperson of the Commandant’s Office should at least answer phone calls. According to the journalist, all agencies referred journalists to the Commandant’s Office, yet no one answered the calls there.

**On March 20**, Factor.am news website journalist Narek Kirakosyan wrote to the National Security Service, asking to provide information about an Azerbaijani person who had crossed the Armenian-Azerbaijani border on March 12. On March 26, a response was received from the NSS, which rejected the request on the grounds that the requested information contained data not subject to publication. This refusal is deemed unfounded because the service could provide the part of the information that was not confidential.

**On March 24**, the *Iravunk* newspaper wrote that back on March 16 it had sent a request to the Ministry of Health, asking for statistics on mortality in the Republic of Armenia caused by the H1N1 virus in 2009 and 2016. The newspaper did not receive a response from the Ministry within the 5-day period stipulated by the law, they only informed that the answer was "in progress," when in fact the Ministry had provided this information to the RA Prime Minister, and the latter spoke about it. Besides, the newspaper sent an inquiry, asking to clarify in which cases should an epidemic be declared in the country, and whether there was an epidemic in Armenia. According to the newspaper, the Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan did not answer this question during his press conference either.

On March 25, the *Iravunk* wrote that they had posed the above-mentioned questions to Vahan Hunanyan, a representative of the Commandant’s Office, too, but the latter would not answer the calls. They were advised to try again because the Government staff was too busy, but all attempts were in vain.

On March 31, the newspaper wrote that they had called the government staff again, hoping to receive answers to their questions, and only after this repeated call did they receive the answer to the first question from the Ministry of Health.

**On March 25**, Aravot.am journalist Nelli Babayan reported that Deputy Minister of Economy Varos Simonyan had not answered any of the journalists’ questions during the press conference. The journalist also complained about online press conferences, organized by the government, because interaction was not maintained, besides, the press secretaries did not read out all the questions, sent in by the journalists.

**On March 26**, the editor-in-chief of “Politik.am” Boris Murazi made an announcement in a Facebook live that Mane Gevorgyan, the spokeswoman for the RA Prime Minister and the Commandant’s Office, was not fulfilling her duties and was threatening to send police officers to the editorial office.[[176]](#footnote-176) The problem is that the website published a news piece about a man who died in Gyumri on suspicion of the coronavirus, but they could not get an explanation on the news from the Commandant’s Office. In particular, Boris Murazi said that Mane Gevorgyan had explained it by the workload and suggested publishing the Facebook post of the press secretary of the Minister of Health. When the editor said that the latter could not be considered as an official refutation, Mane Gevorgyan threatened to fine him and send in the police.

**On March 27**, Aravot.am journalist Nelli Babayan expressed concern over the working style of the Ministry of Defense. Numerous questions related to the coronavirus data among the military remained unanswered, citing confidentiality of personal data, whereas the Defense Ministry spokesman later showed the military, isolated due to the infection, in a live broadcast.

**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 of 2010 - 2020. The answer was received with delay on April 14.

**On April 8**, 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**, 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 Staff did not respond to our inquiry in violation of the Law on Freedom of Information Law," the website wrote. [[177]](#footnote-177)

**On April 14,** Hetq.am online periodical sent a written inquiry to the Government, asking for clarification regarding a governmental decree, which was retroactively applied to the past procurements. For reasons unknown to the website, the inquiry was forwarded to the Ministry of Health, which did not provide clear information within 31 days.[[178]](#footnote-178) The website writes that in the recent months, the Ministry of Health has adopted a policy of delaying 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,** a journalist at Hetq.am online 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 Elders’ council in 2015 - 2020, as they were not published on the official website of the municipality. The journalist mentioned that the Gegharkunik regional administration, which was supposed to receive and publish the decisions of the communities, as established by the law, had not received them either.

**On April 14,** Sona Amiryan, a journalist with the Antifake.am website, sent an inquiry 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, supporting the media outlet, 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 an inquiry 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**, 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.

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 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 address 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.[[179]](#footnote-179) Only after alerting about 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 an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, 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 answer was received with a delay on May 20.

**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, provided on June 8, mentioned that the information about the budget could be found under the relevant link on their website. However, this answer cannot be considered as complete, as the provided link was empty, and the necessary complete information on the website was unavailable.

**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. FOICA considers this as a groundless refusal.

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

**On June 1**, the 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 pandemic. 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.

Starting from **July 1** and throughout the whole quarter, the Freedom of Information Center registered 20 violations of various kinds in the answers to inquiries sent to state and private bodies. In particular, the answers to 8 inquiries were assessed as incomplete, in 2 cases the content of the answer did not relate to the key points of the inquiry, in 1 case the deadline for the official response was unnecessarily extended. In addition, FOICA registered the fact of 1 ungrounded rejection, 1 case of a delayed response and 7 late replies. (For details see Givemeinfo.am website).

**On July 4**, Pastinfo wrote that it sent a written inquiry on the disinfection in the courts to the Judicial Department on June 15, but the latter, violating the requirements of the RA Law on Freedom of Information, had not replied yet.[[180]](#footnote-180)

**On July 5**, NEWS.am Sport wrote that before the start of the summer conscription, it sent a written inquiry to the Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Grisha Tamrazyan, to find out information about the conscription of the national sports team members and the fact that because of the coronavirus the athlets’ had lost opportunities to achieve the results necessary for deferral or service in the sports platoon. The deadlines for responding to the inquiry as set by the legislation had expired, and the Deputy Minister had not commented at all.[[181]](#footnote-181)

**On July 8,** the RA Administrative Court of Appealս accepted the appeal of the the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, challenging the decision of the first instance court which quashed its lawsuit against the Minister of Energy Infrastructure and Natural Resources Ashot Manukyan with claims of obligating him to provide information.

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

The court, having considered that the information requested by the plaintiff was provided by the defendant after the claim had been filed with the court, found that the dispute had in essence been exhausted and that the proceedings in the case should be dismissed. However, the defendant appealed the decision on the confiscation of money as compensation for the plaintiff’s attorney. The hearing of the case was held on August 20, and on September 9 the Court of Appeals rejected the appeal and left the decision of the first court unchanged. The judgment entered into legal force.

**On July 11,** Armlur.am news website wrote that on June 11, the *Zhoghovurd* daily sent a number of questions to the RA Ministry of Health, trying to find out what bonuses the medical staff members (doctors, nurses, drivers, paramedics) involved in the fight against coronavirus had received and how much money was paid to the hotel managers who serviced and took care of the citizens, isolated during the quarantine. 30 days after the inquiry was sent, the newspaper received an answer, which it deemed as incomplete, since it did not provide complete data.[[182]](#footnote-182)

**On July 11**, Hetq.am online periodical wrote that an inquiry was sent to the RA Nature Protection and Subsoil Inspectorate, asking to answer a few questions about the Prime Minister's instructions to start inspections in 28 metal mining companies of Armenia as early as in 2018. A month after sending the inquiry, the inspectorate provided an incomplete answer, some of the questions posed were rejected whatsoever, with reference to Article 8, Para 1(b) of the RA Law on Organizing and Conducting an Inspection, which establishes that the requested information can be provided only with the written consent of an official, representing the enterpise. The website, however, wrote that the justification mentioned by the Inspectorate had nothing to do with their inquiry, and confidentiality was completely inappropriate. By the way, the inspection body did not specify which 28 companies were to be inspected.[[183]](#footnote-183)

**On July 13**, *Sputnik Armenia* news website wrote that it had applied to Yerevan Municipality for information on the number of public transport drivers with a positive coronavirus test. The press secretary of the municipality Hakob Karapetyan noted that they did not have clear data about them, the registration of infected drivers working in the field of public transport was carried out by the National Center for Disease Prevention and Control SNCO. The latter operates under the authorization of and is subject to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia, and the press service of this agency informed the media that they did not collect and categorize statistics of the infected by profession (except for doctors).[[184]](#footnote-184) *Sputnik Armenia* asked the municipality to present the statistics of fining drivers for not wearing a mask and exceeding the number of passengers (if there were any such cases). A written inquiry was required to fully answer these questions, but the answer as provided was incomplete.

**On July 14**, Tirayr Muradyan, a journalist with the Hetq.am online magazine, wrote on Facebook that he had sent an inquiry to the Chairman of the State Property Management Committee, to find out information on the 2004 state property auction, the participants, and the winner. The Chairman of SPMC Narek Babayan refused to provide the name of the winner, referring to the Law on Personal Data Protection, the Law on Public Bargaining and Clause 4.2 of the Regulation on Auction. The journalist commented as follows: “The details on the winner of the state property auction cannot be kept a secret under any circumstances. Such an interpretation of the law is discretionary, it is a case of abusing a right, an excuse for not providing information.” Later, Levon Zakaryan, a member of the Elders’ Council of Yerevan, who also works for the State Property Management Committee, published the answer to a journalist's written inquiry with Narek Babayan’s permission, thus violating the exclusivity of the article to be prepared. [[185]](#footnote-185)

**On July 18**, Yerkir.am news website wrote that it had sent an inquiry to the RA Corruption Prevention Commission a month before, asking to provide information on how many of the RA high-ranking state officials had to submit an annual declaration of property, income and interests for 2019 and how many of them had not yet provided the necessary information. The answer received was incomplete: the website wrote that the Commission had avoided submitting some of the requested data.[[186]](#footnote-186)

**On July 27,** Tert.am news website wrote that they had prepared an article about the Gyumri Customs and had found out that the actual construction costs exceeded the estimated costs twice, amounting to 5,1 billion AMD, and the construction works were done mainly without a tender. After studying the contracts, Tert.am sent an inquiry to the State Revenue Committee on July 10 to receive an additional confirmation of the facts, but did not hear from them.[[187]](#footnote-187)

**On July 28,** the online periodical Hetq.am sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports to find out how the state standards for general education were developed, who the members of the commission were, teachers and principals of which schools were involved in the work, what was the procedure of their selection.[[188]](#footnote-188) In response to the inquiry, the Ministry sent the list of expert group members, amending the subject curricula. These lists were published on the website of the Ministry and contained only the experts’ names and surnames. The Ministry did not answer which school they represented or what position at schools they held.

**On July 30**, Aravot.am news website wrote that the staff of the National Assembly had sent a request to find out how the 580 million AMD bonus was distributed among the MPs in the period from February 2019 to February 2020 and how much bonus each MP received. [[189]](#footnote-189) The National Assembly refused to provide that information, noting that it was subject to discussion from the point of view of personal data protection. However, the income of top officials, according to the law, shall be declared and cannot be considered a secret.

**On August 5**, Hetq.am online periodical wrote that on June 30, it submitted a written inquiry to the Corruption Prevention Commission, hoping to clarify the inaccuracies in the MPs’ declarations. [[190]](#footnote-190) Not receiving a written response, 10 days later the website contacted the Chairman of the Commission Haykuhi Harutyunyan, who said that the inquiry was not answered due to the workload. A month later, the mentioned mistakes were not corrected yet, which, according to the website, impacted the work of the media outlet adversely, as it was impossible to analyze a declaration full of mistakes.

**On August 21**, Hraparak.am website wrote that the editorial office sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, asking to provide information on the "I am" and "I have the honor" programs for service in the RA Armed Forces and to clarify whether the Ministry intended to abandon or amend those programs.[[191]](#footnote-191) The official response was not full, in particular, the Ministry of Defense did not comment on the information about the closure of one of the programs, besides, there was no clarification on why no one applied to the program in 2020 and what the problems these programs encountered in the course of their implementation.

**On August 31,** Aravot.am website asked 10 questions to the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF) about the investments made in the economy. Executive Director Davit Papazyan did not answer the written inquiry, conveying through the press secretary that it was not an appropriate time to speak about such matters.[[192]](#footnote-192) The website wrote that the necessary information was not available on the official, and exclusively English language, website of ANIF.

**On October 5**, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Corruption Prevention Commission, demanding that it provide the requested information. The inquiry is as follows: as of June 1, 2020, how many of the RA NA deputies have submitted the 2019 annual declaration? If there are failures to submit, why? In another inquiry, the NGO expects an explanation as to why the declarations of the assets owned by NA MPs Eduard Babayan, Taguhi Tovmasyan, their related persons were not submitted, and what legal steps the commission has taken against these MPs. On October 12, the lawsuit was returned because the plaintiff missed the legal deadline set by law.

**On October 8**, the Administrative Court held a regular session on *Investigative Journalists NGO v. Chairman of the RA State Revenue Committee David Ananyan*, demanding to obligate the defendant to provide information.

We should remind that the NGO filed the lawsuit on April 17, 2019, requesting copies of all contracts with Taiwanese Mitak Information Technology and Chinese Pax Technology companies, and if the contracts contained any trade secrets, they were offered to close the relevant lines. At a closed hearing on August 6, 2019, the court ruled to settle the Investigative Journalists' claim partially, obligate the State Revenue Committee to provide copies of all contracts signed with the Taiwanese and Chinese companies, closing all the excerpts containing trade secrets, as well as provide information on companies. On September 12, the Investigative Journalists NGO appealed to the Administrative Court of Appeals. On October 28, the appeal of the defendant, former chairman of the State Revenue Committee David Ananyan, was rejected. The respondent did not go to the Court of Cassation.

**On October 13**, the 168.am website sent a request to the RA Police, asking to provide information on how many media outlets had published materials prohibited under the marshal law, what media outlets and publications were concerned, and what criteria underlay the selection. On October 21, the website received a response, which provided general information on the violations of the rules, set for the publication or dissemination of information. In addition, the police refused to provide the names of specific media outlets and the titles of impugned publications, citing the right to privacy. However, this substantiation has nothing to do with the essence of the inquiry.

**On November 4**, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression sent a written inquiry to the RA Police, requesting information on which media outlets had been fined for publishing posts or information on the grounds of violating the restrictions on freedom of speech under the martial law declared on September 27. No answer was given by the RA Police, only a reference was made to the news on the official website, containing only general information and not mentioning the names of the media, fined for the above-stated reason.

**On December 3**, the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Police with the same request, asking to clarify the number of media outlets who had appealed the fine, the number of outlets fined after the ceasefire, and so on. The agency refused to respond to the inquiry, citing the confidentiality of personal data. According to the FOICA, this is an unfounded refusal, as the content of the survey has nothing to do with personal data.

On **November 5**, the Freedom of Information Center received a delayed response from the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to the inquiry sent on September 15, regarding the decisions made by the Advisory Commission on Coordination of Charitable Programs of the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

**On November 8**, Pastinfo news website tried to find out details about NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan's meetings in Moscow from Tigran Galstyan, Chief of Staff of the Parliament. In response, the latter demanded that the request be sent in writing, complaining that the media outlet was trying to verify the information on Saturday. The media reacted to this complaint, saying that there would be no need for a call on Saturday, if the NA Chief of Staff complied with the law by publishing information on foreign visits on the NA website.

**On November 24**, the Hraparak.am website wrote that it had sent a written inquiry to the head of the penitentiary service of the Ministry of Justice, Artur Goyunyan, about the current place of detention of the convicts from the Shushi penitentiary institution. The question remained unanswered, with a reasoning as follows: "Due to the martial law declared in the Republic of Armenia, the provision of the information requested by you is considered inexpedient." The media outlet expressed bewilderment as to how the martial law could be related to the place of detention of the convicts, and concluded that they were simply trying to hide the information. The editorial office also complained that the department had asked for a month to answer a simple question about the bonuses paid.

**On November 26**, 168․am website reported that on September 2 it had sent a written inquiry to the head of the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice Arthur Goyunyan, requesting information on the construction works carried out in penitentiary institutions during the previous year. In response, the penitentiary advised to look for the answers to the questions on Tendermonitoring.am website and find information on the companies that participated in the tenders, the value of their bids, why the specific companies, in particular, Agat 777 Ltd. was the main winner in the tenders. However, it turned out that the website was inaccessible, and all the information there was not publicly accessible.

**On December 8,** NewArmenia journalist Ani Ohanyan asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to comment on the conversation between former Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on the return of the 7 regions of Artsakh. The agency requested a written request, but even after receiving it, failed to provide an answer, nor did it request additional time for response.

**On December 13**, the correspondent of Aravot.am website Nelli Babayan received a delayed response to her inquiry, sent to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs back in August, about the support programs for children with special needs in Tavush region. Due to this delay, the journalistic report was not published on time.

**On December 23**, Yerkir.am website wrote that it had sent an inquiry to the RA Government regarding the grounds for granting someone the right of deferment for studies to the head of the staff Eduard Aghajanyan. The government did not respond to the inquiry, reasoning that the information contained personal data. Meanwhile, a very important circumstance was ignored. It is about a high-ranking official, whose biography could be important for the public.

**On December 23**, the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the RA Nature Protection and Subsoil Inspectorate, requesting information on what was done about the Ararat cyanide tailing dump and in response to the alarm by the Armenian Environmental Front initiative. The FOICA also asked to indicate whether a survey had been conducted and, if so, what were the findings thereof. The answer was incomplete, the provided information did not cover all the questions.

***Other Events on Activity of Media and Journalists***

**On January 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the proceedings with a regular court session on the case of journalist Tehmine Yenokyan against citizen Hovsep Asoyan, with a claim of obliging to refute the information that was considered as an insult.

We should remind that on September 11, 2018, Tehmineh Yenokyan posted on Facebook that Lydian Armenia employees had cut her phone conversation from her colleagues’ live broadcast, then posted it and wrote insulting comments about the journalist.[[193]](#footnote-193) The reporter went to court on April 29, 2019 (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018 and 2019 in the *Reports* section of www.khosq.am website.)

On March 19 the court ruled to settle Tehmine Yenokyan’s claim, setting the value of compensaton at 200000 AMD. Besides, the defendant was obligated to make a public apology to Tehmine Yenokyan for insulting her on Facebook.

**On April 27,** the plaintiff filed an appeal with the Court of Appeals against the first instance court judgment, since the judicial act, in her opinion, had not established the manner and means of the apology, besides, the amount of the compensation was too small. On July 23, the appeal was rejected. The plaintiff did not go to the Court of Cassaion, and the case was handed over to the archive.

**On February 3**, by the decision of the RA Administrative Court, TV5 CJSC, Armenia TV CJSC, MoTV Media Holding CJSC, ArmenAkob CJSC, AR TV COMPANY Ltd., Cinemax and Husaber Ltd. were involved as third parties in the trial on the case of A1 + TV Company against the RA Government and the Commission on Television and Radio.

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. On May 6, the Court decided to remove TV FIVE CJSC and Cinemax Ltd. from the list of the parties to the litigation, taking into account that that they were liquidated. Court sessions on the case were also held on June 4, September 17, November 17, with the next one scheduled on March 16, 2021.

**On February 24**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court hearing on the case of the founder of the *Iravunk* newspaper, former MP *Hayk Babukhanyan v. 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. [[194]](#footnote-194)

Sessions on the case took place on May 6, July 2, July 10 and 14, September 28, November 16, with the next one scheduled for February 12, 2021.

**On March 19**, the RA Government passed a decree to liquidate the *02* *weekly* CJSC. The rationale of the decree stated that in line with the economic, social and budgetary policy pursued by the Government of the Republic of Armenia every state administration body should implement functions, exclusively in compliance with and stemming from its goals. Hence, it was decided to stop the activity of an organization, fulfilling functions that were not typical of the field of activity of the RA Police.

**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 v. 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. (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2018 and 2019 in the *Reports* section of [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am) website).

Court hearings on the case were also held on June 26, and July 10 was appointed as the date of judgment publication, however, access to the information on the this case on Datalex information platform has been restricted.

**On July 23**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction held a preliminary court session on the case of News.am Ltd., the founder of News.am website, against political scientist Styopa Safaryan, seeking compensation for the damage to its business reputation. We should remind that the suit, filed on August 28, was prompted by a Facebook post, saying that the site had received an order from Robert Kocharyan's office to publish some articles about judges.[[195]](#footnote-195)

A court session was held on November 3 and 30, with the next one scheduled for March 16, 2021.

**On November 2**, 168 Zham Ltd. and its founder Satik Seyranyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Chairman of the Public Council Styopa Safaryan, claiming public refutation of the defamatory information, an apology for insult, obligation to remove the article and compensation of damage caused to the honor, dignity and business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit was Styopa Safaryan's post on Facebook, dated October 13, according to which 168.am website, belonging to the company, attributed insulting remarks to the Russian journalist Vladimir Solovyov, which, however, the latter had not made.

The plaintiff considers the following expressions as an insult and slander: "This media outlet masterfully makes use of commercial relations, order, slander, schemes and intrigue in the Armenian media," "it goes without saying that the website run by the woman holding the chair of the President of the Union of Journalists of Armenia is engaged in criminal activities," and so on.

The plaintiff claims 2 million AMD as compensation for defamation and 1 million AMD as compensation for insult.

On November 9, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. On November 16, a counterclaim was filed to publicly refute the defamatory data, obligate to the removal of the material, and compensatation of the damage caused to the honor, dignity and business reputation, but on November 23 the counterclaim was returned due to defects in the documents. The defendant went to the Court of Appeals on December 7. The latter rejected the complaint on December 29. A trial was scheduled for February 8, 2021.

**On December 4**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan partially upheld the claim of LiveNews journalist Taguhi Aslanyan and obligated Public Council Chairman Styopa Safaryan to apologize to the journalist for his insulting remarks, and pay 600,000 AMD (the plaintiff had claimed 1 million AMD) in compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on November 14, 2019, claiming a public apology, obligation to provide compensation for insult. The lawsuit was triggered by Styopa Safaryan's expressions. We should remind that on October 29, 2019, the Armenian Institute of International and Security Issues banned a number of media outlets from participating in the event, and Styopa Safaryan asked Channel 5 and LiveNews.am reporters to leave the event, adding they could not invite him "either to the sauna, or to their place." [[196]](#footnote-196)

As of December 31, the judgment has not been appealed.

By the RA Governmental decree **of December 10**, the Prime Minister's Spokeswoman Mane Gorgyan and Chief of Staff Eduard Aghajanyan became the authorized representatives of Armenpress state news agency, holding 49 and 51% shares, respectively. Prior to that, 50% of Armenpress shares belonged to the Director of the Public Relations and Information Center of the Prime Minister 's Office, and the rest to the Press Secretary of the Prime Minister and the Head of the Information and Public Relations Department of the RA Government Staff, 25% each. The rationale states that the activity of Armenpress was mainly coordinated through the Press Secretary of the Prime Minister and the Department of Information and Public Relations within the Cabinet Staff.

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