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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***

**2021 first quarterly (January-March) report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression**

*The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression regularly submits to the public its reports on the working environment and issues of Armenian media and its personnel, on the status of the freedom of expression and the violations of the rights of media outlets and those of journalists. This report reflects the data for the first quarter of 2021.*

*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***

 The first quarter of 2021 was marked by a drastic increase in physical violence against members of the media. The number of such cases in the reporting period exceeds the one from last year with 7 cases and 8 victims. Moreover, some facts are unprecedented․ In particular, the case of violence applied by the Minister of High-Tech Industry Hakob Arshakyan against the journalist. This has recently been a vivid manifestation of extreme intolerance and even indecent relations between the government and the media.

Cases of unfavorable treatment towards media representatives could be observed in the National Assembly, during opposition protests and other public events. At the same time, hate speech, disinformation and fake news, insults and defamation continue to be widespread in the highly politicized and polarized media.

The authorities, deciding to counteract these phenomena, have come up with a number of legislative initiatives in the recent months, which were assessed by the journalistic community as disproportionate, threatening freedom of speech and not meeting international standards.

In particular, the recommended amendments to the Law on Media, inter alia, proposed to ban the reference to anonymous or, as it was later reformulated, non-identifiable sources. This innovation can seriously hinder journalistic activities, and limit the work with sources of information. Meanwhile, it does not solve the alarming problem of spreading fake news.

The other very alarming initiative, as authored by the NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan, proposed to triple the amount of compensation for defamation and insult envisaged by Article 1087 Part 1 of the Civil Code and took the form of a law already on March 24, being fully adopted in the second reading. This repressive legislative measure was criticized by the expert community, the international human rights organization Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders; the authorities were urged to repeal the amendment. Naturally, these experts and organizations do not aim to justify insulters and slanderers, but to protect the authors of critical speech from unnecessary pressure and unjustified responsibility by using legal mechanisms.

Alen Simonyan has put into circulation 2 legislative proposals, which have not been included in the agenda of the current NA session yet. One is the bill to amend Article 226 of the RA Criminal Code, which envisages criminal prosecution for intentional online publication of apparently false information on an issue of public interest via a pseudonymous source, as well as slander or insult. The other, as related to the former, is an amendment to Article 1087 Part 1 Clause 6 of the RA Civil Code, about exemption from responsibility: it is proposed to add the phrase "unless the source is a pseudonym" at the end.

The RA Prosecutor's Office came up with another problematic initiative, proposing to criminalize slander or insult of officials. Given that government officials, politicians and other popular individuals often perceive criticism against them as defamation or insult, such legislative initiatives can really create serious obstacles to the free operation of the media, increase the number of lawsuits against journalists and the media. And the facts show that 25% of such lawsuits are filed by state officials or politicians.

The repressive initiatives that appeared one after the other, contradict the well-known international norms, including the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the decisions of the European Court, as well as the provisions of the RA Constitutional Court Decision No. 997 of November 15, 2011. In fact, there is a tendency to spare the representatives of the government from criticism. In this regard, the US Department of State expressed concern in its annual report on "Human Rights Practices in the World" on March 30, making reference to CPFE data.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 During the first quarter, compared to the same period in 2019-20, there was a decrease in the number of new lawsuits against journalists and the media. 12 new lawsuits were registered, 10 of which were based on defamation and insult, 1 was an economic dispute, and the other involved 5 media outlets "Armenian Second TV Channel" as a third party in the lawsuit against Commission on Television and Radio. As for the cases of pressure in general, the overall number is 20, and the number of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information are 15.

 One of the significant events that took place during the reporting period was the final stage of the TV licensing competitions for broadcasting on public multiplex, as a result of which "H2" was declared defeated and applied to the court, appealing against the decision of the Commission on Television and Radio. "A1 +" did not get a license again. With a few exceptions, the status quo was maintained in the sector, no serious reforms were observed, which is largely due to the shortcomings and gaps in the Law on Audiovisual Media, adopted in July 2020.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

 The Internet is free in Armenia. The Government does not interfere with online content. This is the conclusion of the US Department of State from its 2020 report on "Human Rights Practices in the World", published on March 30, 2021. The document also touches upon the cases of violation of journalists' rights, making reference to the data of the 2020 annual report of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression. The incident between former Chief of Police Vladimir Gasparyan and the staff of Radio Liberty in Sevan was mentioned, namely invoking not only the use of obscene language by the former official, but his threats to kill journalists, too, and his attempts at hindering the journalists’ professional activities. The report also noted physical violence against journalists during opposition rallies[[2]](#footnote-2).

Similar cases have occurred since the very beginning of 2021. In general, in the first quarter of the year, the media continued to work in extremely tense socio-political conditions in post-war Armenia. The media landscape still remains extremely polarized. Moreover, the representatives of both the authorities and the opposition forces often show extreme intolerance towards the media outlets of the "opposite camp" and their employees, accusing them of trying to spread disinformation, hate speech, manipulation, insult, defamation, and committing attempts of deliberate discreditation.

This reciprocal targeting develops into open conflicts, and in some cases leads to fistfights. The most scandalous case of the reporting period was the case of violence applied by the Minister of High-Tech Industry Hakob Arshakyan against journalist Paylak Fahradyan. This was an unprecedented event during the whole CPFE monitoring, when a member of the government used his fists while interacting with a media representative.

Mass protests, marches and rallies in the country were especially dangerous for journalistic activities, during the coverage of which media workers often became targets of attacks. In the first quarter, the CPFE recorded 7 cases of physical violence against journalists and cameramen, which is by 1 case more than the number of cases registered during the previous year.

Apart from the representatives of the political forces and the government, various pressures were exerted on the media workers by the demonstrators and ordinary citizens during the mass protests. Thus, during the opposition rallies, their participants hindered, for example, the work of Radio Liberty and "1in.am" news website, and at the pro-governmental events the work of the filming crews of “Channel 5 " and " Yerkir Media" TV companies was hindered.
 The law enforcement bodies responded to the statements spread by the CPFE and partner organizations regarding the obstruction of the professional activities of journalists and cameramen, and in connection with three cases, according to the RA Prosecutor's Office, a criminal case was initiated. These cases are presented in the relevant sections of the report.
 In an atmosphere of intolerance and hatred, some journalists resort to tricks that do not always comply with the norms of professional ethics. Thus, Suzy Badoyan, correspondent of emphatically opposition-oriented "Yerevan. Today" website, introduced herself as an employee of another media outlet, "A1+" online TV company, while conducting public opinion polls. This forced "A1+" to make a statement on March 5, expressing concern over the journalist's behavior, urging not to cross the boundaries of professional ethics.[[3]](#footnote-3)
 To counter hate speech, fake news, insults and defamation, which were widespread in the media, the authorities came up with a number of legislative initiatives, which, however, were sharply criticized by journalistic organizations. According to independent experts, the approaches used in the proposed projects will do more harm to the freedom of speech than help to overcome the negative phenomena. Thus, on February 1, "My Step" faction of the National Assembly circulated a package of amendments to the Law on Media and the Code on Administrative Offenses, authored by its MPs, which envisages to ban making reference to anonymous/unidentified sources in publications. It is proposed to impose a fine of 500.000 AMD for violating this prohibition, and in case of recurrence, to administer a fine at 1 million AMD. This, in fact, jeopardizes conscientious journalism, especially investigative journalism, because when reporting information of public significance, the source, sometimes even for their own security reasons, does not want to be identified and revealed.

Another alarming development: on March 24, in the second reading, the parliament fully adopted the bill, proposed by NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan back in September 2020, according to which the maximum amount of monetary compensation for insult and defamation envisaged by Article 1087 Part 1 of the RA Civil Code should be tripled, reaching 3 million and 6 million AMD, respectively. By the way, when the bill was just put into circulation, it passed the first reading with the fivefold current compensation cap (namely, 5 million and 10 million AMD). In this regard, journalistic organizations made statements demanding the National Assembly to postpone the second reading of the above-mentioned bill, initiate open discussions on the issue of insult and defamation, spread in the media, and refer to the possibilities to counteract it. The authors of the statement also called on international organizations to discuss the adoption of laws on the media by the Armenian parliament, and the disregard for international norms in the process, as well as to take measures to remedy the situation[[4]](#footnote-4).

Later, on March 17, after the issue was discussed in the Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs of the National Assembly, the author of the bill made a "concession", reducing the maximum amount of compensations to 3 and 6 million AMD, respectively. However, even in this case, the change is unacceptable, as the balance between the right to freedom of expression envisaged by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the dignity of a person as an aspect of their private life protected by Article 8 of the same convention are disturbed. In addition, the most important provision of the RA Constitutional Court Ruling No. 997 of November 15, 2011 is ignored, according to which the financial situation of the media outlets should be taken into account when awarding compensation for insult and defamation in the publications, so that the liability does not lead to their collapse. On the other hand, tripling the ceiling of the compensation for insult and defamation can be a signal for the courts to confiscate more money in such cases than is accepted in today's practice.

Taking into account that the National Assembly still adopted the problematic bill, journalistic organizations issued another statement urging the RA President not to sign it, and to start the process of checking the constitutionality of that law, and called on to international organizations to urge the authorities to reconsider these and other initiatives threatening freedom of speech.[[5]](#footnote-5) Freedom House, an international human rights organization, responded to the statement by urging the Armenian authorities to repeal the legislative amendment[[6]](#footnote-6). The organization Reporters Without Borders made the same demand on Twitter.
 NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan also put into circulation a bill on making amendments to Article 226 of the RA Criminal Code related to hate speech. It is proposed to add Articles 226 Part 3 and 226 Part 4, which establish criminal liability for intentionally publishing obviously false information on a matter of public interest on the Internet through a pseudonymous source and for slandering or insulting a person under a pseudonymous source, respectively.

The same Alen Simonyan has authored another bill, which proposes to amend the Article 1087 Part 1 Clause 6 of the RA Civil Code ("Procedure and conditions of compensation for damage to honor, dignity or business reputation"), adding at the end, "unless the source uses a pseudonym." This bill has not been included in the agenda of the current NA session yet.
  Another concern to the journalistic community was the draft amendment to the RA Criminal Code, published on the official website e-draft.am for public discussion on February 17, which proposes to impose a fine in the amount of one hundred to five hundred fold the minimum wage for insulting or slandering officials of state and local self-government bodies. And if the insult or slander was committed through the media or other public means related to the performance of official duties, the bill envisages a fine in the amount of five hundred to three thousand fold the minimum wage, or imprisonment for a maximum of two years.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The above-mentioned legislative initiatives are logically interconnected and have an obvious tendency to counteract the vicious phenomena in the media through strict restrictions and sanctions. However, these means are very disproportionate. The proposed bills separately and jointly contradict a number of international norms; first of all, the European Convention, the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the decisions of the European Court, threatening the freedom of speech and the unrestrained activity of the media.

In addition, the authors of the initiatives seem to have ignored the general principle that government officials and politicians, as opposed to ordinary citizens, should be much more tolerant of harsh words addressed to them, as their scope of scrutiny is much wider. Moreover, in this case the journalist can use both "exaggerations", and, in some sense, even provocation, which is an integral part of their professional freedom. Meanwhile, the CPFE's observations show that about 25% of lawsuits against the media are filed by officials and various politicians.

In fact, by increasing liability for insults and defamation, to some extent shifting the issue from the realm of civil law to criminal law, for the sake of special protection for officials, these legislative initiatives can help shield them from criticism and reduce their accountability to the public. When insult and defamation were decriminalized in 2010, international organizations assessed it as progress, a democratic step, while the government today, formed as a result of the revolution, seems to have decided to move in the opposite direction.

By the way, during the first quarter, 12 new lawsuits were filed against journalists and media outlets, 10 of which were based on defamation and insult, and 6 of them were filed by current and former officials and their affiliates. The US Department of State also expressed concern about the large number of such lawsuits in the above-mentioned report, again making reference to the CPFE studies.

In order to resolve the media related problems by extrajudicial proceedings, experts of the field highly recommend to do so through self-regulatory information initiatives such as the Information Disputes Council and the Media Ethics Observatory. Thus, for example, after a opinion provided by the Observatory, journalist Levon Sardaryan refused to file a lawsuit against the founder of News.am website. As for the already launched court case of journalist *Mariam Tashchyan v. businessman Artyom Vardanyan*, as a result of the IDC conclusion, the plaintiff is better prepared for the court sessions and can more accurately defend her interests.
 One of the best ways for the extrajudicial resolution of information disputes is the right to refute or respond, as provided by the law. For example, on February 3, News.am website published the refutation of the Minister of Environment Romanos Petrosyan in relation to an earlier news report, published on the same website.[[8]](#footnote-8) And on March 19, "Yerevan.today" published the refutation demanded by the Corruption Prevention Commission with additional comments.[[9]](#footnote-9) Yet, here is an opposite example: the *Hraparak* daily refused to publish the refutation, after which St. Gregory the Illuminator Medical Center filed a lawsuit against the media outlet, demanding refutation of the defamatory information, discrediting its business reputation, as well as compensation for such defamation.

 In addition to lawsuits based on insult and defamation, there was one case when 5 TV companies were involved as a third party in a lawsuit filed by the Armenian Second TV Channel against the Commission on Television and Radio, and another case was an economic dispute demanding confiscation of money. The total number of various pressures has reached 20 during this quarter, including cases of contemptuous or insulting treatment of media representatives, with which NA MPs Andranik Kocharyan and Hayk Sargsyan particularly stood out. The latter have continuously targeted the representatives of the opposition media; moreover, as a result of unpleasant incidents, the Yerevan Today correspondent was banned from entering the National Assembly. Journalistic organizations have made statements concerning these cases.

 The media outlets continue to complain about the activities of the agencies, when they demand a 30-day period to respond to the inquiries of journalists in anticipation of official data, regardless of whether additional work and efforts are required for it or not. During the quarter, 15 cases of violation of the right to receive and disseminate information were recorded.

 One of the highlights of this quarter was the conclusion of new TV licensing tenders after the adoption of the Law on Audiovisual Media. We should remind that applications were submitted for 6 republican, 9 capital and 8 regional broadcasts on public multiplex. On January 15, the Commission on Television and Radio announced the winners through a rating evaluation. A1+ and Armenian Second TV Channel did not receive licenses. The latter made a statement, considering the whole process of the competition unfair․"Our TV channel considers this decision to be illegal, discriminatory, and will fight by all legal means to restore terrestrial broadcasting." It was on this basis that the TV company filed a lawsuit against the Commission on Television and Radio, demanding the annulment of the decisions made.
 According to independent media experts, neither the new law nor these competitions fulfilled the government's promise to clean up the Armenian television. Hate speech and manipulations, insults and defamation, extreme manifestations of bias continue to be widespread on the air. The new law, in fact, has preserved the outdated licensing procedure and the holding of complex tenders, in which the opportunities for subjective assessments and injustice are great again. In addition, not only did the law fail to facilitate the inclusion of a number of local TV stations in the regions in the digital broadcasting space, but also practically blocked the process, leaving them in the analog range. And although the opportunity of creating a private multiplex is envisaged by the law, mechanisms and realistic conditions for the implementation of that idea have not been developed.

 Another competition was held on February 26 to fill the vacancies of the council members of the Public Television and Radio Company. The established ad hoc commission elected publicist Vahram Martirosyan and NA MP Vahagn Tevosyan into the council.

 The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression continued to follow the criminal cases initiated in connection with the events of "Electric Yerevan" of June 23, 2015 on Baghramyan Avenue and "Sari Tagh" events from July 17 to 30, 2016, within the framework of which more than 40 journalists and cameramen were recognized as victims. On March 4, 2021, the case of "Sari Tagh" was suspended again, for the second time in the recent years, on the grounds that the person involved as an accused was not known. As in the previous case, the CPFE intends to assist the injured journalists to appeal the SIS decision to resume the investigation.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2021 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 the first quarter of 2021, as well as developments related to the previous incidents.

 ***In total, there were 42 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2021. 20 were cases of pressure against the media and staff members, 15 were cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information, and 7 were cases of violence.***

 The table below presents these data, also in comparison with the indicators of the past year.

 **Quantiative data on violations in the 1st quarters of 2020-2021**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2020 | 1st quarter of 2021 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **0** | **7 (8 victims)** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **50** | **20** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **21** | **15** |

**Lawsuits, involving media and journalists in the 1st quarters of 2020-2021**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2020 | 1st quarter of 2021 |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 12 | 10 |
| Economic and other disputes | 2 | 2 |

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

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

 *In the first quarter of 2021 there were 7 cases (with 8 victims) of physical violence against media workers, compared to 0 cases in the same period last year. Below we present facts and developments related to both those cases and past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

 **On January 13,** Hayk Sargsyan, a member of the ruling party in the National Assembly, pushed Suzy Badoyan, a journalist of Yerevan.today, impeding her work. Then the MP announced that he would not answer the journalist's questions, snatched the microphone and took it with him to the office, returning it shortly after.[[10]](#footnote-10)

 The information related to the incident was sent by the Prosecutor's Office to the Special Investigation Service, where on February 1 a decision was made to refuse to initiate a criminal case on the grounds of absence of corpus delicti.

 **On January 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of 168.am correspondent Ani Keshishyan, Public Radio correspondent Liana Yeghiazaryan and a group of citizens v. Levon Yeranosyan, former RA Police Commander.
 We should remind that charges were brought against Levon Yeranosyan for deliberately exceeding official authorities with the use of special means, and causing essential damage to the rights of citizens, negligently leading to serious consequences. On April 16, 2018 injuries were caused to Ani Keshishyan on Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan, and on April 22, Liana Yeghiazaryan got an injury at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebouni streets, while covering protest demonstrations and police activities. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

 The next court hearing is scheduled for April 12.

**On January 18,** the Criminal Court of Appeal rejected the appeal of journalist Sisak Gabrielyan against the judgment of the Court of First Instance, according to which the accusation against defendant Levon Gasparyan under Article 149, Part 2, Clause 3 of the RA Criminal Code was requalified into Part 1 of the same article and the prosecution against him was terminated on the grounds that the statute of limitations for criminal liability had expired, and the proceedings in this case were terminated. The victim had appealed the verdict, demanding a proportionate punishment.

We should remind that on April 2, 2017, on National Assembly election day Sisak Gabrielyan, journalist from Radio Liberty, and Shoghik Galstyan, correspondent of Araratnews.am news website, underwent violence at the campaign office of Hakob Beglaryan, candidate to the parliament from the Republican party. Shoghik Galstyan’s interests are presented by CPFE advocate.

On February 5, 2018, the court announced Julietta Kokolyan wanted, since the latter was charged with impeding Shoghik Galstyan’s professional activity.[[11]](#footnote-11) Before finding Julietta Kokolyan, the court decided to halt the proceedings against her and resume in a separate proceeding on the case of the other defendant Levon Gasparyan. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2017-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Thus, the Court of General Jurisdiction noted that within the scope of the criminal case, both during the pre-investigation and the trial, no information was obtained that Sisak Gabrielyan's health had been harmed as a result of Levon Gasparyan's act or that he had undergone physical pain or mental suffering. The Court of Appeal, in its turn, considered the decision of the Court of First Instance well reasoned and ruled to reject the plaintiff's appeal. No cassation appeal was filed.

 **On January 29,** a woman attacked "Yerkir.am" correspondent Liana Sargsyan in front of the RA Government building, hindering her work. At the suggestion of the RA Prime Minister, the journalist formulated her question in writing, preferring to present it with a poster, which was not to the liking of the citizens supporting Nikol Pashinyan. The above-mentioned woman forcibly took it, tore the poster, and pushed the journalist.[[12]](#footnote-12)
 Based on the video, publications and notes on the event, the Police initiated a criminal case on the grounds of Article 164, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code and filed to the Investigative Committee on February 26, with the aim to conduct pre-investigation and identify the circumstances of the case.

**On February 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (Masis residence) held a regular court hearing on the criminal case of attacking "Kentron TV" journalist Artur Hakobyan and cameraman Simik Mailyan and hindering their professional activities.

We should remind that on December 24, 2019, dozens of residents in the Hovtashen community in Ararat marz attacked Kentron TV workers, hitting them and damaging the camera.[[13]](#footnote-13)On May 21, 2020the case with the indictment of one person, namely the perpetrator Samvel Minasyan, within the separate action of the criminal case was sent to the Court, and accepted for proceedings on May 26.

This year a court hearing on the case was also held on Februrary 24, the next is scheduled for April 1.

**On February 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a trial on the fact of violence against Artak Khulyan, reporter at "Shantnews.am" news website, and Hovhannes Sargsyan, cameraman at "Factor.am" news website. That criminal case was initiated in 2018 in connection with the incident that took place during the days of the April Revolution, and 8 people with indictments were sent to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan.(For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearing on the case was also held on March 18, the next is scheduled for April 1.

**On February 23** Aram Nersisyan, cameraman at "Sputnik Armenia" website, was hit and fell to the ground during a protest rally organized by opposition forces in Yerevan.[[14]](#footnote-14)

During the opposition march that took place on the same day, the demonstrators targeted the personnel of Radio Liberty, insulted, cursed and threatened to close the radio station. Then they kicked journalist Artak Khulyan and cameraman Karen Chilingaryan, damaging the camera.

The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations issued a joint statement on the incident, to which the RA Police responded on March 1, informing that the document had been sent to the central division of the Yerevan City Police Department to resolve the further process. The Prosecutor's Office also informed that a criminal case was initiated according to Article 164, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code and sent to the RA Investigative Committee for a pre-investigation, in order to identify the circumstances of the cases. On March 3, the Investigative Committee informed that the case had been accepted for proceedings, a pre-investigation was being conducted, within the framework of which interrogations were being carried out, the scene and videos were being inspected, and operative-investigative measures were being taken.

 **On February 24,** "Yerkir.am" journalist Liana Sargsyan reported to the police that two people had impeded her work while performing her professional activities in Yerevan Freedom Square, and one of them had hit her[[15]](#footnote-15). On March 3, the RA Prosecutor's Office informed that a criminal case had been initiated on the prepared materials according to Article 164, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code; on February 26, it was sent to the RA Investigative Committee, where an inquiry is being conducted.

**On February 26,** during a protest rally organized by opposition forces on Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan, some citizens first insulted and then physically assaulted Vahe Makaryan, journalist of "Hraparak" daily, as he tried to support his Radio Liberty colleagues by protecting them from insulting remarks.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**On March 18,** RA Minister of High-Tech Industry Hakob Arshakyan used violence against Paylak Fahradyan, the editor of "Irakanum.am" website, in one of the cafes in Yerevan. The latter, noticing a high-ranking official, approached and asked why he was in the cafe during working hours. According to media reports, the conversation was inappropriate on both sides, after which the minister hit the journalist, damaged his computer and phone.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The RA Prosecutor's Office sent the publications related to the incident to the Special Investigation Service for inspection.

**On March 30,** the Criminal Court of Appeal held a trial on the complaint of Narine Avetisyan, the editor-in-chief of "Lori TV", against Tigran Nazaryan, the head of "Shinplus" construction company, and its employee Vrezh Khachatryan for impeding her lawful professional activities and using physical violence.

We should remind that on September 28, 2017,Narine Avetisyan, after receiving information, that asphalting was being carried out in the conditions of heavy rain, went to that site to cover the implemented works. When videotaping, Tigran Nazaryan, head of the “Shinplus” construction company, along with his staff members attacked Narine Avetisyan, twisted her arms, dropped her on the ground and seized her phone, deleting the taken photos.[[18]](#footnote-18)
 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. On September 28, Narine Avetisyan appealed the verdict at the Criminal Court of Appeals.
 The next court hearing is scheduled on May 4.

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

*In 2021, there was a total of 20 cases of pressures on the media and their staff, with 30 cases fewer than the number recorded last year. They were carried out through lawsuits, impediment of professional activities, insulting attitude towards journalists, as well as their dismissal.Those pressures 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 9,** during a protest rally in front of Vazgen Sargsyan Military University, a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Defense banned media representatives from filming. The official showed aggressive behavior. He attacked the cameraman of "24news" website with insulting expressions, and hit the camera. [[19]](#footnote-19) In a letter to the CPFE on February 26, following a joint statement by news organizations, the Ministry of Defense said that an official investigation had been launched into the incident, and that it had been revealed that the media representative had violated the rules of filming in the area of military unit and special security facilities, not coordinating their actions with the command of the military unit in advance. Nonetheless, the officer of the military unit was warned against such behavior.

**On January 11,** in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Gegharkunik Marz (Martuni residence), the trial on the criminal case of hindering the professional activities of the employees of Radio Liberty by the former Chief of Police of the Republic of Armenia Vladimir Gasparyan continued.

We should remind that the incident happened on August 8, 2020, near the former official’s private house on the shore of lake Sevan, where noticing that the reporters were filming, Gasparyan 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. 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 received the criminal case from the RA Prosecutor's Office with an indictment.

 On February 19, the court decided to satisfy the motion of Vladimir Gasparyan's lawyer and to abolish the above-mentioned precautionary measure. A hearing on the case was held on March 29, the next one is scheduled on April 30.

**On January 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Ara Harutyunyan, a former employee of the National Security Service, against "Skizb Media Kentron" Ltd., founder of "1in.am" news website, demanding refutation of defamatory information, publication of a refutation and compensation for the damages caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on August 31, 2020, and the reason was the article published in "1in.am" on July 31, stating that the plaintiff had served in the RA NSS for more than 20 years, and according to the rumors circulating: "For years, he was paid in an envelope by the chief accountant of the South Caucasus Railways Company for "turning a blind eye" to the robbery on the railways, organized goods smuggling, and engaged in sponsorship"[[20]](#footnote-20).

A court hearing was held on March 15, the next one is scheduled for May 21.

 **On January 11,** "St. Gregory the Illuminator" Medical Center filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against “Hraparak Daily” LLC, demanding refutation and compensation for defamatory information discrediting business reputation.
 The reason for the lawsuit was an article, titled "One of the Deputy Directors of "St. Gregory the Illuminator MC" Lost 1 billion AMD in Toto" published in the December 9, 2020 issue of the *Hraparak Daily*. The article stated, "One of the deputy directors made bets at the Toto bookmaker's office, using the hospital's cash register and lost a great amount of money, over 1 billion AMD. As a result, the hospital staff has not been paid the salary… ". On the day of the publication of the article, the medical center refuted the information of the media on its Facebook page, considering it an absolute lie, which was aimed at discrediting the reputation of the medical center[[21]](#footnote-21). The *Hraparak* was offered to publish a refutation, which was not done.

On January 19, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A preliminary court hearing is scheduled on June 3.

**On January 11,** citizen Azat Tovmasyan filed a complaint in the Civil Court of Appeal, against the decision of Court of First Instance of December 10, 2020, which rejected his lawsuit against "A-TV" and citizen Sirvard Avoyan, demanding recognition of the violation of personal and family rights, refutation of defamatory information, and compensation of 2 million AMD.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by an accusation against Azat Tovmasyan of an alleged obduction of his own daughter, this accusation was made during the "Semi-Open Windows" TV show of July 30, 2018.[[22]](#footnote-22) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The Court of Appeal accepted the plaintiff's complaint for proceedings on February 8. A hearing on the case was held on March 18, the judicial act will be published on April 2.

**On January 13,** “Hraparak Daily” LLC filed a second cassation appeal against the decision of the Court of Appeal, which rejected the appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance on the grounds of unsubstantiated arguments, demanding the media outlet to apologize to plaintiff Alina Nikoghosyan, publishing the text provided by the plaintiff on the website. Besides, it was decided to confiscate 200,000 AMD from “Hraparak Daily” LLC in favor of Alina Nikoghosyan as compensation for the insult and 200,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

The reason for the court dispute was the article "The Ministry of Healthcare Hides what happened, and takes Lfik under Its Auspices" published on "Hraparak.am" website on May 9[[23]](#footnote-23), in connection with which the ministry's press secretary Alina Nikoghosyan filed a lawsuit against the founder of the media outlet.

The appeal was accepted for proceedings in the Court of Cassation on February 23. No other developments were recorded by the end of the quarter.

**On January 13,** NA deputy Vahe Enfiajyan filed a lawsuit against "Social Media" LLC, the founder of "Mamul.am" website, demanding public refutation of the information discrediting his honor and dignity and compensation for defamation. The reason for the lawsuit was the article published on "Mamul.am" website on December 9, 2020, titled "Vahe Enfiajyan's Assistant Offers to Write Praises about Tsarukyan in Exchange for Money, to Discredit Pashinyan."[[24]](#footnote-24) On January 27, the lawsuit was returned. As of March 31, no other developments were recorded.

**On January 14,** Styopa Safaryan, Chairman of the Public Council, again filed a lawsuit against "168 Hours" Ltd. and its founder Satik Seyranyan, demanding public refutation of defamatory factual data, removal of the publication, and compensation for damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was returned twice for corrections in December, 2020. And 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.[[25]](#footnote-25) 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, the pro-Western psychos 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 January 25, 2021, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing on the case was held on March 31. On the same day, the plaintiff filed a motion for the presiding judge's recusal, stating that he had reasonable doubts about the court's objectivity and impartiality. In particular, the presiding judge is the wife of Hayk Alumyan, the lawyer of the second president of Armenia Robert Kocharyan, and the plaintiff's sister, Seda Safaryan, is the defender of the interests of the legal successors of the victims of the "March 1" criminal case. Consequently, the conflict of interest may have a negative impact on the judge investigating the same civil case, causing a greater inclination towards the defendant Satik Seyranyan, who is sympathetic to the interests of the same group in this case.

The next court hearing is scheduled for July 1.

**On January 14,** Chambarak Mayor Vazgen Adamyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the founder of the *Zhamanak* newspaper "Skizb Media Center" LLC, demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was the article published in the newspaper and "1in.am" website on December 11, 2020, titled "Chambarak Mayor Suspected of Selling Military Aid"[[26]](#footnote-26).

On January 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A trial is scheduled on April 7.

**On January 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of citizen *Edgar Janibekyan v. Gagik Shamshyan*, founder of "Shamshyan Media" LLC , demanding compensation for refutation of defamatory information. The lawsuit was filed on July 14, 2020, and the reason was an article on Shamshyan.com, titled "Discovery of Another Large Amount of Drugs by the Arabkir Police in Yerevan․ The 26-year-old suspect acquired it through "Telegram․ Photographic report", published on June 14, where the website, referring to its informants, wrote that Edgar Janibekyan was among the detained[[27]](#footnote-27).

On January 19, the court made a decision on the distribution of the burden of proof, on February 2, it rejected the plaintiff's motion to apply a remedy (to put a freezing order on the defendant's property). Court hearings were held on February 11 and March 3, the next one is scheduled on April 1.

**On January 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Artur Vanetsyan, former head of NSS, v. Dareskizb Ltd.*, founder of the *Armenian Times* daily and "Armtimes.com" website, demanding public refutation of slanderous information, removal of the article from the above-mentioned website, publication of a defamatory statement, and compensation for the damage caused.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 10, 2020, 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.

This year, court hearings on the case were held on January 22 and March 5, and on March 26, the court dismissed the case because the plaintiff withdrew the lawsuit.

**On January 15,** the Civil Court of Appeals rejected Davit Adyan's appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance, which partially upheld the plaintiff's claim against "Skizb Media Kentron" Ltd., 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. [[28]](#footnote-28) 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.

By the court decision made on July 29, 2020, the claim was partially upheld. “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 150,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. The plaintiff's claim for a compensation of 3 million AMD was rejected. The plaintiff appealed the judgment to the Court of Appeal.

The latter considered all the arguments and substantiations of the appellant for material compensation groundless and found that the refutation of the data should be sufficient. The plaintiff did not appeal this decision, the case was handed over to the court archives.

**On January 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen *Arusyak Mkrtchyan v. The Zhoghovurd Daily*, demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused. The lawsuit was filed on August 12, 2019, and the reason was an article published on “Armlur.am” website on July 12, titled "A DJ in Healthcare Sector: Circa $ 20,000 to the Minister's Acquaintance.”[[29]](#footnote-29) 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 film social ads.

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 5.

**On January 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen *Zaven Hakobyan v. The Zhamanak Daily*, demanding compensation for the non-pecuniary damage caused to his business reputation, a public apology and a refutation.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on July 13, 2020, was an article, 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․”[[30]](#footnote-30)

Court hearings on the case were held on February 11 and March 3, the next one is scheduled for April 7.

**On January 19,** “Factor.am” journalist Lilit Shaboyan warned that the decision of Supreme Judicial Council to restrict journalists' access to the courts was hindering the work of the media, creating unnecessary complications.[[31]](#footnote-31) Such a decision is conditioned by COVID-19, according to the official interpretation but, according to the journalist, the epidemic situation in our country allows lifting the restrictions in the courts by following the rules.

**On January 20,** the Court of Cassation ruled not to accept the appeal filed by Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan against the decision of the Administrative Court of Appeal for proceedings.

We should remind that on January 24**,** 2019, the journalists filed a lawsuit to 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 upheld the journalists’ lawsuit. The defendants appealed the decision made by the Administrative Court, and on October 13 the Court of Appeal ruled to uphold the appeal, overturn the judgment of the Administrative Court, and send the case for a new trial.

By the decision of the RA Administrative Court of February 18, a new proceeding was initiated and the case was remitted to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, and on March 15, a proceeding was accepted there. The day of the court hearing has not been scheduled as of March 31.

**On January 20,** theCourt of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of citizens *Marat Grigoryan, Sargis Kelyan, Leon Harutyunyan, Liana Manukyan, Esther Manukyan, Tatevik Boyakhchyan v. The Hraparak*, with claims of compensation for insult and slander.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit was 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[[32]](#footnote-32). The claim was partially settled by a judgment passed on February 28, 2020. The “Hraparak” was obligated to refute the defamatory information published in the above-mentioned article 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 to a higher instance and on July 24 it was upheld.

On March 27, the respondent submitted a complaint to a higher instance; on July 24, it was upheld. By the decision of the Civil Court of Appeal, the case was sent to the same court of general jurisdiction for a new trial.

This year a court hearing on the case was held on March 3, the next one is scheduled for April 12.

**On January 21,** the staff of the National Assembly applied to the editorial office of "Yerevan.today" website, proposing to replace one of the 4 accredited journalists from that editorial office, namely, Suzy Badoyan, with another journalist. This step of the parliament followed the incident that took place between Suzy Badoyan and NA MP Hayk Sargsyan on January 13, which is described in the "Physical Violence" subsection of this report. On January 26, Suzy Badoyan was banned from entering the National Assembly. The journalist had an arrangement for the interview with Arman Abovyan, a Prosperous Armenia Party MP, and a pass, to be issued by the latter. However, the security officers said that the journalist could not enter the National Assembly, as she was deprived of accreditation after an argument with MP Hayk Sargsyan. Journalistic organizations issued a condemning statement regarding these incidents.

**On January 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the lawsuit of citizen Ashot Parazyan against the founder of "Tert.am" news website "Tert AM" LLC, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed by Vahe Parazyan on August 15, 2019, was an article titled "Vahe Parazyan, Who Reported Against Samvel Karapetyan’s Nephew, Has a Criminal Backgound", and published on the website on July 16[[33]](#footnote-33).

The court based its decision on the assertion that the disputed expressions are value judgments. On February 24, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeals, which returned the complaint on March 17. No other developments were recorded as of March 31.

**On January 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made redistribution on the case of the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure *Suren Papikyan v. "Anna Gevorgyan" Private Entrepreneur* ("Hzham.am" news site).

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 22, 2020, demanding public refutation of the defamatory data and payment of compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article published on “Hzham.am” website on May 15, titled "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.[[34]](#footnote-34) On December 17, the motion to apply freezing order on the property was upheld.

On January 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, presided over by another judge. The next court hearing is scheduled for April 19.

**On January 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Leila Karina Ezgeguelyan Majaryan v. "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 demanded to remove it.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 26, 2020. This year, a court hearing was held on February 26, and on March 11, the court decided to leave the lawsuit without trial, as the notified plaintiff did not appear in two consecutive court hearings, and did not apply to postpone the trial or resolve the case in his absence, and the defendant did not insist that the investigation of the case continue.

**On January 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. “Iravunk Media” LLC and Journalist Ilona Azaryan*, claiming 1 million AMD in compensation for damage caused to honor, dignity and reputation through insult and defamation.

The lawsuit was filed on June 13, 2019. The reason for the lawsuit was an article published in the *Iravunk* newspaper on May 14, stating that "the entire information package against David Sanasaryan (Former head of the State Control Service- **CPFE**) reached the NSS with Hayk Sargsyan’s help."

This year the court hearing was held on February 9, and on March 2 the court partially upheld the claim. Accordingly, the defendant was obligated to pay 90,000 AMD in compensation for the damage caused to the plaintiff's honor and dignity, in addition, it was decided to confiscate 200,000 AMD from the plaintiff in favor of the defendant Ilona Azaryan and 48,200 AMD in favor of “Iravunk Media” LLC, as an attorney’s reasonable fee. As of March 31, the court act has not been appealed.

**On January 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Alvina Gyulumyan, a former member of the Constitutional Court, v. “Dareskizb” Ltd., the founder of the "Armenian Times" daily, demanding refutation of slander and compensation.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on August 22, 2018, was the publication of an article stating that when Gyulumyan was representing Armenia at the ECHR as a judge, she did not spare any effort to postpone the investigation of one of the cases in relation to the March 1, 2008, events in Yerevan.

Alvina Gyulumyan’s lawsuit was rejected on December 6, 2019, on the ground that it was time-barred, and the plaintiff filed an appeal on December 30.

On April 15, 2020, the Court of Appeal made a judgment to uphold Alvina Gyulumyan’s appeal against the first instance court judgment, overturning it and sending the case to the same court for a new trial.

 This year, a court hearing on the case was held on February 24. The court made a decision on the distribution of the burden of proof. The next hearing is scheduled for April 12.

**On January 25, “**Armenian National Interests Fund” CJSC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against journalist Oleg Safonov and "168 Hours" Ltd., demanding refutation of information discrediting their business reputation and claiming a monetary compensation. The reason for the lawsuit is the article published by Oleg Safonov on "168.am" website on December 31, 2020, titled "On Anticipated Sharp Increase in Electricity Tariffs in 2022 and Corruption Risks in the Development of Solar Electricity․ Why is Everyone Silent?"[[35]](#footnote-35) The author of the article described the activity of the plaintiff company as suspicious, accusing it of entering into a corrupt deal with the RA government through the mediation of the RA President. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on February 9. The day of the court hearing was not scheduled as of March 31.

**On January 25,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of *"Livenews.am" journalist Artur Hovhannisyan v. Public TV journalist Leon Sardaryan*, demanding an apology for the insult and public refutation of the defamatory information.

The lawsuit was filed on June 22, 2020 based on Levon Sardaryan's Facebook comment, dated May 21, to “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 next court hearing is scheduled for April 30.

**On January 26,** the Vanadzor office of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the "Antifake.am" website, demanding public refutation of the defamatory factual data and compensation for the damage caused. The reason for the lawsuit is an article, titled "How Much Money did the NGOs Operating in Armenia Receive for Supporting the Handover of Artsakh" and published on the website on December 29, 2020, where, among other organizations, the name of the plaintiff was mentioned, too. On February 5, the lawsuit was returned on the grounds of not mentioning the name of the proper defendant. It was filed again on February 19 and returned again on March 1 for corrections. A new lawsuit was filed on March 17. As of March 31, no other developments had taken place.

**On January 26,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made a redistribution on the case of Vardan Badasyan (the father of the RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan - *CPFE*) v. Narek Mantashyan, the co-chair of "Alternative" NGO, and "News.am", "Analitik.am", "168.am ", "Iravunk.com ", "Blognews.am", "Alternativ.am", "Ipress.am" websites.

We should remind that thelawsuitwasfiledon July 10, 2020, demanding public refutation of the defamatory data, publication of the refutation in the relevant media outlets, compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation. The reason for the lawsuit were publications about Vardan Badasyan's years long activity, published on the above-mentioned websites, according to which he assigned positions for money.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The case was accepted for proceedings on February 4, presided over by another judge, and a court hearing was scheduled for May 25.

**On January 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz held a regular court hearing on the case of the head of Ani community *Artak Gevorgyan v. Andranik Gevorgyan*, a resident of Maralik town in the same community, demanding refutation of slander and compensation. The third party to the case was "Zhoghovurd newspaper edition" LLC ("Armlur.am" news site).

The lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2019 and the reason for the lawsuit was the phrase "ate it up, robbed it all," used 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 have to share?"[[37]](#footnote-37) The plaintiff demands 2 million AMD from the defendant.

Court hearings on the case were held on March 17 and March 30, the next one is scheduled on June 2.

**On January 27,** "Tsayg" Ltd. (the founder of the homonymous TV in Gyumri TV) filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak region against "Shant" LLC (the founder of the TV company of the same name), demanding a monetary confiscation. The lawsuit was returned on February 8 for corrections. A new lawsuit was filed on February 19, and was returned on March 1 for the same reason. No other developments were recorded as of March 31.

On January 18, another lawsuit against "Shant" LLC was accepted for proceedings, which was filed on December 30, 2020, by the "Armenian Television and Radio Broadcasting Network" CJSC with the same demand. The latter's motion to apply a remedy was rejected, then was appealed by an interim act in the Court of Appeal and was left unchanged. And the CJSC's motion to postpone the payment of the state fee was upheld. The day of the trial is scheduled for April 12.

**On January 29,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *"Olymp Construction" LLC v. "Hetq" LLC*, demanding refutation of the defamatory information and compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 29, 2020, and 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", published in Hetq.am[[38]](#footnote-38). 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.

This year the court hearing on the case was held on March 30, the next one is scheduled for June 29.

**On January 29,** "Europe in Law" NGO, lawyers Lousine Hakobyan, Tigran Yegoryan, human rights activist Zhanna Aleksanyan, "Skizb Media Kentron" Ltd., NA deputy Arman Babajanyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against "Veto" social -political movement, Narek Malyan, "ArmNews TV" CJSC and "Yerevan.today" website, claiming compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit is an article published on Yerevan.today on October 24, 2020 titled "Working Hand in Hand in the Interests of the Turks" addressed to human rights organizations as "Sorosians" who lay the cornerstone of Armenia's downfall,[[39]](#footnote-39) as well as Narek Malyan's film with the same content shown on December 5 on "ArmNews TV."[[40]](#footnote-40)

On February 11, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. As of March 31, no other developments have taken place.

**On January 29,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the claim of "Van-Charter" LLC against "Armenia TV" CJSC for refuting the defamation and paying compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 12, 2020, and 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.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The court based its rejection on the fact that the defendant did not seek to discredit the plaintiff's business reputation with his publication, therefore, the disputed expressions were qualified as a value judgment. On March 5, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal, where the case was accepted for proceedings on March 29.

**On January 29,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen *Vahe Parazyan v. "Tert.am" LLC*, the founder of "Tert.am" news website, demanding public refutation of defamatory data and compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The reason for Vahe Parazyan's lawsuit filed on August 15, 2019, is the article "Vahe Parazyan Has a Criminal Record Against Samvel Karapetyan's Nephew" published on July 16 on the above-mentioned website.[[42]](#footnote-42)

A court hearing on the case was also held on February 15, and on March 9, the court decided to reject the lawsuit, considering it groundless. In particular, the court found that the defendant did not intend to discredit or degrade the plaintiff's honor and dignity when making the disputed statements, therefore, they were value judgments.

On March 1, on another case Vahe Parazyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of Appeals against the founder of "Slaq.am" website "Virtual Media" LLC and the founder of that company Menua Harutyunyan, appealing the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan. The reason for the lawsuit is the article published on the website on July 17, 2019 titled "In the Footsteps of a Scandalous Incident. Narek Karapetyan Presents the Details of the Incident" and the attached video.[[43]](#footnote-43) The plaintiff demands a public apology, refutation of the defamatory information, and compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The lawsuit was dismissed on November 4, 2020. The court found that the media outlet did not initially seek to discredit the plaintiff's honor, dignity or business reputation. The plaintiff's appeal was not accepted for proceedings as of March 31.

Another one of Vahe Parazyan's lawsuits is against "Armenia TV" CJSC, journalist Shake Ghazaryan and lawyer Armen Feroyan. This lawsuit, filed on August 16, 2019, was also caused by publications about the incidents between businessmen Vahe Parazyan and Samvel Karapetyan. On January 21, this lawsuit was also rejected on the same grounds. On March 1, the plaintiff filed an appeal, which was received on March 16.

**On February 2,** Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Coordinator of the "Union of Informed Citizens" NGO, filed a complaint in Court of Appeal against the decision of the Court of First Instance, which upheld the lawsuit of citizen Babken Ghazaryan against Ioannisyan, demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused. The reason for the lawsuit is Daniel Ioannisyan's statement at Media Center on May 22, 2019, in which he accused NSS Director Artur Vanetsyan of having close relations with Arshak Hakobyan, Aram Vardanyan, nicknamed "Vstrechi Aper" and Babken Ghazaryan, known as "Tokhmakh Babo", calling them "criminal authorities."[[44]](#footnote-44)

On December 24, 2020, the court partially upheld the claim. Accordingly, Daniel Ioannisyan was obligated to refute 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, and 100,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

On March 2, Ioannisyan’s appeal was accepted for proceedings; there were no other developments as of March 31.

**On February 2,** the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Kazakhstan Hayk Terteryan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against “Hraparak Daily” LLC for forcing him to refute the defamatory data and confiscating a sum as compensation for the expression, discrediting his business reputation. On the same day, his son Mher Terteryan filed a lawsuit against the defendant with the same demand. The reason for the lawsuit is an article, titled "The Pig Farm of the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Kazakhstan has Caused an Ecological Disaster,"[[45]](#footnote-45) published on December 9, 2020, on "Hraparak.am" website. The article particularly mentions that the bodies of sick pigs were buried in the land around the pig farm belonging to Hayk Terteryan, causing enormous damage to the communities around the city of Aktoba. According to the website, the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia agreed to compensate the damage caused to the state of Kazakhstan and the communities as a result of the activities of his pig farm. As for his son, according to the website, he is a shareholder of the pig farm, and a criminal case has been initiated against him on fraud charges.

On January 21, 2021, the website published a refutation, correcting some of the information in the article that caused the lawsuit. However, it did not satisfy the plaintiffs. [[46]](#footnote-46) The first lawsuit was returned on February 11, re-filed on March 5, and accepted on the 17th. The second one was returned on February 15, and no other developments were recorded as of March 31.

**On February 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of NA MP *Hayk Sargsyan v. Armenuhi Hovsepyan*, founder of "Newspress.am" website, demanding compensation for the damage caused to the honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

The lawsuit filed on April 13, 2020, was caused by posts and live broadcasts on the defendant's Facebook page, dated March 20, where, according to Hayk Sargsyan, a number of expressions were made in the plaintiff’s address in an ironic and insulting tone, slang and street 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 next court hearing is scheduled for May 4.

**On February 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of journalist *Arthur Hovhannisyan v. the RA Ministry of Health* (with "Aravot Daily" LLC as third party).

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on January 11, 2018, is the information published on the “Moh.am” website of the ministry, titled “One should not Rely on Falsification: There was No Attempt of Vaccination at Aygabats School in Shirak Marz.”[[47]](#footnote-47) According to the plaintiff, this publication contains insults and slander addressed to him. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 21.

**On February 2**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of "Exclusive Store" LLC v. journalist, actress Arus Tigranyan, demanding refutation of false information discrediting business reputation, without monetary compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on April 10, 2020, and 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.

A court hearing on the case took place on March 29, the next one is scheduled for May 25.

**On February 3,** "Armenian Second TV Channel" LLC, represented by its Executive Director Samvel Mayrapetyan, filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Television and Radio Commission, demanding abolition of the Decision N 2-A of January 8, 2021 "On the Change of the Number of Slots in the State-Metropolitan Broadcast Competitions for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex" and Decision No. 14-A of January 15, 2021 "On Issuing a License to Recognize the Winners of the Competition of State Broadcast for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex." On February 8, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings; "Armenia TV" CJSC, "Husaber" CJSC (founder of "Yerkir Media" TV company), "Shant" CJSC (founder of the homonymous company), "A-TV" LLC, "Multi Media-Kentron TV" CJSC (founder of "Kentron" TV company) were involved as the third party.

A court hearing was held on March 15, the next one is scheduled for April 2.

**On February 3,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan dismissed the case of former RA Police Chief Vladimir Gasparyan's bodyguard *Arshak Hakobyan v. Daniel Ioannisyan*, Program Coordinator of the "Union of Informed Citizens" NGO, with claims of refuting defamatory information and paying a compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on June 6, and the reason for the lawsuit was 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"[[48]](#footnote-48).

The court decision states that the plaintiff, having been duly notified of the time and place of the two consecutive court hearings, did not appear and did not apply for the adjournment of the case or resolution of the case in his absence.

**On February 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan terminated the case of film director and former head of "Yerevan" Studio *Tigran Khzmalyan v. "Hraparak Daily" LLC* on the grounds of the plaintiff's withdrawal of the lawsuit, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information, and compensation for it.

The lawsuit was filed on October 28, 2019, and the reason for the lawsuit was the newspaper's claim that the unique archive of the Public Television and Radio Company, i.e. the Soviet-era television films and programs that were the pride and wealth of any television station, had been destroyed during his term in office, and very valuable tapes were sold away.[[49]](#footnote-49)

**On February 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of NA MP Gevorg Gorgisyan against "Power of Speech" NGO ("4rd.am" website) demanding public apology, and confiscation of 1 million AMD in compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity, and business reputation.

The lawsuit was filed on April 2, 2020, and the reason for the lawsuit was an article published on 4rd.am on Feburay 29, titled “Gorgisyan Would Be a Pickpocket.[[50]](#footnote-50) “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 February 15, the court decided to reject the motion of the "Power of Speech" NGO to dismiss the lawsuit on the grounds of statute of limitations. The court hearing on the case was held on March 24, the next one is scheduled for April 19.

**On February 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz held a regular court hearing on the case of the founder of *Gyumri "Tsayg" TV LLC v. the founder of "Shant" TV LLC* (with the Commission on Television and Radio as the third party).

We should remind that on December 6, 2017, "Tsayg" LLC filed a lawsuit, which, as the plaintiff claimed, was caused by the unlicensed activities of Shant TV in Gyumri, implementing national broadcasting, particularly broadcasting local advertisements, sponsored reports and other programs different from those broadcast by the headquarters. The demand of "Tsayg" TV is to stop the activities of "Shant" as the regional broadcaster in Gyumri. According to the decision of May 10, 2019, the civil case was terminated on the grounds that the dispute was not subject to trial in court. The plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeals, where on September 30 his appeal against the decision of the First Instance was upheld and the case was sent to the same court for a full retrial. On February 25, 2020, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings in the Court of First Instance. Court hearings were held on July 30, December 28.

A hearing on the case was held on February 19, and on March 12, the court terminated the case on the grounds of the exhaustion of the dispute. The court also obligated the plaintiff to compensate the court costs incurred by the defendant in the amount of 200,000 AMD.

By the way, on March 4, based on the complaint of "Tsayg" LLC, the Commission on Television and Radio initiated administrative proceedings against the national broadcaster – "Shant" company, for broadcasting a program in Shirak region, which differs from the nationally broadcast audio-visual program. A written warning was applied with the instruction to eliminate the violations.

**On February 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Roman Baghdasaryan v. "Media Plus" Ltd*., demanding refutation of the slander and a compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on August 19, 2020; 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.”[[51]](#footnote-51) It stated that one of the admins of the mentioned Telegram channel was Roman Baghdasaryan, who among others 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.

A court hearing was held on March 24, the next is scheduled on May 10.

**On February 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a session on the redistribution on the case of Lara Aharonyan, head of the Women's Resource Center NGO, against the "Hayeli" club and "Live News Media" LLC; the case was handed over to another judge.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit, claiming compensation of damage to honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD, was a video, titled “Member of the CC Board of Trustees Lara Aharonyan is Involved in Sexual Profanity of Childern: Hayk Ayvazyan” published on April 24, 2019, in which one of the guests of “Hayeli” Club, Hayk Ayvazyan, made assessments of Aharonyan's activities during a press conference. The video was posted on “Hayeli.am” and “Livenews.am” news websites.

On February 10, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings that were presided over by a new judge; a court hearing is scheduled for October 11.

**On February 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of the former NSS intelligence colonel Eduard Harutyunyan v. Taron Sahakyan, former NA MP (with "Meltex" LLC, founder of "A1plus.am" website as the third party), demanding a public apology for insult, refutation of defamatory information and a compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on September 18, 2019, and the reason was a video released on “A1plus.am” on August 14 in which Taron Sahakyan talks about the 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.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

A court hearing on the case was held on March 17, the next is scheduled for June16.

**On February 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the investigation of the criminal case, related to the execution of the judicial act implemented by the lawsuit of the second President of the Republic of Armenia Robert Kocharyan against "Skizb Media Kentron" Ltd.

We should remind that on July 6, 2020, 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.

Thus, on January 18, 2019, the Court of General Jurisdiction partially upheld the claim, filed by Robert Kocharyan against “Skizb Media Kentron” Ltd*.* claiming a public refutation of the information considered as slander as well as compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the 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,[[53]](#footnote-53) Robert Kocharyan is in Panic: the Second President is on His Way to Prison,"[[54]](#footnote-54) and "Robert Kocharyan is the Bloody Symbol of Anti- Revolution.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

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 Appeal and the Court of Cassation rejected the appeals of Skizb Media Kentron Ltd. On July 6, 2020, the case was filed to the court.

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 6.

**On February 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made a decision to expel "First News" LLC from the third party in the case of former NSS intelligence colonel Eduard Harutyunyan v. former NA MP Taron Sahakyan (with the founder of "1in.am" website "First News" LLC as the third party) and involve “Skizb Media Kentron” Ltd. (the founder of the *Zhamanak* daily) in that capacity.

The lawsuit was filed with claims of a public apology, as well as a refutation of the information considered slander and payment of compensation, and the reason for the lawsuit was the May 29, 2019 article titled “The Harutyunyans Dynasty is Still Rooted in the State Administration System: Who Occupies a Post, What Post and Where?”[[56]](#footnote-56)

The next court hearing is scheduled for June 16.

**On February 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of the *Republic of Armenia* daily employees *Emil Sargsyan, Lusine Mesrobyan, Gayane Antonyan, Naira Karapetyan, Tatevik Hambardzumyan, Marine Kyureghyan, Khachik Sargsyan v. the legal successor of "Armenpress State News Agency" CJSC*.

We should remind that 7 lawsuits were filed on November 23, 2020, 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.

Separate court hearings were held on March 4 and 18, and subsequent hearings were scheduled for April 8 and May 6.

**On February 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of NA Deputy Speaker *Alen Simonyan v. Gegham Simonyan*, the domain owner of "Alternativ.am" website, demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

The reason for the lawsuit filed on September 18, 2020, 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.[[57]](#footnote-57) 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.

By the decision made on March 10, Alen Simonyan's lawsuit was rejected. According to the court, the plaintiff did not substantiate the fact that the defendant Gegham Simonyan is the author of the disputed article in "Alternativ.am", the alleged slanderer, the proper defendant, and this circumstance alone is sufficient to reject the claim.

**On February 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen *Yura Adyan v. "News AM" LLC* (the founder of the News.am website) demanding refutation of slander and payment of 2 million AMD in compensation.

The cause of the lawsuit, accepted for proceedings on August 6, 2019, is an article in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak,* daily entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia,” which was reprinted by the website.

A court hearing was held on March 12, and April 2 is scheduled to be the day of publication of the judicial act.

**On February 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the NA MP *Hayk Sargsyan v. The Irates newspaper*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity through slander and insult.

The lawsuit was filed on October 1, 2019 and the reason for the lawsuit was the article published in the September 6 issue of the newspaper, titled "You Only Used to Hold the Water Bottle for Nikol: Anna Hakobyan", which particularly states “When Hayk Sargsyan, who is getting angry with the expression “Nikol’s bottle holder” and suing media, talked against the use of Amulsar, Anna Hakobyan reminded him again of his position. “You only used to hold the water bottle for Nikol”.

The next court session is scheduled for April 15.

**On February 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled that the claim of Orsis Arms Ltd. against the Public Television of Armenia, demanding refutation of data, should be dismissed on the grounds that the plaintiff's representative had not appeared in court.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on February 20, 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.[[58]](#footnote-58) Moreover, as the author of the news piece Gevorg Tosunyan told the CPFE, the video contains the company’s clarification on the matter.[[59]](#footnote-59)

**On February 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan decided to terminate the case of *"Lydian Armenia" CJSC v. economic commentator Atom Margaryan*, as the plaintiff withdrew his claims.

We should remind that the lawsuit was initially filed against economic commentator Atom Margaryan and the Lragir e-newspaper on September 27, 2019, seeking a refutation of defamatory information and claiming confiscation of compensation for expressions, discrediting business reputation. Then Atom Margaryan’s part was separated from the case. 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.[[60]](#footnote-60) On June 15, 2020, a counterclaim was filed, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity, business reputation, and the pre-paid state duty. The counterclaim was accepted for proceedings on July 28.

This year a court hearing on the case was held on March 10.

During a rally in Yerevan **on February 20**, one of the opposition figures, Narek Samsonyan, approached Radio Liberty correspondent Artak Khulyan and cameraman Garik Azibekyan, and asked a rhetorical question via live broadcast, "When are you going to hand over Yerevan to the Turks?"[[61]](#footnote-61) The journalist addressed the police officers in the area, informing that the activity of the media outlet was hindered, but the latter remained indifferent to what was happening.

**On February 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Armen Tavadyan, the owner of Channel 5 TV, and Ashot Melikyan, the chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Speech NGO, demanding refutation of the defamatory facts and a compensation of 2 million AMD .

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 1, 2020, and the reason for the lawsuit was 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”[[62]](#footnote-62). The defendant claimed that the quote was not accurate and that his statement was distorted.

According to the court judgement made on March 22, the case was terminated because the plaintiff admitted that before going to court he did not find out what Ashot Melikyan really meant, and at Tavadyan's suggestion a truce was signed.

**On February 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of *Alvina Gyulumyan v. lawyer Tigran Hayrapetyan* and "Skizb Media Kentron" Ltd., the founder of the *Zhamanak* daily, demanding refutation of defamation and confiscation of 1 million AMD in compensation from Tigran Hayrapetyan.

The reason for the lawsuit filed on August 7, 2018, was the interview by Tigran Hayrapetyan, titled “We should Send a Lawyer to ECHR, Who will not Exchange Impartiality with an Order”. The publication touched upon the activities of Alvina Gyulumyan in her capacity as ECHR judge, in particular stating that she had made a cunning move to prevent cases against Armenia to be heard at ECHR.[[63]](#footnote-63) The plaintiff rendered this statement to be slander.

By the decision of March 10, the claim was partially upheld․ The media outlet was obliged to refute defamatory information, discrediting Alvina Gyulumyan's honor and dignity, to pay 500,000 AMD to Tigran Hayrapetyan in compensation for the damage caused, as well as to pay 18,000 AMD to "Skizb Media Kentron" Ltd. and Tigran Hayrapetyan by principle of liability in solido as a state fee and 500,000 AMD as an attorney’s fee.

During the protest rally organized by the opposition forces on Baghramyan Avenue **on February 26**, the employees of Radio Liberty were targeted once again. Protesters addressed offensive expressions to the journalist of Radio Liberty Gayane Saribekyan and the cameraman Davit Hovhannisyan[[64]](#footnote-64).

**On March 1,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes (Artashat residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of the Ararat marz Governor *Garik Sargsyan v. "168 Zham" Ltd.,* demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, and public refutation of defamatory information.

The lawsuit was filed on Decmeber 20, 2019, and the reason for the lawsuit was the article, titled "Again an Incident with the Participation of Governor of Ararat" published on the "168.am" website, which stated that Garik Sargsyan was again part of another fight and that the barber Serob was beaten for not cutting the governor's hair asking him to wait for his turn. Hence, the barber was not allowed to continue his business in Nor Kyank community.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 22.

**On March 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of citizen *Hayk Mkrtchyan v. "ArmNews TV" CJSC*, demanding the refutation of the data considered as defamation and a compensation for the damage caused.

The reason for the lawsuit filed on May 13, 2019, is the news piece that 32-year-old Hayk Mkrtchyan, a resident of Nor Nork administrative district of Yerevan, used counterfeit banknotes. The plaintiff considers this to be slander and demands refutation.

The next court hearing is scheduled for June 10.

**On March 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Marz (Vanadzor residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of the teacher *Susanna Sargsyan v. Shushanna Grigoryan*, the correspondent of Hraparak.am website.

The case is being re-examined in the Court of First Instance.

The lawsuit was caused by articles, titled “The Head of Vanadzor School N8 was Fired”[[66]](#footnote-66) and “A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time.”[[67]](#footnote-67) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2016-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for June 8.

**On March 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of NA Deputy Speaker *Alen Simonyan v. Ani Hovhannisyan*, the founder of "Analitik.am" website, demanding compensation for the damage caused.

The reason for the lawsuit, filed on July 13, 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.[[68]](#footnote-68) (For details see CPFE’s annual report for 2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 17.

**On March 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of politician *Vahan Babayan v. journalist and publicist Liza Chagharyan*.

The lawsuit was filed on May 10, 2019, and the reason for the lawsuit was Lisa Chagharyan's Facebook post on April 13: "this one, by the name vahan Babayan, may claim the first place in global slobber competition."

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 5.

**On March 5** Yerkrapah president Sasun Mikayelyan refused to answer Tert.am journalist Ani Gevorgyan’s questions at Yerablur Military Memorial Cemetery, offering to address the questions during the upcoming press conference. The journalist continued to voice out questions, and NA MP Andranik Kocharyan interfered with the dispute and shouted at the journalist, kicking her out.[[69]](#footnote-69)

**On March 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Gegham Vardanyan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, against “Yerkir Editorial Office” LLC, demanding public refutation of the information and expressions considered as slander and insult, as well as an apology and a compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on September 9, 2020, and 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.[[70]](#footnote-70)

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 16.

The same plaintiff **filed a lawsuit on the same day** against “Pastinfo” Ltd., demanding that the latter be obligated to publicly refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article, titled “The Armenian Representative in the Eurasian Economic Commission is Suspected of Abuse”[[71]](#footnote-71).

On February 8, 2021, the case was redistributed, it was reassigned to another judge. A court hearing is scheduled on April 21.

**On March 5**, 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" website, *and "SHARK" LLC*, founder of "5th Channel" TV, with demands to refute the defamatory statement, apologize for the insult, and pay compensation.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on May 6, 2019, is a statement made by Constantin Ter-Nakalian in the Channel 5's "Face to Face" program on April 5 that Progressive Youth NGO implemented LGBT propaganda in a Kotayk region school[[72]](#footnote-72). (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 30.

**On March 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the *SOS Children's Villages Armenian Charitable Foundation v. "Iravunk Media" LLC*, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to the business reputation.

The reason for the lawsuit, filed on May 14, 2020, 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.[[73]](#footnote-73) The website, citing its own sources, stated that the foundation's employees engaged in robbery․

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 17.

**On March 9,** the Civil Court of Appeal heard the case of Mher Derdzyan, the head of the "Under One Roof" housing project, against the plaintiff in the case of “Zhoghovurd Newspaper" Ltd. against the decision of the Court of First Instance, which rejected the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on April 15, 2019, was caused by the newspaper’s concerns that the program could be a deliberate hoax.[[74]](#footnote-74) The plaintiff demands a public apology and 1,5 million AMD compensation for insult and slander. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

By a judgment of October 28, 2020, 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, where the complaint was upheld on March 23, 2021, the verdict was overturned and the case was sent for a retrial. The Court of Appeal found that the evidence in the case was insufficient to substantiate the fact that the defendant had taken measures to verify the veracity and relevance of the information.

**On Marh 9,** David Galstyan, advisor to the RA former minister of defense, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against Radio Liberty and its director Hrayr Tamrazyan, demanding compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity, as well as public refutation of defamatory information. The lawsuit was caused by the publications on the media outlet about the official duties of Davit Galstyan, particularly the trade of weapons and various deals. On March 18, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, on March 31, it was refiled.

**On March 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *"Yeghitsi Luys-BK" Ltd. v. Public Television of Armenia and head of Charentsavan community Hakob Shahgaldyan*, demanding refutation of the information considered as slanderous.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 10, 2020, and the reason for the lawsuit was the broadcast of a report on issues related to the use of community owned territories during the news program on the First Channel of Public TV – "News in 60 Minutes" on November 30, 2019.[[75]](#footnote-75) The plaintiff considered Hakob Shahgaldyan’s comment on the quality of his work as 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 next court hearing on the case is scheduled for May 6.

**On March 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes (Vayk residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of “*Lydian Armenia” company v. journalist Tehmine Yenokyan.*

The lawsuit was filed on September 5, 2018, and the reason for the lawsuit was Tehmine Yenokyan’s live-stream on her Facebook page from the mineral water drinking hall of Jermuk city on August 12. According to the plaintiff, the journalist during her public speech made expressions discrediting the business reputation of the company, for which they demand 1 million AMD of compensation, as well as refutation of data considered as slanderous via a Facebook public live-stream from the same venue. (For details see CPFE’s annual report for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 19.

**On March 11,** the Civil Court of Appeal made a decision to partially uphold the complaint of “Hraparak Daily” Ltd. against the judgement of the Court of First Instance, which upheld NA MP Hayk Sargsyan’s lawsuit against the daily newspsaper, demanding compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation through slander and insult.

We should remind that Hayk Sargsyan filed **3 lawsuits** against the founder of the media outlet. The reason for the first lawsuit was an article, titled “A New Schmeiss has Appeared in the Parliament,”[[76]](#footnote-76) and by the judgment of September 16, 2020, Hayk Sargsyan’s claim was partially upheld. 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 150.000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. On October 16, the defendant filed an appeal which was again partially upheld. The Court of Appeal found that the part of the expression “A New Schmeiss has Appeared in the Parliament” being offensive should be extracted from the refutation, and the confiscated money in favor of the deputy should amount to 40.000 AMD for defamatory expressions. The claim remained unchanged otherwise.

The reason for **the second lawsuit** was an article, titled “Pashinyan Showed a Yellow Card to Hayk Sargsyan” where the deputy is portrayed as “an odious figure”, notorious for scandals.[[77]](#footnote-77) This year a court hearing on the case was held on March 15, the next one is scheduled for June 25.

The reason for **the third lawsuit** was an article, titled “Hayk Sargsyan "Made a Row" on the Yerevan-Moscow Plane.”[[78]](#footnote-78) At the hearing of February 28, 2020, 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. The plaintiff filed an appeal against this judgment with the Civil Court of Appeal. After rejection the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation. On February 26, 2021 the Court of Cassation upheld the claim, abolishing the decision of the Court of Appeal. As of March 31, no other developments were recorded.

**On March16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Gagik Gevorkian v. “Dareszkib” Ltd.*, the founder of the *Armenian Times* daily, and three other citizens, demanding refutation of information discrediting honor and dignity, as well as compensation for insult and slander. The lawsuit was filed on July 24, 2019, accepted for proceedings on September 30, and the reason for the lawsuit is the article, titled "They Try to Use Our Patriotism and Deceive Us. Serzh Sargsyan's Adviser 'Dumped' a Canadian-Armenian Businessman,”[[79]](#footnote-79) published in the *Armenian Times* on May 22, 2019.

A court hearing on the case was also held on March 26, the next is scheduled for May 17.

**On March 16,** Hrachya Papinyan, correspondent of Public Television, announced that the board of directors fired him for publishing unchecked information on his social media page.[[80]](#footnote-80)

**On March 16,** Andranik Kocharyan, the Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defense and Security, shouted at the Tert.am journalist Ani Gevorgyan when the latter asked a question referring to the "Deja Vu" Telegram Channel, according to which Kocharyan had applied to the former Minister of Defense Davit Tonoyan with a request regarding his son and that is why their relations have become tense. The official responded to the reporter: "Whatever you just said, should be said about your master's children. Go ask the Deja Vu. I am now cutting off the electricity of the fake accounts, you are without electricity now, Ani, I am cutting off the electricity to "Tert.am", go, you are gone! All the morons, the deja vu people, all of them are without electricity.[[81]](#footnote-81)

On March 19, the journalist addressed the NA Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan with a demand to discuss the fact of Andranik Kocharyan's gross violation of the rules of parliamentary ethics and start the process of setting up an ad hoc committee to submit an opinion on the issue to the National Assembly. On March 18, he also addressed NA deputy Speaker Vahe Enfiajyan asking to raise in the parliament the issues of putting pressure on journalists and obstructing their work.

**On March 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary hearing on the case of businessman *Levon Marcos v. "24News" Ltd.*”, demanding refutation of the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation.

The reason for the lawsuit, filed on May 26, 2020, 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?”[[82]](#footnote-82) The article, in particular, refers to the criminal case, initiated against Marcos in Armenia, and states that the certificate issued by the World Bank helped to reveal that Levon Marcos had issued $ 300 million counterfeit banknotes, thus trying to fulfill the biggest financial fraud in the history of Armenia.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 31.

**On March 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted the lawsuit of the former police officer *Vardan Ghukasyan v. "ArmDaily.am"* news website, demanding from lawyer Hrant Ananyan refutation of the slander and apology for the insult.

The lawsuit was filed on October 26, 2020, and 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” and published on the website on September 24.[[83]](#footnote-83) In the article, the lawyer's opinions and qualifications were used in response to the plaintiff's Facebook Live, where accusations were voiced against the 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, certainly because of Vladimir Gasparyan, because he was kicked out of the police.”

The lawsuit was returned several times for corrections. It was last submitted on February 5, 2021. The day of the court hearing is not scheduled as of March 31.

**On March 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of Vardan Badasyan, the RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan's father, against "Alternativ.am" news website, demanding confiscation of money and publication of a refutation.

The reason for the lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, was 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.”[[84]](#footnote-84)

The next court hearing is scheduled for June 18.

**On March 23,** Davit Galstyan, Advisor to the former Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the "First Armenian News Website" Ltd. and journalist Nver Mnatsakanyan, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, and public refutation of defamatory information. The lawsuit has not been accepted for proceedings yet.

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

 *In the first quarter of 2021 the CPFE recorded 15 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 the same period of 2020, the violations of the right to receive and disseminate information decreased by 6.*

*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 7,** "Pastinfo" agency sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, requesting information on the number of killed soldiers as of January 7, how many of them are conscripts, how many are reservists, how many are volunteers, how many are MIA. A reply was sent to the media outlet, according to which the department does not think it expedient to publish the data, as Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan and other officials have regularly published information and the relevant data. This is an unsubstantiated refusal to provide the requested information.

**On January 8,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, seeking information on who were the RA Ministers of Defense in 2017-2021. The answer was submitted with a delay on January 18.

**On January 9,** "Pastinfo" agency sent a written request to the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, seeking information on the interdepartmental working group, organizing the demarcation and delimitation of the state border, as well as asking for the provision of the copies of the Government decree on the matter and the annexes attached to it. The request also stated that the establishment of the working group was officially announced by the RA Ministry of Defense earlier. "The works are organized by the interdepartmental working group established by the RA Government decree under the coordination of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

The government claimed it had not established an interdepartmental working group. "Thus, it seems that there is no other agency in the Republic of Armenia that will be able to clearly answer how the demarcation and delimitation is carried out in the Republic of Armenia, or, if you wish, the "defense-security measure" will be ensured,” Pastinfo stated.

**On January 15, the** Freedom of Information Center sent an inqury to the RA Ministry of Defense, requesting to inform what legal document, agreement, statement served as a basis for the units of the RA Armed Forces to make positional changes in Syunik and Gegharkunik marzes after the war. The Ministry of Defense responded that they had made changes in the positions of the Armed Forces, based on the provisions of the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020. The response, however, does not specify which points of the statement include those positional changes. Freedom of Information Center also requested to provide copies of the relevant documents, in response to which the link to the trilateral statement was sent again. Thus, the Ministry of Defense, in fact, avoided providing the requested information.

**On January 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan initiated new proceedings on the case of "Hetq.am" online periodical (founded by "Investigative Journalists" NGO) v. The Board of Trustees of "A. I. Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory (Yerevan Physics Institute)” foundation, demanding to oblige the Board to provide copies of all decisions made in 2011-2019.

We should remind that after the refusal from the Foundation, "Investigative Journalists" NGO filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court on July 8, 2019, and on July 15, the case was remitted to Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction, where the case was accepted for proceedings on August 14. By the judgment of May 22, 2020, the claim of "Investigative Journalists" NGO was partially upheld. The 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. 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 retrial.

A trial is scheduled for April 15.

**On January 21,** Livenews.am journalist Taguhi Aslanyan sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Health, requesting information on the tests administered during the coronavirus epidemic. The delayed response was incomplete.

**On January 22,** theFreedom of Information Center of Armenia sent an inquiry to the central authorities and local self-government bodies, requesting to provide information on how many inquiries the given entity rejected in 2020, to clarify how many of them were rejected with reference to the confidentiality of personal data or the protection of state and/or official secrets. The State Revenue Committee did not provide statistics on the grounds for rejection. FOICA assessed the answer as incomplete.

**On January 22,** "168.am" website wrote that back on December 30, 2020, it sent a written inquiry to the RA Ministry of Defense to find out the number of the victims, wounded, MIA and POWs in the recent war. On January 22, a letter was received from the agency with a delay, stating that the clarification of the numbers was in progress, therefore, they considered it inexpedient to provide information. The website qualified the answer to be late and unfounded, especially when various officials regularly publish data on the number of victims.

**On January 29,** the "Union of Informed Citizens" NGO ("Fip.am") filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the RA National Security Service with a demand to obligate it to provide information. The NGO specifically requested the following information: in the period from November 10 to December 20, 2020, in the cases under investigation of the NSS Investigation Department, how many motions for choosing detention as a measure of restraint were upheld by the court? How many were rejected? Also, how many previously detained individuals were set free by the court?

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on February 5, the first court hearing was held on March 30, and the next one is scheduled for May 10.

**On January 29,** the *Zhoghovurd* daily sent an inquiry to the RA Minister of Defense Vagharshak Harutyunyan about the military drills to be held in Turkey on February 1-12, as well as the probability of military drills to be held in Armenia. The ministry demanded a 30-day period to answer these questions, in response to which the newspaper wrote that the period expired on March 1, i.e. 16 days after the end of the military drills, so the answer to the question would no longer be topical.

**On February 2,** "Hetq.am" website sent a written inquiry to the Football Federation of Armenia, requesting to inform which company was entrusted with the project for the reconstruction of the Abovyan City Stadium, by what procedure it was selected, and how much money was allocated. They responded on February 9, stating that the project was prepared by "AVN Group" LLC, but it was not mentioned by what procedure it was selected and how much money was allocated.

On February 11, the media outlet sent the second inquiry to the FFA with the same questions, which remained unanswered. The same inquiry was sent once again on February 24, but it remained unanswered, too. On March 11, the journalist called Hayk Karapetyan, head of the FFA Public Relations and Press Unit, hoping to receive clarification. The latter noted that they had provided all possible information about that process, and "did not find it expedient to answer the remaining questions," and the requested information was "a trade secret." The website reminded that the Football Federation of Armenia is an organization of public significance, so it must be accountable and transparent to the public, especially since one of the parties to the deal is a company owned by a high-ranking state official, the Secretary General of RA Investigative Committee.

**On February 2,** "168.am" sent an inquiry to the Penitentiary Service of the RA Ministry of Justice about the whereabouts of Azerbaijani convicts in Armenia, as well as the people transferred from Shushi prison. The Penitentiary Service considered the provision of information inexpedient. The website commented: "The penitentiary service needed more than 20 days to provide information which is, of course, available in the penitentiary registers, but they could not think of a more creative excuse, so apparently, they resorted to the old and good formulation "we find the provision of information inexpedient".

**On February 10,** "168.am" sent an inquiry to the RA Prosecutor General about the aid received from abroad for the needs of the Armed Forces during the 44-day war, which, however, never arrived at the destination, as well as the criminal cases initiated in that regard.

The answer was as follows. "The mentioned measures are currently in motion, the prosecutor's office has instructed to take additional actions in certain directions, the results of which have not been received yet. Based on the results of the mentioned inspection actions, it will be decided whether to initiate criminal proceedings on the above-mentioned case or not”.

In this regard, the website wrote that the Prosecutor General's Office, in fact, did not give a clear answer to any question.

**On February 17,** the "Union of Informed Citizens" NGO filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, demanding to obligate it to provide information. The NGO expected the agency to receive the departmental list of information subject to encryption.

On February 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing is scheduled for April 6.

**On February 24,** the “Iravunk.com” website wrote that two weeks before it had sent a written inquiry to Tatevik Revazyan, the Chair of the Civil Aviation Committee, requesting clarifications on both personal and work issues. The answers to the questions were provided in violation of the term provided by law.

**On February 28,** the*Hraparak* newspaper wrote that the RA Ministry of Defense, responding to their inquiry, asked for a month to announce the name of the commander in charge of Shushi during the 44-day war. This news was also published by several other websites, considering the possibility of extending the 5-day period set for the response to 30 days as an abuse of the law and an unnecessary delay of information provision.

**On March 10,** the Court of Cassation rejected the appeal, brought by David Ananyan, the former Chairman of the RA State Revenue Committee against the decision made by the Court of Appeal, which in its turn rejected the appeal against the decision of the First Instance Court on the case of *Investigative Journalists NGO v. David Ananyan*, Chairman of the State Revenue Committee.

We should remind that the NGO filed the lawsuit on April 17, 2019, demanding to provide information. “Hetq.am” website Investigative Journalists NGO expected to receive 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. On August 6, 2019, the court ruled to uphold 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. On September 12, David Ananyan appealed to the Court of Appeal. On October 28, 2020, the appeal of the defendant was rejected, and the latter appealed to the Court of Cassation on December 11.

The judicial act entered into force.

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

**On January 25,** the chairman of the Public Council Styopa Safaryan applied to the Court of Appeal, appealing the decision of the Court of First Instance of December 4, 2020, which partially upheld LiveNews journalist Taguhi Aslanyan's lawsuit against Styopa Safaryan and the latter was obligated to apologize to the journalist for the insulting expressions and to pay 600.000 AMD (the plaintiff demanded 1 million) in compensation.

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 its 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.”[[85]](#footnote-85) For this reason the journalist filed a lawsuit on November 14, 2019.

The Court of Appeal accepted the defendant's appeal for proceedings on February 11, and a court hearing is scheduled for April 6.

**On March 15,** "Armenian Second TV Channel" LLC filed a lawsuit against the Commission on Television and Radio, demanding to obligate it to make a decision on recognizing as a winner and granting a license to the given channel in the competition for licensing the use of slots in the Public Multiplex.

On March 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the court hearing is scheduled for July 22.

**On February 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the founder of the *Iravunk* newspaper, former MP *Hayk Babukhanyan v. Larissa Minasyan*, the executive director of "Open Society Foundations-Armenia".

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 4, demanding refutation of the information considered defamatory, and the reason was Larissa Minasyan's statement that Hayk Babukhanyan, too, received a grant from their foundation[[86]](#footnote-86).

On March 5, Hayk Babukhanyan's lawsuit was rejected by the court judgement, because the plaintiff did not substantiate the fact that the defendant's statements were defamatory or insulting, neither did he prove her intention to defame and humiliate the plaintiff's honor and dignity. It was also decided to confiscate 300,000 AMD from Hayk Babukhanyan in favor of Larissa Minasyan as an attorney's reasonable fee.

**On March 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary hearing on the case of “168 Zham” Ltd. and founder *Satik Seyranyan v. Styopa Safaryan*, the Chairman of the Public Council, demanding public refutation of defamatory information, removal of the article and compenstion of the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation.

We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on November 2, 2020 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.

The reason for the lawsuit, filed on November 2, 2020, 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 made in the defendant’s post as an insult and slander, particularly: "…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 in compensation for defamation and 1 million AMD in compensation for insult.

A court hearing on the case was held on March 25, the next one is scheduled for April 15.

**On March 16,** a regular court hearing was held on the case of *A1+ TV v. RA Government and Commission on Television and Radio* (with Armenia TV CJSC, Mo TV Media Holding CJSC, ArmenAkob LLC, AR TV LLC and Husaber CJSC acting as the third party).

We should remind that on December 18, 2019, the founder of "A1+" TV company "MELTEX" LLC filed a lawsuit in 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.

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 6.

**On March 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of News AM LLC against political scientist Styopa Safaryan, demanding compensation for the damage caused to their business reputation. We should remind that the reason for the lawsuit filed on August 28, 2019, was the defendant’s post on Facebook that the website had received an order from Robert Kocharyan's office to publish some articles about judges[[87]](#footnote-87).

A court hearing was held on March 19, the next one is scheduled for June 18.

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