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COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

***REPORT***

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

**2021 third quarterly (July-September) report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression**

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

*The facts included in the report have been collected through the following channels:*

*- 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 partner journalistic organizations,*

*- publications by the media.*

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***BRIEF SUMMARY***

 During the third quarter of 2021, journalists and media outlets faced new restrictions. The heated political struggle in the parliament of the eighth convocation formed as a result of the snap elections was accompanied by harsh pressure on the media and regressive initiatives that jeopardize freedom of speech and information, and restrict journalistic activities.

 One of the concerning events was the unexpected decision of the NA leadership on restricting the activities and free movement of journalists in the parliament building, which caused indignation and concern of media and public media organizations. This "innovation" was accompanied by the abuse of the NA Speaker's powers. Whenever there was a tense situation in the session hall, he instructed the live broadcast to be turned off, and at the same time the security guards removed the journalists from the press room, namely their workplace, and banned videotaping. All this is a gross violation of both the media outlets’ rights conducting their professional activities and the public's right to be informed.

The CPFE with partner organizations jointly issued four statements on all of the above cases, deeming the restrictions and pressures unacceptable. Listening to the criticism of the journalistic community, the NA Speaker convened a meeting on August 23 to discuss the issue with the heads of the following organizations – the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Media Initiatives Center, and the Journalists’ Club Asparez. However, as a result, no change was made in the problematic decision. And on August 30, in the National Assembly, the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs organized a meeting to discuss the newly-emerged issues. In practice, it also failed to produce any results.

 The intentions of the authorities to hinder the activities of the media and restrict access to official information were also expressed in proposing legislative and other normative-legal acts. Thus, the amendments and supplements to the RA Law on Media initiated by the ruling party were put into circulation again from the beginning of September, although both local journalistic organizations and international organizations expressed a negative opinion on it. In particular, the bill proposes, among other things, to ban reference to unidentifiable sources. This change can seriously hinder journalistic activities, limiting the work with information sources. At the same time, it does not solve the disturbing problem of spreading false news. In this regard, one of the most effective ways to fight against this issue may be the Media Initiatives Center's fact-checking and disinformation program, implemented with foreign partners, which, however, continues to be protested by dozens of media outlets, especially those whose monitoring reveals false news.

 On July 30, the National Assembly adopted a package of draft amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, which came into force on August 30, criminalizing public insult to a person, for which fines of various sizes, and in some cases imprisonment of up to 3 months were envisaged. If a person carries out journalistic, publicistic, socio-political activities or holds a public post, a more severe punishment is envisaged for insulting them than in the case of an ordinary citizen. The package of these projects was assessed by journalistic organizations as a setback from the decriminalization of insult to criminalization, highlighting, among other things, the existing discriminatory approach towards different groups of citizens. On September 28, Freedom House international organization issued a short statement expressing concern in this regard, calling on the Armenian authorities to immediately end the implementation of this unconstitutional legislation that was meant to criminalize insult.

The drafts proposed by the Ministry of High-Tech Industry and the NSS and uploaded on the official e-draft.am platform on July 2 were a matter of serious concern, too: the drafts stipulated not to publish information on the e-gov.am website of the RA Government on the decisions made about the aims of, costs incurred and topics discussed during officials’ business trips. In addition, the drafts provided for non-submission of information on single source procurements and a number of other details. The vast majority of the provisions in the documents under consideration contradict Article 51 of the Constitution, the RA Law on Freedom of Information, as well as the commitments undertaken by the RA within the framework of the International Open Government Partnership. All these concerns were expressed at the meeting with the Minister of High-Tech Industry by the heads of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Information Center, Media Initiatives Center and other NGOs. The above-mentioned drafts were not adopted as of September 30.

Another initiative related to the media refers to making amendments and supplements to the Law on Advertising. On September 16, by the decree of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, a bill was approved and submitted to the National Assembly, which proposes to ban the advertising of lotteries, Internet totalizator and Internet gambling games on TV, radio, Internet and outdoor posters.

 ***In total, during the quarter there were 3 reported cases of physical violence, 23 cases of pressure against the media personnel, and 37 violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.***

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

 During the third quarter of 2021, restrictions on the media gained new momentum, both in the form of legislative initiatives and concrete actions.

Thus, after the snap elections of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia held on June 20, the journalists, who came to the parliament, faced serious obstacles related to their mobility in the NA building, opportunities for taking comments from the MPs, interviewing them, and covering the plenary sittings. It is worth mentioning that the representatives of the accredited media in the parliament were not informed about it in advance.

Back in late July, rumors were circulating in the media that the newly elected National Assembly intended to impose restrictions on correspondents and cameramen operating in its premises. This became a basis for Taguhi Tovmasyan, MP of the NA "I Have Honor" faction, Chair of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, to send a letter with a corresponding inquiry to the NA Chief of Staff-Secretary General on July 27.[[1]](#footnote-1) The rumors spread were refuted in the reply letter received on July 30. Meanwhile, on the very next working day – August 2, the first sitting of the National Assembly of the eighth convocation began in new, limited conditions for journalistic work. Only on the same day the relevant decision of the NA Speaker dated July 30 was published, according to which the journalists should carry out their professional activities in the press room, in the lobby of the session hall, and in the park in front of the NA, but the journalists could stay and work in other areas within the building only with the permission of the NA General Secretariat.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In addition, media representatives were banned from attending committee meetings and visiting MPs' offices without prior consent. On this occasion, 10 journalistic organizations issued a joint statement, noting that the measures taken did not create regulations, but rather created unfounded obstacles to the free operations of the media in the parliament, hindering their professional activities. According to the authors of the document, these measures are aimed at sparing MPs from sharp questions and the criticism of the press, and they could obviously undermine the transparency and accountability of the NA activities to the public. The NGOs demanded to cancel the restrictions envisaged by the relevant decision of the NA Speaker and to organize discussions with the interested parties.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The arbitrary decisions of the newly elected parliament leadership and unfounded pressure on the press have given rise to new statements. One of them was made on August 5 in connection with the ban imposed on the photo correspondent of *Panorama.am* news website Lilian Galstyan, when she was not allowed to enter the NA building to do her job.[[4]](#footnote-4) The official substantiation was that the photographer, in the course of her professional activity, violated Clause 2.8 of Annex 1 of the NA Speaker's Decision "On Approving the Security Rules Operating in the Area of the Residence and the Building of the National Assembly", according to which it is prohibited to record, videotape and photograph security guards during their professional activities in the area of the protected object, including at checkpoints. Meanwhile, the same employees openly face both online and live media broadcasts, in which case holding the photojournalist accountable is a proof of selective discrimination.
 In their statement, the journalistic organizations condemned the step of the NA leadership, noting that the recent decisions hindering the freedom of speech and the activity of the media undermine the possibilities of establishing civilized relations between the government and the media. "And until these outdated initiatives are canceled, they will be considered an encroachment on the rights of our partners," the statement said.

After these and other alarms, on August 17, Lilian Galstyan's entrance permit to the National Assembly was renewed. However, this did not end the violations of the rights of media representatives accredited in the parliament and the obstructions to freedom of information. Thus, during the fistfight as a result of the quarrel that started at the August 11 sitting of the National Assembly between the pro-government and opposition MPs, the NA Speaker Alen Simonyan instructed to turn off the live broadcast. In addition, the security officers invited the journalists accredited in the parliament and the cameramen out of the press room, and forbade them to film the incident. The CPFE and its partner organizations in another statement drew the authorities' attention to the right of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia to be informed. Everyone has the right to know what is happening in the parliament and what is the behavior of the MPs elected by the people, regardless of whether it will be evaluated positively or negatively.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The same repeated at the August 24 and 25 sittings. Moreover, these actions were also accompanied by physical violence against media representatives: 3 such cases were reported. Meanwhile, on August 23, the heads of three journalistic organizations, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Media Initiatives Center, and the Journalists' Club Asparez, met with NA Speaker Alen Simonyan to discuss the current situation and the possibilities to remedy it. According to another statement by the journalistic organizations these actions against the accredited journalists and cameramen in the National Assembly contradict the content and essence of the meeting with the NA Speaker Alen Simonyan.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Earlier, on August 18, a special sitting of the NA Council of the Republic of Armenia was convened, during which the draft decision of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia dated 27 December, 2017 and authored by Alen Simonyan and MP Sisak Gabrielyan “On Making Amendments and Supplements to the Annex Approved by Decision No. 044-L” On Approving the Procedure for Accreditation of Journalists in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia”” was discussed. It reaffirmed the restrictions envisaged in the earlier decision of the NA Speaker. However, according to the main speaker Sisak Gabrielyan, the proposed amendments were aimed at regulating the journalistic activity in the parliament and carrying out a proper coverage of the NA’s activity. As a result of these changes, the journalists will now carry out their professional activity only in the lobby of the sitting hall of the National Assembly, in the foyer, in the press room, and in the park of the National Assembly. Journalists can visit the offices of the MPs only by prior arrangement.

According to expert analysis, several provisions of this decision contradict the RA Law on Media. In particular, according to Article 6, Part 3 of the Law, named "Accreditation of Journalists", "Accreditation procedure shall not contain provisions (and if they do, those shall not have legal force) that:

1) restrict the right of an accredited journalist to take part in sessions of the given body and its subdivisions, and other events, with the exception of the cases when they are closed;

2) exclude the timely notification of journalists of the planned events by the given body reasonably in advance;

3) create unequal conditions for accredited journalists"

At the same time, the constitutional law "NA Rules of Procedure", which has supreme force over the Law on Media, allows to introduce such regulations, and the NA Speaker has taken such a measure with this very substantiation.

To discuss the issues, on August 30 the Standing Committee on the Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs of the National Assembly organized a meeting with the participation of the heads of media outlets, journalists accredited in the National Assembly, journalistic organizations, and the leadership of the National Assembly. During the discussion, the participants once again spoke about the issues of concern, but as a result a summary document of the proposals was not created, and no new steps were taken as a follow-up.

By the way, in connection with that controversial decision of the National Assembly, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO has filed 4 lawsuits to the Administrative Court.

According to independent media experts, the restrictions imposed in the post-war period were due to the strained relations between the MPs and journalists in the National Assembly, intolerance towards each other, and in some cases, rude behavior, and various conflicts. In such situations, both politicians and some journalists crossed the boundaries of ethics. Nevertheless, if we take into account the danger of the restrictions imposed on freedom of speech, it is obvious that they are not proportionate with the problems that have arisen, and are not effective solutions for the regulation of journalistic activities. In general, it is necessary to establish the practice of discussing such issues with the journalists accredited in the National Assembly in advance, and to inform about the reasons why this or that restriction is adopted. This is crucial due to the fact that officials often present their misconceptions about journalistic activities as the truth, and therefore make decisions that mostly serve narrow desires and interests of a group. As a proof of that, let us quote the opinion of the ruling party MP Vladimir Vardanyan, according to which covering a fistfight in the National Assembly is not the media’s function.[[7]](#footnote-7) This phrase, showing the "knowledge" of the ruling party about the activities of the media, was sharply criticized by the journalistic community.

Incompetent approaches to journalistic work, as well as freedom of speech and information in general, have also been reflected in legislative initiatives that are often inconsistent with international principles and norms. Thus, on July 2, the drafts on making amendments to Decree No.1230-N of the RA Prime Minister, dated September 19, 2018, and Decrees No. 1104-N, and No.982-N of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, dated August 30, 2012 and September 22, 2016, respectively, were discussed on the official e-draft.am platform.[[8]](#footnote-8) The first of them envisages not publishing information on the government's e-gov.am platform on the purpose of government officials' business trips, their expenses, topics discussed, meetings, speeches, decisions made. The second one stipulates to block information of public interest and significance, in particular, not to provide information on single source procurements. In addition, it is recommended to remove from the gov.travel.am website information on air carriers, flights, their cost, booking codes, and the number of passengers.
 Expressing concern in this regard, the CPFE and 10 journalistic organizations noted in a statement that the vast majority of the provisions of the documents under discussion contradict Article 51 of the Constitution, the RA Law on Freedom of Information, as well as Armenia's commitments under the International Open Government Partnership.[[9]](#footnote-9) Taking into account that such information restrictions are fraught with corruption risks, and they do not correspond to the democratic principles of transparent governance, and accountability to the public, the authors of the statement demanded from the RA Government to repeal the above-mentioned drafts, and to organize comprehensive discussions with the participation of state bodies, public specialized bodies, independent experts and representatives of international organizations aimed at finding solutions to the problems regarding freedom of information. On July 16, responding to the above-mentioned statement, the Minister of High-Tech Industry invited the authors of the document to a meeting, which was attended by the heads of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Media Initiatives Center, and Freedom of Information Center of Armenia. As a positive result of the meeting, it can be stated that the draft decisions were not submitted to the government for approval as of September 30.
 Another very concerning initiative was related to the separation of insult and severe insult, criminalizing the latter. Thus, on July 30, the National Assembly adopted a package of bills submitted by a group of MPs of the "My Step" faction, on amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, which envisages a punishment for severe insult, swearing or insult to a person's dignity in an extremely indecent manner with a fine of at least 100 thousand AMD and a maximum of 3 million AMD. And if the act was committed against the same person regularly, imprisonment for up to 3 months is envisaged.

This vulnerable bill, which came into force on August 30, is a serious setback, given that in 2010 insult was decriminalized in Armenia, and it was considered a progressive step by both the public and international organizations, and now it is partially criminalized, jeopardizing the freedom of speech. Experts see this as an expression of discrimination, as the punishment for insulting journalists, publicists, public servants or public officials, those engaged in public or political activities is greater. In addition, the ambiguous wording in the law can lead to subjective perceptions, giving rise to unfounded lawsuits against the media. Thus, the terms "severe insult" or "swearing" can include some sharp words, not to mention that according to the numerous lawsuits filed against the media, many public figures are offended by sharp criticism. Therefore, it is not only a matter of putting pressure, but also depriving journalists of the opportunity to act freely. By the way, during this quarter the flow of lawsuits against the media continued, 17 new lawsuits being reported.

The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations warned about such dangers back at the beginning of the year, when the draft was put into circulation. [[10]](#footnote-10) And on September 28, the international human rights organization Freedom House issued a statement expressing concern over the already applied punishment. It is about the criminal case initiated by the Armenian law enforcement bodies for writing an insulting comment under the photo of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Facebook. "This symbolizes a clear decline of the democratic norms in Armenia, including that of the freedom of speech. We urge the Armenian authorities to immediately end the implementation of this unconstitutional legislation criminalizing insult," Freedom House said in a statement.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Experts from international organizations, in particular the Council of Europe, also expressed a negative opinion on the legislative amendments and supplements to the RA Law on Media initiated by the ruling power of the Republic of Armenia, especially in regard to the ban on referring to unidentifiable sources. Authorities have decided to counteract against the spread of disinformation, fake news and hate speech, but their approaches pose a threat to the freedom of speech and contradict international norms. Thus, recommendations on unidentifiable sources can seriously restrict journalistic activities, limit the work with sources of information, without solving the actually concerning problem of spreading fake news.

Meanwhile, the creation and widespread use of a powerful fact-checking system in the media field may serve as a more effective alternative to the above-mentioned steps. One of the best examples is the Media Initiatives Center's program implemented with foreign partners, which identifies fake news and disinformation in media publications, on the basis of which Facebook and Instagram block access to such materials. Of course, it was not accepted unequivocally. Some media outlets raised a wave of protests (and still do)[[12]](#footnote-12), considering this work as censorship.

However, most journalistic organizations consider that the implemented program can remedy the situation in the information sphere, and express bewilderment at how an activity directed against disinformation and fake news can become a cause of dissatisfaction. Especially in the case when the measures taken by the authorities are mainly ineffective and contradict democratic values.

Another initiative related to the media is connected with making amendments and supplements to the Law on Advertising. We should remind that on May 5, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the law, according to which time limits were envisaged for lottery advertisements on the Internet. These ads can be published from 22:00 to 07:00. And at the July 29 sitting of the Government, a bill was approved, which had circulated since March and proposed to ban the advertising of lotteries (internet totalizator) and Internet gambling games on TV, radio, Internet, and outdoor advertisements. This was approved by Governmental Decree No.1478-A, dated September 16, and the legislative initiative was submitted to the RA National Assembly.

At the end of the third quarter, on September 21, Freedom House international human rights organization published the “Freedom on the Net 2021 Report”, which covers the period from June 1, 2020 to May 31 2021, and according to which Armenia ranked among the countries with Internet freedom.[[13]](#footnote-13) However, despite the positive status, compared to the previous year, the country fell by 4 points gaining 71 points. The reason, according to the report, is the information restrictions imposed by the government during the armed conflict between the Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in Nagorno Karabakh, when the authorities demanded the removal of the content and imposed fines. Azerbaijan and Turkey are on the list of non-free countries, having scored 35 and 34 points. Russia is also ranked on the list of non-free countries with 30 points. Iran has the lowest index of the countries in the region - 16 points.

***Thus, 23 cases of pressure on the media and their personnel were recorded during the quarter, which is 21 cases fewer than in the previous quarter. 37 cases of the right to receive and disseminate information were also recorded. In this respect, the Ministry of Defense stood out, about which the relevant section of the report shall elaborate.***

During the period under review, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression continued to follow the criminal cases initiated in connection with the events that took place on June 23, 2015 in Baghramyan Avenue and on July 17-30, 2016, in Sari Tagh, 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 recent years, on the grounds that "the person involved as an accused was not known". The question to resume the pre-investigation is under discussion.

As for "Electric Yerevan", the decision of the Special Investigation Service to suspend the pre-investigation of this case for the second time with the support of the CPFE was appealed to the Prosecutor's Office last year, and after being dismissed was filed to the Court of General Jurisdiction. The latter upheld the appeal on January 22, in connection with which the Prosecutor's Office applied to the Court of Appeal, which upheld the appeal of the Prosecutor's Office on May 17. On June 30, the aggrieved journalists, supported by the CPFE, filed an appeal to the Court of Cassation. This court rejected the victim’s appeal on August 30.

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

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

***In total, there were 63 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the third quarter of 2021. 3 were cases of physical violence, 23 were cases of pressure against the media and staff members, 37 were cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.***

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

**Quantiative data on violations in the quarters of 2021**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2021  | 2nd quarter of 2021  | 3rd quarter of 2021  | Total |
| Physical violence against journalists | **7 (8 victims)** | **8(9 victims)** | **3** | **18** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **20** | **44** | **23** | **87** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **15** | **15** | **37** | **67** |

**Number of reported violations in the 3rd quarters of 2020 and 2021**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 3rd quarter of 2020  | 3rd quarter of 2021  |
| Physical violence against journalists | **0** | **3** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **47** | **23** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **34** | **37** |

**Lawsuits, involving media and journalists accprding to quarters**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2021  | 2nd quarter of 2021 | 3rd quarter of 2021 | Total |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | **10** | **23** | **17** | **50** |
| Economic and other disputes | **2** | **0** | **0** | **2** |

**Lawsuits, involving media and journalists in the 3rd quarters of 2020-2021**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 3rd quarter of 2020  | 3rd quarter of 2021  |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | **20** | **17** |
| Economic and other disputes | **2** | **0** |

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

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

 *In the third quarter of 2021 there were 3 cases of physical violence against media workers, 5 cases fewer than in the previous quarter. Below we present facts and developments related to both those cases and past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

**On August 16,** the Investigative Committee suspended the proceedings initiated on the case of hindering the lawful professional activity of Radio Liberty journalist Artak Khulyan and cameraman Karen Chilingaryan on February 23, substantiating that decision with Article 31, Part 1, Clause 1 of the RA Criminal Code, according to which the person who can be involved as an accused is not known.

We should remind that during the opposition march that took place on February 23, 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.

**On August 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the trial on the criminal case of physical violence against Artak Khulyan, former correspondent of *Shantnews.am* news website, and Hovhannes Sargsyan, cameraman of *Factor.am* news website. That case was initiated in connection with the incident that took place during the days of the April Revolution in 2018, and was sent to court with the indictment of 8 people.(For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2021 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

A court hearing on the case was held on September 2, the next one is scheduled for October 21.

**On August 19,** the Special Investigation Service terminated the proceedings on the criminal case in regard to the physical violence used by already former Minister of High Tech Industry Hakob Arshakyan against journalist Paylak Fahradyan on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti.

We should remind that on March 18**,** Minister Hakob Arshakyan hit Paylak Fahradyan, the editor of *Irakanum.am* website, in the face, damaged his computer and phone in one of the cafes in Yerevan.[[14]](#footnote-14) Afterwards, the RA Prosecutor's Office sent the publications related to the incident to the Special Investigation Service for inspection. The latter decided to reject the initiaton of a criminal case on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti on April 12. On April 22, the Prosecutor General's Office itself initiated a criminal case in connection with the incident, according to Article 185, Part 2, Clause 3 of the RA Criminal Code (“Willful destruction of or damage to property”). The criminal case was refiled to the Special Investigation Service.

According to the information provided by the RA Prosecutor's Office to the CPFE, the lawfulness of the SIS’s decision to terminate the case was checked, in fact, no violation was found, and no complaint was submitted by the victim.

**On August 24,** the activity of the representatives of the media in the National Assembly was restricted, using violence against them. When the heated debate between the MPs of different NA factions turned into a fistfight, the security officers forcibly removed the journalists from their workplace, the press room.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**On the same day,** during the fistfight in the NA session hall, when the journalists were removed from the press room and were trying to film from the entrance of the session hall, the MP of the "Civil Contract" faction Vahe Ghalumyan tried to remove the journalists from there by forcibly pushing and pulling them.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**On August 25,** in order not to witness the fistfight of the parliamentarians in the National Assembly and to prevent the filming, the media representatives were forcibly removed from the press room.[[17]](#footnote-17) Obstacles to professional activity continued at the entrance to the session hall.

The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations issued statements in connection with these incidents, condemning the illegal restrictions and violence against representatives of the media.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In response to the CPFE's inquiry, the RA Prosecutor General's Office stated that on August 24 and 25, the media reports on hindering the activity of journalists were sent to the Special Investigation Service with an instruction to prepare materials in accordance with Articles 180-181 of the RA Criminal Procedure Code. On September 6, the SIS made a decision to reject the initiation of a criminal case on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti. On September 28, Daniel Ioannisyan, program coordinator of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, filed an appeal against this decision to the Prosecutor's Office, asking to abolish it and initiate a criminal case.

**On September 3**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *168.am website correspondent Ani Keshishyan and Public radio correspondent Liana Yeghiazaryan and other citizens v. former commander of RA Police armed forces Levon Yeranosyan*.

We should remind that Levon Yeranosyan was charged for intentionally committing acts that were manifestly outside his powers, using special measures, and caused substantial damage to citizens' rights, and negligently brought about severe consequences. Ani Keshishyan was injured in Baghramyan Avenue, Yerevan, on April 16, 2018, and Liana Yeghiazaryan was injured at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebuni Streets, on April 22, covering the protests 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 December 8.

**On September 3,** the criminal case initiated on the fact of violence against the correspondent of Tert.am news website Ani Gevorgyan was filed to the court with an indictment of 2 persons.

We should remind that on June 4,during the coverage of the meetings of the acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the city of Artashat, Ararat region, some of the citizens present snatched the phone of *Tert.am* correspondent Ani Gevorgyan, insulted and slapped her. The criminal case initiated in the Investigative Committee was sent to the court. The accused are sister and brother Sona and Vahagn Hakobyan. The first is accused of seizing the journalist's phone, the second of hitting the journalist while filming.

On September 6, the criminal case was accepted for proceedings. The first court hearing was held on September 29, the next one is scheduled for November 12.

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

*In the third quarter of 2021, there was a total of 23 cases of pressures on the media and their staff. They were carried out through lawsuits, impediment of professional activities, insulting attitude and display of hatred towards journalists and media outlets.* *Of the 17 new lawsuits filed against journalists and the media outlets, 3 are from a private company, in 1 case the plaintiff is a citizen, in 1 case a lawyer, 11 lawsuits were from current and former officials and state bodies, and 1 lawsuit was filed by a media outlet against a media outlet. 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 July 1,** the Civil Court of Appeals rejected the defendant's motion for reinstatement of the deadline set by law and acceptance of the claim on the case of *Edmon Marukyan, Taron Simonyan and Armen Yeghiazaryan, former MPs of the "Bright Armenia" parliamentary faction, v. Founder of 1in.am news website Skizb Media Kentron Ltd*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 2**,** 2020 and the cause of the lawsuit was a news piece, entitled “Bright Armenia met with Serzh Sargsyan in the latter's house” and published on 1in.am on June 19, which stated that the above-mentioned MPs discussed a number of events and issues of domestic policy with Serzh Sargsyan.[[19]](#footnote-19) On April 12, the court upheld the lawsuit with a demand to publish a refutation, and obliged the defendant to publish the refutation of the above-mentioned information on 1in.am website. On June 26, the Court of Appeal received the defendant's complaint.

The case was sent to the court archives.

**On July 1,** The Civil Court of Appeal rejected the appeals of both the plaintiff and the defendant against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *Yura Adyan v. News.am, the founder of News.am LLC*, finding that the grounds of appeal were not sufficient to overturn the verdict.

We should remind that the cause of the lawsuit, accepted for proceedings on August 16, was an article in the May 9 issue of the *Zhamanak* daily entitled "The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia", which the website has copied from another media outlet. On April 2 the lawsuit with claims of refutation of slander and payment of 2 million AMD in compensation was dismissed: the court came to the conclusion that the defendant was released from liability, as he had made a proper reference to the source of information, Zhamanak newspaper, therefore the claim is groundless and should be dismissed.

 On August 11, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation.

**On July 1,** the Administrative Court ruled to reject the motion filed by the third party on the case of *journalists Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan v. Council of Public Television and Radio Company of Armenia* (third party: Public Television of Armenia CJSC) to apply statute of limitations on the demands to consider the orders of the head of CJSC as null and void.

We should remind that on January 24**,** 2019, the journalists filed a lawsuit to the RA Administrative Court against the Council of Public Television and Radio Company of Armenia 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 judgement, and on October 13 the Court of Appeal ruled to uphold the appeal, to overturn the judgment of the Administrative Court, and send the case for a new trial.On January 20 of this year,the Court of Cassation ruled not to accept the appeal filed by the plaintiffs against the decision of the Administrative Court of Appeal for proceedings. As a result 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, where on March 15, it was accepted for trial.

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 1.

**On July 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings two lawsuits filed by the former head of the Shirak regional subdivision of the Cadastre, Arayik Arakelyan, against 168 Hours LLC on June 18, demanding compensation for the damage, caused to honor and dignity and public refutation of the information considered as defamation. The cause of the first lawsuit was the article published on the website 168.am belonging to the LLC on April 14, entitled: "The mysterious person in a cap and glasses. Who is behind the next personnel mess in Shirak region?"[[20]](#footnote-20), which states in particular that Arayik Arakelyan, known for corruption scandals, shall be appointed for position, while he is involved in several criminal cases. The basis of the second lawsuit on the same topic is the article "Is Karen Sarukhanyan from My Step the "godfather" of the former head of the cadastre, involved in a corruption case?", published on April 24, which states that the MP is involved in the "profitable" case of returning Arayik Arakelyan to his old position.[[21]](#footnote-21) Besides, according to the publication, "Arayik Arakelyan is involved in the story of corruption scandal, moreover, with all his family."

A court hearing on both cases is scheduled for October 21.

**On July 2,** Medisar LLC filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against News AM LLC, the founder of the News.am news website, seeking compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation. The cause of the lawsuit was an article published on May 29 on the above-mentioned website, entitled: "Did they get super profit by purchasing a DNA identification device for war victims? New facts from a suspicious deal". The website particularly stated that as a result of the tender conducted by the Scientific and Practical Center of Forensic Medicine SNCO of the RA Ministry of Justice, a contract worth 295.8 million AMD was signed with Medisar LLC, engaged in the supply and import of laboratory equipment and chemicals, which received a revenue (overhead) of at least 111 million AMD ($ 212,237) as a result of the procurement process.

On July 20, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the plaintiff's motion on application of injunction to obligate the defendant or other persons to perform certain actions related to the subject matter of the dispute, was rejected. As of September 30, no court hearing has been scheduled.

**On July 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Naira Karapetyan, an employee of the Hayastani Hanrapetutyun daily, v. Armenpress State News Agency CJSC*, with claims to declare the orders on imposing a disciplinary sanction invalid, restore them to their previous job, and confiscate the money for the forced leave. A hearing on the case was held on July 28.

We should remind that 6 more employees filed lawsuits against the CJSC with the same claim on November 23, 2020, 5 of which were rejected during the previous quarter. In this quarter, court hearings were also held on Lusine Mesropyan's case on July 2 and 28. There have been no other developments as of September 30.

**On July 2,** Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s complaint on the case of *Vahe Parazyan v. Slaq.am website’s founder Virtual Media LLC and founder of that company Menua Harutyunyan*. In addition, the plaintiff was obligated to pay 100,000 AMD to the defendant as an attorney's reasonable fee.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 16, 2019, was caused by an article entitled “Tracing the Scandalous Incident: Narek Karapetyan Gives Details”, and a video attached to it and published on the website on July 17, 2019.[[22]](#footnote-22) The plaintiff demands a public apology, refutation of defamatory information, and compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

By a decision of 1 March, the Court of First Instance also dismissed the claim, finding that the media outlet did not initially seek to discredit the plaintiff's honor, dignity or business reputation.

The case was handed over to the court archives.

**On July 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *lawyer Aram Orbelyan v. the Republic of Armenia, in the person of the National Security Service and the Public Television of Armenia CJSC*, demanding a refutation of the defamatory information and a compensation of the damage caused. The lawsuit, filed on March 3, 2020, was caused by the report within the main news program on the Public Television on January 30, which, according to its author Gevorg Tosunyan, was based on official explanations. The report contained information provided by the NSS, stating that lawyer Aram Orbelyan regularly visited the Constitutional Court without presenting an ID, and his entries were not logged**.**[[23]](#footnote-23)

On July 26, the court ruled to reject the lawsuit and confiscate 100,000 AMD from Aram Orbelyan in favor of the Public Television of Armenia CJSC as an attorney's reasonable fee. The reasoning of the verdict is the following: the information presented on TV was a value judgment and did not have an intention to slander Aram Orbelyan. In addition, the court noted that given the fact that Aram Orbelyan was Robert Kocharyan's lawyer, he should be more tolerant towards criticism of his actions.

On August 30, an appeal against the verdict was filed to the Court of Appeal, which received it on September 9.

**On July 2,** the Administrative Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the complaint of the defendant in the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC. v. the Commission on Television and Radio of the Republic of Armenia* (third party: Armenia TV CJSC, Husaber CJSC, Shant Ltd., A-TV Ltd. and Multi Media-Center TV CJSC ).

On April 2, the Administrative Court rejected the lawsuit, demanding Television and Radio Commission to abolish Decision N 2-A, dated January 8 “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 the lawsuit filed demanding abolition of Decision No. 14-A of January 15, “On Issuing a License to Recognize the Winners of the Competition of State Broadcast for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex” was upheld and the act was considered null and void. In addition, the court decided to confiscate 4,000 AMD in favor of the plaintiff *Armenian Second TV Channel* LLC as a compensation for the state fee and 300,000 AMD as attorney's fee.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 3 demanding to abolish the above-mentioned decisions. The defendant filed an appeal against the decision of the Administrative Court.

The court hearing is scheduled for December 14.

**On July 3,** the RA Police made a decision to reject the initiation of a criminal case in connection with the pressure on *FreeNews.am* reporter Diana Davtyan at 9/21 polling station in Yerevan on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti.

We should remind that on June 20,at the mentioned polling station in Yerevan, the proxis of the Armenia Alliance showed disrespectful attitude towards the reporter, insulting her.[[24]](#footnote-24) Then, a pronounced contemptuous attitude was shown towards the media outlet belonging to NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan.

Materials on the fact were prepared in the Central Department of the RA Police in accordance with Articles 180-181 of the RA Criminal Procedure Code, during which the circumstances of impediment of the reporter’s professional activity were not confirmed. Among others, Diana Davtyan herself gave an explanation, noting that her professional activity was not hindered.

**On July 6,** by the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, the claim of Tigran Seyranyan for compensation of damage to the honor, dignity and business reputation of a person was separated from the case of *businessman Ashot Grigoryan v. "24News" LLC*, and Tigran Seyranyan, the RA Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 27, 2018, was caused by a video entitled “Chance Comer in Yerevan: Who is the Big Schemer, Initiating the Restart of Nairit?” that was published on the YouTube channel of the website.[[25]](#footnote-25) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website)։

The separated part was filed to the court on August 19 of this year and was accepted for proceedings on the 30th. No new developments were recorded by the end of the quarter.

**On July 6,** 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, v. the founder of "1in.am" news website Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.*, demanding refutation of information considered slander, publication of refutation text and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on August 31 and was caused by an article published on 1in.am on July 31, which stated that the plaintiff had served in the RA NSS for more than 20 years, and according to rumors, was paid cash in envelopes for years by the chief accountant of South Caucasus Railway company in exchange for "turning a blind eye" to the robberies along the railways, the organized smuggling of goods․ He also engaged in protectionism.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 25.

**On July 6,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings the lawsuit of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC v. 168 Hours LLC*, demanding refutation of the information discrediting the business reputation, and payment of monetary compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 13, and was caused by the article "Waiting for Investments" published on *168․am* website on April 12, where it is particularly mentioned that the promised investments are not fulfilled by the fund, instead the government provided the fund with large grants without organizing a tender[[27]](#footnote-27) On May 27, the lawsuit was returned for corrections and was re-filed on June 23.

The motion for injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected.

A hearing on the case was held on September 27, the next one is scheduled for October 19.

**On July 7,** the Court of Cassation rejected the motion of the plaintiff on the case of *citizen Azat Tovmasyan v. A-TV and citizen Sirvard Avoyan* to postpone the state fee payment or grant an exemption from it, and returned the cassation appeal brought by the plaintiff for corrections.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 3, 2018, demanding recognition of the violation of personal and family rights, refutation of defamatory information, and compensation of 2 million AMD, and was caused by an accusation against Azat Tovmasyan of an alleged obduction of his own daughter, made during the *Semi-Open Windows* TV show of July 30, 2018.[[28]](#footnote-28)

On December 10, 2020, the Court of General Jurisdiction rejected the lawsuit, and on April 2, 2021 the Court of Appeal rejected the complaint brought by the plaintiff. On May 5, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation.

After making corrections in the documents, the plaintiff filed an appeal again on September 1, which was received on September 30.

**On July 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian Progressive Youth NGO v. Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan, Editor-in-Chief of BlogNews.am and the founder of Channel 5 TV Company, SHARK LLC*, demanding refutation of a defamatory statement, apology for insult and payment of compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by 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 campaign in a Kotayk region school.[[29]](#footnote-29) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

A court hearing on the case was also held on September 24. The publication of the judicial act is scheduled for October 15.

**On July 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the trial on the case of *Gagik Gevorkyan v. the founder of the Armenian Times daily’s founder Dareskibz LLC and 2 other citizens*demanding refutation of the information discrediting honor and dignity and a compensation for insult and slander.

The lawsuit was filed on July 24, 2019, and was caused by the article, entitled: "They try to use our patriotism and deceive us". Serzh Sargsyan's adviser 'dumped' a Canadian-Armenian businessman”[[30]](#footnote-30) published in the *Armenian Times* on May 22 and on *Armtimes.com* website on May 24.

On July 27, the court rejected the motion of one of the defendant citizens to apply statute of limitations. The next court hearing is scheduled for January 25, 2022.

**On July 8,** Artak Mkhitaryan, Deputy Director of Khosrov Forest State Reserve SNCO, again filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against journalist Narine Kirakosyan, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity through insult and slander, and public refutation.

We should remind that the first lawsuit was filed on May 5 and returned for corrections. The lawsuit was caused by the journalist's Facebook post that some officials, including Artak Mkhitaryan, carried out illegal hunting in Syunik. By the way, after filing the lawsuit, the post was removed from Facebook.

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on July 19, a court hearing is scheduled for January 20, 2022.

**On July 8,**  The Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made a decision on the distribution of the burden of proof in the case of *NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan v. Tert.am journalist Ani Gevorgyan*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 13, demanding public refutation of information considered defamatory. The lawsuit was caused by the interview given by Ani Gevorgyan at the *Mirror* club on April 16, where the latter accused Alen Simonyan of organizing a campaign against her with threats and insults.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Court hearings on the case were also held on August 19, September 3, the next one is scheduled for October 5.

**On July 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Exclusive Store Ltd. v. the journalist, actress Arus Tigranyan*, demanding refutation of the false information discrediting business reputation and no monetary compensation.

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

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for October 11.

**On July 8,** the Yerevan Court of First Instance decided to terminate the case of *journalist, founder of Medialab.am website Marianna Grigoryan v. Analitik LLC*, as the plaintiff withdrew the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 28, 2020, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to her honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by an article, entitled "What does Erik Grigoryan have to do with Soros's Open Society Foundation" and published on *Analitik.am* website on December 6, 2019.[[32]](#footnote-32) Referring to its own sources, the website wrote that the Soros Foundation, through Erik Grigoryan's sister Marianna Grigoryan, influences the policy projects, implemented by the Ministry of Environment, adapting them to the Foundation’s interests.

**On July 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the investigation of the criminal case related to the execution of the judicial act in the case of *second President of the Republic of Armenia Robert Kocharyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.*, *the founder of 1in.am news site*.

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

Thus, on January 18, 2019, the Court of General Jurisdiction partially upheld the claim, filed by Robert Kocharyanagainst the Ltd., demanding public refutation of the information considered as slander as well as a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the 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[[33]](#footnote-33), “Robert Kocharyan is in Panic: The Second President is on His Way to Prison,”[[34]](#footnote-34) and “Robert Kocharyan is the Bloody Symbol of the Anti-Revolution”.[[35]](#footnote-35)

*Skizb Media Kentron* appealed the judgment on February 20, 2019, according to which 400,000 AMD should be seized to compensate Robert Kocharyan's non-pecuniary damage and a refutation should have to be published. Both the Court of Appeals and the Court of Cassation rejected the appeals of *Skizb Media Kentron Ltd*.

 On July 6, 2020 the criminal case on non-fulfillment of the judicial act entered the court.

On April 7, 2021, the court ruled in favor of Hasmik Martirosyan's lawyer's motion to dismiss the presiding judge on the grounds of biased attitude. On April 13, the case was accepted for proceedings with another judge presiding.

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 20.

**On July 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC v. journalist Oleg Safonov and 168 Hours Ltd.*, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation and monetary compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 25, and was caused by the article published by Oleg Safonov on *168.am* website on December 31, 2020, entitled "On Expected Sharp Increase in Electricity Tariffs in 2022 and Corruption Risks in the Development of Solar Electricity. Why is Everyone Silent?"[[36]](#footnote-36) 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. On April 5,the plaintiff filed an appeal in the Court of General Jurisdiction against the decision made on March 9, which rejected the motion to apply injunction, concerning the seizure of 3 million AMD on property and financial means belonging to the defendant. On May 13 the appeal was upheld. The next hearing for further investigation in the Court of General Jurisdiction is scheduled for November 22.

**On July 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz held a regular court hearing on the case of*Artak Gevorgyan, the head of Ani community, v. Andranik Gevorgyan, a resident of Maralik town of the same community*, demanding a refutation of slander and compensation of 2 million AMD. *Zhoghovurd Publishing House LLC* (founder of Armlur.am news site) was recognized as a third party to the case.

 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz օn August 23, 2019 and was caused by the phrase "ate it up, robbed it all" in the video and the accompanying text posted on the above-mentioned site on August 10: “The former head robbed the village college and fled. What do the people of Maralik tell us?".[[37]](#footnote-37)
 The next court hearing has not been scheduled as of September 30.

**On July 9,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal on the case of *Vahe Parazyan v. Armenia TV CJSC*, *journalist Shake Ghazaryan and lawyer Armen Feroyan* against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction, which dismissed the claim.

We should remind that this lawsuit, filed on August 16, 2019, was caused by publications about the incidents between businessmen Vahe Parazyan and Samvel Karapetyan. The plaintiff demanded public refutation of the defamatory compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

 On January 21, 2021 the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the defendants did not intend to slander while transmitting the information, they reproduced the opinion voiced by another media outlet. The plaintiff had filed an appeal, which was accepted for proceedings on May 4. The Court of Appeal also found that the disputed statements were value judgments based on the available facts.

**On July 9,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Yeghitsi Luys-BK Ltd. v. the Public Television of Armenia and the head of Charentsavan community Hakob Shahgaldyan*, demanding refutation of the information considered defamatory.

The lawsuit was filed on January 10, 2020, and was caused by the broadcast of a report on issues related to the use of community owned territories during the 9 o’clock main news program on the First Channel of Public TV – "News in 60 Minutes" on November 30, 2019.[[38]](#footnote-38) The plaintiff considered Hakob Shahgaldyan’s comment on the quality of his work defamatory. *Yeghitsi Luys-BK Ltd*. demanded from Public TV to publicly refute the slanderous information on air, and claimed from Hakob Shahgaldyan payment of monetary compensation of 2 million AMD.

 The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for October 30.

**On July 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes (Artashat residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *Ararat Governor Garik Sargsyan v. 168 Zham LLC,* demanding public refutation of factual data considered slander and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on December 20 and was caused by the article "Again an Incident with the Participation of Governor of Ararat" published on the *168.am* website, which states that again there was a fistfight with Garik Sargsyan’s participation and that the hairdresser Serob was beaten for not cutting the governor's hair asking him to wait for his turn and was not allowed to continue working in Nor Kyank community.[[39]](#footnote-39)

On August 2, the court decided to partially settle the claim: to oblige 168 Zham LLC to publish a refutation on 168.am website, to confiscate 700,000 AMD as compensation in favor of the plaintiff, and 18,000 AMD as a pre-paid state fee.

On September 30, the defendant filed an appeal.

 **On July 14,** the Civil Court of Appeal upheld NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan’s appeal against the judgement by the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, which rejected his lawsuit against Gegham Simonyan, the owner of *Alternativ.am* website domain with claims of compensation for the damage caused to his honor ad dignity.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on September 18, 2020, was caused by an article, entitled “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, which particularly states 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**.**[[40]](#footnote-40) By the decision made on March 10, 2021 the court found that 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, and the proper defendant.

The decision of the Court of First Instance was completely overturned, the case was sent to the same court for a new trial. As of September 30, no court hearing was scheduled.

**On July 15,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff's appeal on the case of *Vahe Parazyan v. Tert.am LLC, the founder of Tert.am news website*, against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction.

The lawsuit, filed on August 15, 2019, was caused by an article titled "Vahe Parazyan, Who reported Against Samvel Karapetyan’s Nephew, Has a Criminal Backgound", and published on the website on July 16.[[41]](#footnote-41) The plaintiff demands public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for that damage caused to his honor and dignity. Rejecting the claim, the court found that the defendant did not intend to discredit or tarnish the plaintiff's honor and dignity when making the disputed statements, therefore, they are value judgments.

By its decision of rejection, the Court of Appeal reaffirmed the reasoning of the Court of General Jurisdiction. On August 18, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation, which received the case on September 28.

**On July 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan v. Iravunk Media LLC*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The lawsuit, filed on August 4, 2020, was caused by the thoughts attributed to Alen Simonyan in Iravunk newspaper, according to which he said that the ruling political team is not ready to work without bonuses. In a September 29 judgement, the court partially upheld Alen Simonyan's lawsuit, obligating Iravunk Media LLC to publicly refute the defamatory information, and pay 200,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.

**On July 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made a decision on the distribution of the burden of proof in the case of *Anriva Tour LLC v. Ani Alexanyan* (with Public Television of Armenia CJSC, Educational Planet LLC as third party).

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 1, 2019 with claims for the protection of business reputation, was caused by the statements made on the "One Window" program about "Anriva-Tour" on the public television channel on July 1, which the plaintiff considers to be defamatory.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The next court hearing is scheduled for November 30.

 **On July 19,** 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 was caused by Lisa Chagharyan's Facebook post on April 13: "One by the name vahan babayan may claim the first place in global slobber competition."

The next court hearing is scheduled for November 22.

**On July 19,** Hraparak Daily LLC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Media Initiatives Center NGO, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by the program initiated by the NGO, which reveals fake news and misinformation materials, and Facebook and Instagram block them. The media outlet thinks that no objective choice is made, and in general the initiative puts pressure on the press.

On July 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. On August 2, the court rejected the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim. As of September 30, no other developments have been recorded.

**On July 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan partially settled the claim on the case of citizen Zaven Hakobyan v. *Zhamanak* daily, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to his business reputation, a public apology and a refutation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, was caused by an article, published in the daily on June 13, entitled "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”.[[43]](#footnote-43)

According to the verdict, Zhamanak daily was obliged to publish an apology text in its next issue, to pay 200,000 AMD to the plaintiff as compensation for non-pecuniary damage, 100,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee and 8,000 AMD as a state fee for the upheld claim.

**On July 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *already former NA Deputy Speaker Vahe Enfiajyan v.* *Social Media LLC,*  demanding public refutation of the defamation discrediting his honor and dignity.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 16,and was caused by the article published on *Mamul.am* website on December 9, 2020, entitled “Vahe Enfiajyan's Assistant Offers to Write Praises about Tsarukyan in Exchange for Money, and to Discredit Pashinyan”. This is the plaintiff’s second lawsuit with the same cause, the first one being returned.

The next court hearing is scheduled for November 30.

 **On July 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of *Hayk Terteryan v. Hraparak Daily* *LLC,* during which it was ruled to distribute the burden of proof.

We should remind that on February 2,the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Kazakhstan Hayk Terteryan filed a lawsuit against the founder of the media outlet, demanding refutation of the defamatory information and confiscatation of compensation for the expression discrediting his business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by an article entitled "The Pig Farm of the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Kazakhstan has Caused an Ecological Disaster", published on December 9, 2020 on "Hraparak.am" website.[[44]](#footnote-44) 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.

Although on January 21, 2021 the website published a refutation, correcting some of the information in the article that caused the lawsuit, but it did not satisfy the plaintiff.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 13.

**On July 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian Television and Radio Broadcasting Network CJSC v. the founder of Shant TV Company, eponymous LLC*, demanding confiscation of money.

The lawsuit was filed on December 30, 2020, and accepted for proceedings on January 18. (For details see CPFE’s quarterly reports for 2021 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).
 The next court hearing is scheduled for October 15.

**On July 23**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan dismissed the lawsuit of the already former Chairman of the Public Council Styopa Safaryan against 168 Zham Ltd. and its founder Satik Seyranyan, claiming public refutation of the defamatory information, obligation to remove the article and compensation of damage caused to the honor, dignity and business reputation. The court also ordered the defendant to pay 100,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee. The decision is based on the fact that the statute of limitations has expired.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 14. Application to the court was caused by the news entitled "Vladimir Solovyov's reaction to Styopa Safaryan's post" and published on *168.am* website, owned by the company, on October 13, which attributed expressions insulting Styopa Safaryan to Solovyov.[[46]](#footnote-46) (For details see CPFE’s quarterly reports for 2021 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

**On July 26,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (Masis residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *Nver Mnatsakanyan, a journalist and anchor at 1in.am website, v. Hayeli Club and Garnik Isagulyan*, demanding public apology and publication of the judgment in the media.

The lawsuit was caused by the video, published on *Hayeli.am* website on April 14, 2019, entitled “Hey, Nver, aren’t you ashamed: you will serve whoever pays you: Garnik Isagulyan”, where the latter made his assessment on Nver Mnatsakanyan's activities.[[47]](#footnote-47)

On August 16, the court dismissed Nver Mnatsakanyan's lawsuit, finding that the plaintiff did not substantiate with his facts that the defendant sought to insult the plaintiff, to discredit his honor, dignity, and his business reputation. On September 15, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeals, which received the complaint on September 24.

 **On July 26,** in the case of *citizen Arthur Vardanyan v. 168 Zham LLC and citizen David Pirumyan*, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the June 15 judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction, which dismissed the claim on the grounds of statute of limitations.

We should remind that the first lawsuit on the case was filed on April 6, 2020,with claims of obligating the defendant to apologize, refute the defamatory information and confiscating a compensation, and then was returned, and the second one was filed on July 10. The lawsuit was caused by an article, entitled “Nikol Pashinyan talked to Artur Vardanyan during his campaign” and published on *168.am* website on March 6.[[48]](#footnote-48) The website wrote: “In the course of the campaign, as noted by the active Facebook user David Pirumyan, Nikol Pashinyan greeted and talked to Artur Vardanyan, who was the leader of the group neutralized in 2015”, and they quoted Pirumyan: “The Prime-Minister warmly greeted on the street the terrorist Artur Vardanyan who was incomprehensibly released by the court during the former’s rule.”

The Court of Appeal received the case on August 9, and as of September 30, no other development has been recorded.

**On July 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Styopa Safaryan, Chairman of the Public Council, v. Igor Khachaturov and 168 Zham Ltd.*, demanding a public apology for insulting expressions and confiscation of 500,000 AMD in compensation from each defendant.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 2 andwas caused by March 2 publication in the *Blog.168.am* website belonging to *168 Hours* Ltd., with the caption “Khachaturov's son's tough response to Styopa Safaryan”, where it says in particular: “Baghanis Ayrum's drunken Turkish kirva's bastard, do not dare delete your meaningless long text that you will give an answer for, line by line. One thing is for sure, you will not be allowed on that Ankara flight. Go and find something under the skirt of your schizophrenic master, play, enjoy the last pleasures of power, and stay out of my sight”. On April 15, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 29.

**On July 29,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the first court hearing on the case of businessman Khachatur Sukiasyan v. *Media Plus LLC*, *the founder of* *Yerevan.Today* website, demanding a public apology, publication of the court judgement, refutation of information considered defamatory, as well as payment of compensation. [[49]](#footnote-49)

This and all the other lawsuits mentioned below are filed by Khachatur Sukiasyan for the same demand and cause on April 19, because of the article published on different websites on March 25, entitled: “Beware. Khachatur Sukiasyan's Petrolium Spoils Cars. Déjà vu”. Moreover, all of them are published with a link to unidentified sources. In this case, the plaintiff stated the amount of compensation to be 3 million AMD. On May 5, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was rejected. The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for December 16.

On the same day, July 27, a court hearing was held on the case of *168 Zham LLC, the founder of Blog.168.am website*, demanding 2 million AMD compensation.[[50]](#footnote-50) The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on May 3, the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was rejected. The next court hearing is scheduled for December 16.

A court hearing on the lawsuit filed against Spartak Seyranyan (editor of Yerkir.am website) was held on August 4.[[51]](#footnote-51)This lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on May 12, the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was rejected. The next court hearing is scheduled for October 8.

The first court hearing on the the lawsuit filed against News.am LLC, founder of News.am website, was held on September 22.[[52]](#footnote-52) On April 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was rejected. On September 22, the court ruled to distribute the burden of proof. The next hearing is scheduled for December 6.

We should remind that on the same day, Mega Trade LLC, owned by the businessman, filed **5 lawsuits** for the same article against the founders of *Armday.am, Yerevan.today, Blog.168.am, Asekose.am, News.am* respectively, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory, as well as compensation. In **the first lawsuit**, the court ruled to distribute the burden of proof on August 30, and the next hearing was scheduled for November 5. A court hearing on **the second lawsuit** was held on September 29, the next one was scheduled for January 27, 2022. A court hearing on **the third lawsuit** was held on September 14, and the next was scheduled for November 22. A court hearing on **the fourth case** was held on September 7, and the next was scheduled for October 22. Court hearings on **the fifth lawsuit** were held on July 12, September 7, and the next was scheduled for October 22.

**On July 27,** by the initiative of the Administrative Court *ArmNews CJSC, Shark LLC, Multi Media Center TV CJSC, Armenia TV CJSC, A-TV LLC, Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., Free News LLC, Meltex LLC, Armenian Public Television CJSC, Husaber CJSC, Shant LLC* and the Ministry of High-Tech Industry were involved as a third party in the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. the Commission on Television and Radio*.

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

A preliminary court hearing is scheduled for January 25, 2022.

**On July 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan v. "Anna Gevorgyan" Private Entrepreneur (founder of HZham news website)*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 22, 2020, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and payment of compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article published on *Hzham.am* on May 15, entitled "My Step party members are interested in the real estate market", which states in particular that the provincial governors, led by Minister Suren Papikyan, are buying houses in the capital "without paying,” as they provide services, demanding an apartment as a donation.[[53]](#footnote-53) On December 17, the motion to apply injunction to seize the property was upheld.

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 18.

**On July 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (residence of Vayk) 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 caused by live-streaming on Tehmine Yenokyan’s Facebook page and in the mineral water drinking hall of Jermuk city on August 12. According to the plaintiff, the journalist uttered expressions discrediting the business reputation of the company made during her public speech, for which compensation of 1 million AMD, and refutation of the defamatory information in the same place through a Facebook live stream is demanded. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

A court hearing on the case was held on September 15, the next one is scheduled for October 7.

**On July 30,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan launched a new trial on the case of *Mher Derdzyan, the head of the "Under One Roof" housing project, v. Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office LLC*.

We should remind that, the lawsuit, filed on April 15, 2019, was caused by the newspaper’s publication on the concerns that the implemented construction program could be a deliberate hoax.[[54]](#footnote-54) 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). The claim was completely rejected by the decision made on October 28, 2020. The court concluded that the expressions published by the respondent, regardless of their negative connotations, could not be considered as an insult or a slander from the legislative point of view.

The plaintiff applied to the Civil Court of Appeal, which upheld the appeal on March 23, 2021, overturned the verdict, and sent the case for a new trial. The Court of Appeal found that the evidence in the case was not sufficient to substantiate the fact that the defendant had taken measures to verify the truth and validity of the information.

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 6.

**On August 2,** Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC and its Executive Director Davit Papazyan filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak Daily LLC and journalist Suzan Simonyan, demanding refutation of information discrediting the honor, dignity, and business reputation, and a monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article on Hraparak.am website, published on July 24, entitled: "State interest or business of a group of people?", which particularly states, that Davit Papazyan published a Q&A talk, addressing the deal signed with Air Arabia company on July 14.[[55]](#footnote-55) Then the journalist expressed a final thought, "The state invests, the businessman puts the money in his pocket...".

On August 12, the court accepted the lawsuit for proceedings, rejected the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim. The plaintiff appealed the rejection in the Court of Appeal on September 22.

**On the same day, on the same occasion,** only Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC filed a lawsuit against *Hraparak Daily LLC* and Suzan Simonyan, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation and payment of a monetary compensation.
 On August 10, the court accepted the lawsuit for proceedings, rejected the motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim. On September 8, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the rejection, which was returned on September 27 due to the lack of a signature on the document.

The start of the work of the newly elected National Assembly **on August 2** was accompanied by severe restrictions on the movement of media representatives in the parliament.[[56]](#footnote-56) Journalists and cameramen were not allowed to enter the building where the committee sittings took place; they were not able to pass to the section where the offices of the parliament majority were located, as well as couldn't make use of some lobbies, where they usually took interviews and commentaries from the MPs. All this was done without the adoption of any normative-legal act, which would be a basis for such actions. Only on the same day, August 2, when the restrictions had already been applied, the relevant decision of the NA Speaker regarding them was published. Journalist organizations have condemned the authorities' obstruction of the lawful professional activities of the media.

**On August 2,** the Investigative Committee decided to terminate the proceedings on the criminal case of threats addressed to *Tert.am* journalist Ani Gevorgyan and not conduct prosecution against 4 persons on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti.

We should remind that on April 14, the journalist applied to the Human Rights Defender, informing that she had received threats related to her professional activities from unknown people. Thus, by targeting her on various pages of social networks, these users shared a photo of her and her child with insulting and humiliating texts.

In response to the inquiry of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, the Police informed that a criminal case was initiated on April 26, in accordance with Article 164, Part 1 of the RA Criminal Code, and was sent to the Investigative Committee, where a preliminary investigation is underway.

**On August 3,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Boris Gasparyan v. citizen Armen Abroyan, Hraparak Daily Ltd. and Factor Information Center NGO*, demanding protection of honor and dignity and a confiscation of a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 29, 2020, was caused by the articles about the archeologist Boris Gasparyan published on *Hraparak.am* and *Factor.am* websites. The article, entitled "Tomato and pepper seedlings are planted in Areni Cave under the disguise of viticulture development" and published on *Hraparak.am* website on June 19, stated that according to Armen Abroyan, former head of the History and Monuments Protection Agency, Boris Gasparyan was allowed to lease out the cave, where tomato and pepper seedlings are planted under the disguise of viticulture development in Areni, moreover, specifically in the reserve area.[[57]](#footnote-57) *Factor.am*, too, published an article with the same content on June 27, entitled: "Who planted tomatoes and peppers in the area of ​​Areni cave? Abroyan blames the archeologist, the latter names the offender".[[58]](#footnote-58)

The next court hearing is scheduled for November 17.

**On August 4**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz (residence of Gyumri) held a regular court hearing on the case of citizens of *Susanna Minasyan and Arkadi Boyajyan v. ATV Ltd.,* demanding confiscation of 2 million AMD in compensation for violating the right to privacy of personal and family life. We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 30, 2018, caused by a regular edition of the Half-Open Window program on the aforementioned TV channel, uploaded onto the Internet on October 1, 2018, about a housing dispute between neighbors.[[59]](#footnote-59)

On September 10, 2019, the court suspended the proceedings until a final ruling was reached on another case between the parties. The proceedings were resumed on February 25, 2020. The case was reappointed on April 20, and was handed over to another judge, being accepted for proceedings on April 23.

A court hearing on the case was held on Septmber 8, the next one is scheduled for October 6.

**On the morning of August 5,** the photo correspondent of *Panorama.am* news website Lilian Galstyan was banned from entering the National Assembly. [[60]](#footnote-60) Later it was revealed that she was completely deprived of the opportunity to cover the activities of the parliament. The chief of the NA staff informed in the letter sent to the editorial office that the photographer, while carrying out her professional activity, took pictures of the employees of the security service, which is forbidden. The editorial office, in its turn, noted that the employees of the security service, who, according to the NA leadership, have a problem to hide their faces, in fact, look at the hall with an open face, from where a live broadcast is carried out. The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations issued a statement condemning another obstruction of the journalist's activities by the authorities. On August 17, Lilian Galstyan's entry permit to the National Assembly was renewed.

**On August 10,** Mher Terteryan, the leader of the United Homeland Party and an advisor to former Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against lawyer Hakob Charoyan (third party-Live News Media), demanding refutation of information considered defamatory and compensation of damages caused to honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the following allegations made in the authorial program *Ditaket* on *LIVEnews.am* website on June 30: "Leader of United Homeland Party Mher Terteryan tried to kill his wife", as well as other details of his personal life, about which Terteryan's ex-wife Naira Terteryan spoke during the program, and his lawyer Hakob Charoyan.[[61]](#footnote-61)

On September 3, Mher Terteryan filed a lawsuit against Naira Terteryan (third party, *Live News Media LLC*) on the same occasion, demanding refutation of the information considered defamatory. And on September 27, he already filed a lawsuit against *Live News Media LLC* demanding refutation of the information considered defamatory, and compensation of the damage caused to the dignity, honor and business reputation. The lawsuit has not been accepted for proceedings as of September 30.

**On August 10,** lawyer Lusine Avagyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Naira Terteryan, (third party - Live News Media LLC), demanding refutation of the information considered defamatory, and compensation of the damage caused to her dignity, honor and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the allegations made by Naira Terteryan in the authorial program Ditaket of LIVEnews.am website, according to which the lawyer of her ex-husband Mher Terteryan Lusine Avagyan, aside from professional activities, interferes in their personal and family life.[[62]](#footnote-62)

On August 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The plaintiff's motion to apply injunction to seize the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was rejected. A court hearing is scheduled for November 22.

 **On August 10,** the Court of General jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Lyova Abrahamyan, head of Sarukhan Community in Gegharkunik Marz, v. Narine Hasratyan, a reporter at the* *Haykakan Zham* *news site*, claiming refutation of the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation.

On April 1, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings with a new presding judge. The preliminary lawsuit was filed on February 13, 2019 and was caused by an article entitled “Who Sponsors Sarukhan Mayor and Prevents Preliminary Investigation Since August”, published on the website on January 10 and containing villagers’ complaints about their mayor.[[63]](#footnote-63)
 The next court hearing is schedulec for November 5.

After the heated argument between the political forces in the sitting hall of the National Assembly and the intervention of the security officers by the order of the NA Speaker on August 11, the media representatives were forbidden to work and film from the press room.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**On August 12,** FDA Laboratory LLC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Investigative Journalists NGO, demanding to post the refutation of the published information, and the presented response. The lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: "Two of the Vitamin D drugs registered as biologically active supplements" published in Hetq.am belonging to the NGO on June 30, which states that in order to avoid a costly and time-consuming process, medical vitamins are often registered in violation as a supplement, food.[[65]](#footnote-65) On August 20, the lawsuit was returned due to incomplete documents. It was filed again on September 14.

**On August 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Chambarak Mayor Vazgen Adamyan v. the founder of Zhamanak newspaper Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on January 14, and was caused by the article published in the *Zhamanak* newspaper and *1in.am* website on December 11, 2020, entitled "Chambarak Mayor Suspected of Selling Military Aid".[[66]](#footnote-66) On January 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. On September 7, the court partially upheld the lawsuit, obliging Skizb Media Kentron Ltd. to refute all the statements on the 1in.am website where the plaintiff is accused of corruption. The court rejected the demand to confiscate 2 million AMD from the defendant.

**On August 19,** Arthur Vanetsyan, former head of the National Security Service and leader of the "I Have Honor" Alliance of the National Assembly, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Gurgen (Gagik) Melkonyan, a member of the "Civil Contract" faction (third party: Public Television of Armenia CJSC), demanding refutation of the defamatory information, publication of the refutation text, and compensation of the damage caused to the honor and dignity. The lawsuit was caused by Melkonyan 's thoughts on Arthur Vanetsyan' s activities during the last Artsakh war on July 20 expressed during an interview with Petros Ghazaryan on Public TV. He particularly said: "Vanetsyan went and ran away. He went and came back in the blink of an eye. They went and got there, collected the weapons, knew that there were a lot of weapons dumped there, collected them and brought them to Armenia. Their goal was to bring weapons ".[[67]](#footnote-67)

On August 27, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings; as of September 30, no other development have been recorded.

**On August 23,** Aram Mamikonyan, a lawyer and former employee of the Control Chamber, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Karmen Davtyan (third party: Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office LLC), obliging to pay compensation for the damages caused to honor and dignity, refute information considered defamation and to apologize. The plaintiff also demands compensation of 2 million drams. The lawsuit was caused by Karmen Davtyan's article published on July 30 on *Armlur.am* website entitled "Immorality also has a limit".[[68]](#footnote-68) The author accuses the plaintiff of corruption and bribery. By the way, at the end of the article, the editorial office states that it is not responsible for the author's opinion.

On September 6, the court rejected the plaintiff's motion to apply injunction to ban the defendant from taking certain actions. In addition, the court ruled to reject the motion to provide evidence.

**On August 24,** the activities of journalists and cameramen were hindered at the entrance to the parliament session hall, where security officers even threatened News.am cameraman Hayk Tonoyan with deprivation of NA accreditation if he continued filming, and deleted his video of the fistfight in the session hall.[[69]](#footnote-69) The CPFE and 10 partner journalistic organizations issued a statement condemning the incident.[[70]](#footnote-70)
 In response to the CPFE's inquiry, the RA Prosecutor General's Office stated that the media publications about this case had been sent to the Special Investigation Service with an assignment to prepare materials. On September 6, the SIS made a decision to refuse to initiate a criminal case on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti. On September 28, Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Coordinator of theU nion of Informed Citizens NGO, filed a complaint against this decision, asking to abolish it and initiate a criminal case.

**On August 27,** the Civil Court of Appeal partially upheld the defendant’s complaint against the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction on the case of *Alvina Gyulumyan v. lawyer Tigran Hayrapetyan and Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., founder of Zhamanak daily*.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 7, 2018, was caused by the interview by Tigran Hayrapetyan, entitled “We should Send a Lawyer to ECHR, who will not Exchange Impartiality with an Order”.[[71]](#footnote-71) 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. 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. In addition, it was ruled to confiscate 500,000 AMD from Tigran Hayrapetyan in compensation for the damage caused, as well as to confiscate 18,000 AMD from *Skizb Media Kentron Ltd*. and Tigran Hayrapetyan by principle of liability in solido as a state duty and 500,000 AMD as attorney’s fee.

On May 6, the defendant applied to the Court of Appeals, filing an appeal against that decision. The Court of Appeal ruled to oblige Tigran Hayrapetyan to refute the statements made about Alvina Gyulumyan on *1in.am* website, and to pay 10,000 AMD to Alvina Gyulumyan in favor of the budget as a state duty provided by law for an appeal. As of September 30, no appeal has been filed against this decision.

**On August 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to distribute the burden of proof on the case of *Vahe Keushgueryan v. Dareskizb Ltd.*.

The lawsuit was filed on October 12, 2020, demanding to refute the information considered insulting and slanderous. The lawsuit was caused by an article, published on Armtimes.com website (owned by the company) on September 7, which particularly stated that a semi-secret auction was an attempt to alieante the Chrran waterfall near the border village of Khachik, which is the most scenic place in the village, to the Armenian American Vahe Keushgueryan. The website also wrote that the businessman was still enjoying the privilege, granted to him by the former government, and was almost the only buyer of all the grapes grown in Khachik village, this being an exceptional raw material for producing his expensive wine.

The next court hearing is scheduled for December 7.

 **On August 31,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Livenews.am journalist Arthur Hovhannisyan v. Public TV journalist Levon Sardaryan*, demanding an apology for the insult and a public refutation of the information considered defamatory.

The lawsuit, filed on June 22, 2020, was caused by Levon Sardaryan's Facebook comment, dated May 21, on the article, entitled “The Situation in Armenia is Terrible: some will survive, the rest will die” published on Livenews.am website on the same day. Sardaryan quoted 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on September 23, the next one is scheduled for January 18, 2022.

 **On August 31,** the RA General Prosecutor's Office made a decision to initiate a case under Article 164, Part 2 of the RA Criminal Code, in connection with the incident between Channel 5 journalist Karine Mangasaryan and NA MPs.The case was sent to the Special Investigation Service, where a preliminary investigation is underway.

We should remind that on October 6, 2020 NA MPs Kristine Poghosyan and Artur Hovhannisyan, in response to the question posed by the Channel 5 TV journalist Karine Mangasaryan, moved away the microphone pointed at them, then threatened that they would face a different kind of treatment, and all would be held accountable. The MPs meant the coverage policy of the TV company during the war.

On October 13, the Prosecutor's Office sent the case to the SIS, where on October 22 a decision was made to refuse to initiate a criminal case on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti in the deputies' deed. On November 4, the journalist filed a complaint against this decision with the RA Prosecutor's Office, which was rejected. On December 15, Karine Mangasaryan applied to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, where on February 24, 2021 the appeal was upheld, and the decision to refuse to initiate a criminal case was abolished.

 **On September 1,** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the defendant’s comlaint against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction on the case of *the citizens Marat Grigoryan, Sargis Kelyan, Levon Harutyunyan, Liana Manukyan, Esther Manukyan, Tatevik Boyakhchyan v.* *the Hraparak* *newspaper*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 30, 2019, with claims of compensation for insult and slander. And it was caused by October 8, 2018 article, entitled “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.[[72]](#footnote-72) The claim was partially upheld 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. Besides, according to the court judgment, a compensation of 100,000 AMD for defamation and 100,000 AMD for insult should have been 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 the appeal was upheld. By the decision of Civil Court of Appeal the case was sent to the same Court of General Jurisdiction for a retrial.

On May 3, the court decided to partially settle the claim, in fact repeating the previous judgement. The defendant appealed the judgement again on June 4 in a higher instance. **On**

September 16,the Court of Appeal rejected the appeal, keeping the decision of the first instance in force. The court found that the journalist's judgments contained slander, did not come from the overriding public interest, were not based on facts, and were not value judgements.

 **On September 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made redistribution on the case of *GN Tobacco Sweden AB company v. Golos LLC* due to the termination of the judge's powers.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 22, 2020, claiming refutation and compensation for the damage (3 million AMD) caused to its business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by an article, published on *Golosarmenii.am* website on May 23, entitled "A bowl of press cake, or why Swedish snus was brought to Armenia." The author referred to the Swedish product called "snus", a tobacco substitute that, in the opinion of the author, is of dubious reputation and is sold in the supermarket chain belonging to businessman Samvel Aleksanyan. Its sale is prohibited in the European Union (except Sweden) and in the Russian Federation.

On September 20 the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings with a new presiding judge; a court hearing is scheduled for December 24.

 **On September 3,** citizen Siranush Abelyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the chief executive of Politcom.am news website Lilit Silanyan, demanding apology for the slander and publication of a refutation. According to the person in charge of the website Suren Surenyan, the lawsuit was caused by the coverage of the issue related to the provision of loans in one of the banks, which was posted on the website in August, which was carried out based on the citizens' alarm. After the publication of the article, the bank employee, the plaintiff, expressed his disagreement with the citizens' protest, as a result of which the news was removed from the website within hours. The person in charge of the website offered to also publish the viewpoint of the bank, but the plaintiff did not agree and applied to the court.

 On September 22, the lawsuit was returned for corrections.

 **On September 8,**  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 lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, was an article, entitled "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.[[73]](#footnote-73) (For details see CPFE’s annual report for 2020 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website). The next court hearing is scheduled for November 29.

**On September 8,** due to the termination of the judge's powers, there has been a redistribution on the case of *the NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Irates newspaper*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 1, 2019, demanding compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity through slander and insult. And the reason for the lawsuit was the article published in the September 6 issue of the newspaper, entitled "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”.

A court hearing with a new presiding judge is scheduled for Decmber 21.

**On September 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister Eduard Aghajanyan v. the founder of 168.am website 168 Zham Ltd.*, with claims of refutation of defamatory information and a compensation for defamation.

The lawsuit was filed on July 10, 2020, and was caused by an article, entitled "A Party in the Government-owned Fermata Club" and published on the website on June 7.[[74]](#footnote-74) The article narrated that the club, owned by Eduard Aghajanyan, violated the Commandant’s decisions by organizing a night-club style party with the participation of several dozen people in a closed space, such as his club, which is an act prohibited during the state of emergency caused by COVID-19. By the way, Eduard Aghajanyan sent a refutation text to the editorial office, but the latter did not publish it due to disagreement with the presented arguments. The first lawsuit was returned, and the plaintiff filed a new application on August 11.

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for November 23.

**On September 16,** former MP Nikolay Baghdasaryan filed a lawsuit against Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office, demanding a public apology and a compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published in the *Zhoghovurd newspaper* and on the website belonging to the same company on August 20, entitled "The Chamber of Advocates is targeted. The government is looking for a candidate for the post of Chairman of the Chamber of Advocates", which was also printed by other media outlets.[[75]](#footnote-75) The media outlet, making reference to its sources, wrote that Nikolay Baghdasaryan, the former pro-government MP of the National Assembly, may be the candidate for the Chairman of the Chamber of Advocates, and that it is his childhood dream. Then added, "Back in April 2014, Ara Zohrabyan fired Nikolay Baghdasaryan from the post of the Chairman of the Chamber of Advocates, after which Baghdasaryan took every dirty step against Zohrabyan."

**On September 16,** health expert Samvel Kharazyan filed a lawsuit against Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office, demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The lawsuit was caused by the article published in the newspaper and on the website belonging to the same company on August 10, entitled "The government will give a post to the corrupt personnel remaining from the "former authorities": it has a lack of professionals".[[76]](#footnote-76) The article narrated, "The name of a Samvel Kharazyan is circulating as the Deputy Minister of Health, who during the rule of "former authorities" worked as head of a department in the State Health Agency, known for its corruption scandals, and it is very peculiar that he even managed to get arrested with the then head of the State Health Agency Saro Tsaturyan...The only hope of the revolutionary authorities is the remaining personnel from the "former authorities", not real professionals, but corrupt personnel".

**On September 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Hayk Sargsyan v. Hraparak Daily Ltd.*, demanding compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

The lawsuit was filed on June 21, 2019 for an article published two days before, entitled “Pashinyan Showed a Yellow Card to Hayk Sargsyan” where the MP is portrayed as “an odious figure”, notorious for scandals.[[77]](#footnote-77) The publication of the judicial act on the case is scheduled for October 11.

The reason for the next lawsuit against the media outlet was an article, entitled “MP Hayk Sargsyan "Made a Row" on the Yerevan-Moscow Plane published on May 26, 2019.[[78]](#footnote-78) At the hearing of February 28, 2020, the court decided to dismiss the claim without trial, on the grounds that the plaintiff and the defendant had failed to attend two successive hearings. The plaintiff filed an appeal against this judgment to 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. The latter abolished the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction on June 30. On August 26, it was ruled to resume proceedings on the case. A court hearing is scheduled on October 4.

**On September 24,** Sasun Khachatryan, former head of the RA Special Investigation Service and chairman of the RA Corruption Prevention Commission, filed a lawsuit against Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on September 11 in the newspaper and on the website belonging to the same company, entitled "Sasun Khachatryan has an apartment in Moscow. he signed his indictment",[[79]](#footnote-79) in which Sasun Khachatryan is attributed with real estate and money of great value, which the official did not declare.

By the way, the plaintiff demanded the media outlet to publish refutation, which was refused.[[80]](#footnote-80) The amount of compensation mentioned in Sasun Khachatryan's claim is 2 million AMD and in case the lawsuit is upheld, he intends to fully direct the money to the Rehabilitation Center for Soldiers Wounded and Disabled After the War for charity purposes.

**On September 28,** Sayat Shirinyan, a member of the opposition "Armenia" Alliance, wrote an insulting, swearing comment on the Facebook page of Aravot.am news website under the article of journalist Hripsime Jebejyan, at the same time addressing the same expressions to the administration of the editorial office. The article, which was published on September 26, referred to the march organized by the opposition that day, where the journalist mentioned the fact that the leader of "Armenia" Alliance Robert Kocharyan did not make the cross sign during the mourning ceremony in Yerablur Military Pantheon, as well as mentioned that years ago the RA First President Levon Ter-Petrosyan revealed that Kocharyan did not know "Lord's Prayer".[[81]](#footnote-81) The site removed the swearing from the Facebook page.

In response to the CPFE's inquiry, the RA Prosecutor General's Office stated that the data on this had been sent to the RA Police to carry out inspections.

**On September 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction held a regular court hearing on the case of *Vardan Badasyan (the father of the RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan- Comment by CPFE) v. Alternative NGO co-chair Narek Mantashyan and News.am, Analitik.am, 168.am, Iravunk.com, Blognews.am, Alternativ.am, Ipress.am websites*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on July 10, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information, publication of the refutation in the relevant media, and compensation of the damage caused to the honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by articles about Vardan Badasyan's activity of many years, published on the above-mentioned websites, according to which he assigned positions for money.[[82]](#footnote-82)

The next court hearing is scheduled for January 27, 2022.

**On September 28,** the Civil Court of Appeal partially upheld the complaints od both the plaintiff and the defendant on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Iravunk Media LLC and journalist Ilona Azaryan*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on June 13, 2019. The lawsuit was caused by 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- *Comment by CPFE*) reached the NSS with Hayk Sargsyan’s help." The plaintiff demands1 million AMD in compensation for damage caused to honor, dignity and reputation through insult and defamation.

This year 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. On April 19 and 30 the parties filed an appeal to the Court of Appeal.

At the September 28 hearing, this court decided to overturn the decision made by the Court of General Jurisdiction regarding the claim against Iravunk Media LLC and to reject the lawsuit, to overturn the decision regarding Ilona Azaryan and to send the case in that regard to the same court for a new trial. In addition, the Court of Appeal decided to confiscate 150,000 AMD from Hayk Sargsyan in favor of Iravunk Media LLC as an attorney's reasonable fee.

**On September 30,** by the decision ofthe Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, the proceedings on the case of citizen Ara Sukiasyan v. Shamshyan.com news website was terminated, on the grounds of plaintiff’s withdrawal of the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 19, 2020, demanding an apology for the data, considered defamatory and insulting. The lawsuit was caused by an article, entitled “Police officers, investigators and military police officers tracked a 27-year-old employee of the RA Ministry of Defense down on suspicion of brutal murder of a 16-year-old girl in Yerevan”, published on the website on January 6, 2012, where based on his own information, the author published data about the plaintiff’s son, the person arrested under suspicion of murder. [[[83]](#footnote-83)](https://shamshyan.com/hy/article/2020/01/06/1144413/)

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

*In the third quarter of 2021 the CPFE recorded 37 facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. Compared to the situation in the previous quarter, the cases of violation increased by 22 and compared to the same period of 2020, the
violations of the right to receive and disseminate information increased by 3.
In none of these cases a lawsuit was filed to the court.*

*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 July 9-ին** the Administrative Court rejected the lawsuit of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO (founder of *Fip.am* website) against the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, demanding to obligate it to provide information.

The lawsuit was filed on February 17. The NGO expected to receive the departmental list of information subject to encryption from the agency. On February 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

As of September 30, the decision has not been appealed.

 **On July 20,** Public Radio Vanadzor correspondent Lusine Sargsyan sent a letter to the Mayor of Vanadzor Mamikon Aslanyan asking for information on the owner of one of the buildings being built near the green zone in the city, its purpose, and the terms of the works to be carried out. Violating the 5-day period prescribed by law for response and after numerous reminder calls, the journalist's inquiry was responded incompletely.

 **On July 21,** the journalist of Media Initiatives Center Ofelia Simonyan sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Defense, asking for information on the number of servicemen who signed a contract with the "I am" and "I have honor" program. The ministry refused to provide the information, reasoning that it was an official secret. Meanwhile, in response to the inquiry with the same content from the 2020 issue of Hraparak newspaper, the Ministry of Defense provided a full answer.[[84]](#footnote-84)

**From July 22 to September 30,** the correspondent of *Infocom.am* news website Hayarpi Baghdasaryan sent 20 inquiries with the same content to the Ministry of Defense, asking to provide information on how many Azerbaijani servicemen are in the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia as of a specific day, on what territories the Azerbaijani army is located and what is the maximum depth of penetration of the Azerbaijani army.

In three cases, letters came from the Ministry, according to which there is a need for additional examination to provide the information mentioned in the inquiry, and so the answer to the request will be provided within the timeframe prescribed by the RA legislation, i.e. within 30 days. However, no answer has been received. And after examining the inquiries on July 22, 23 and 30, the Ministry decided to refuse to provide the information, again violating the timeframe prescribed by law. Thus, no substantive answer has been given to the inquiries sent to the Ministry of Defense. In some cases, the Ministry of Defense considered a secret the requested information, which had already been published by the RA Prime Minister.

**On August 2,** Aravot.am journalist Hripsime Jebejyan sent an inquiry to the RA Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Gnel Sanosyan about the restoration of the monument-building at 23 Arami Street in Yerevan. The agency, in violation of the timeframe prescribed by law, stated that an additional 30-day period was required for a response. The journalist, with the intervention of the Freedom of Information Center, expressed her disagreement with this response, as the public administration body abused its authority to apply an additional 30-day period for providing information. The requested information was then provided.

**On August 3,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the RA National Assembly, requesting to provide information on the legal basis for restricting the movement of journalists in the National Assembly building. The FOICA assessed the answer provided by the National Assembly as incomplete, as the format of presenting open data was violated. On the same day, the FOICA sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Environment, requesting to provide information on what awareness-raising activities / measures are being carried out among economic entities and residents, starting from January 1, 2022, due to the ban on sale and utilization of polyethylene sacks and bags (except for those made of secondary and weighing-packing raw materials). The Ministry provided an incomplete answer. In particular, it is not specified by what means the awareness-raising activities are carried out.

 **On August 6,** Civilnet.am correspondent Gevorg Tosunyan sent an inquiry to the RA Minister of Health to get information about the funds allocated to the agency for the fight against coronavirus, as well as the parties to the transactions. The ministry provided only the amount spent, responding that the remaining information requested was a trade secret for supplier organizations. The journalist states that the information considered a secret was provided to them in 2020.

**On August 9,** Hetq.am journalist Tirayr Muradyan addressed an inquiry to the head of the State Supervision Service of the Republic of Armenia Tigran Ulikhanyan, asking for information on the findings of the study conducted at the Center for Agricultural Services SNCO. The agency refused to respond to the inquiry, with reasoning that the information contained personal data.

**On August 11,** Aravot.am journalist Nelli Babayan sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense regarding the placement of the tombstones of the victims of the 44-day war buried in the Yerablur Pantheon. On August 17, the Ministry of Defense informed that additional time was needed to answer the questions (according to the law, it can take up to 30 days), but even after a month and a half the response to the question was not acquired.

During the clash between the MPs of different factions in the session hall of the National Assembly on August 11, the NA Speaker instructed to turn off the live broadcast, which was carried out from the session hall of the Parliament.[[85]](#footnote-85)
 The NA Speaker also gave such an instruction on August 25, after the heated argument between the NA MPs Hayk Sargsyan and Seyran Ohanyan, which turned into a fist fight.[[86]](#footnote-86)

**On August 12**, the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Yerevan Municipality requesting information on a stone factory, operating illegally for more than 10 years, located on a community-owned land adjacent to the Silikyan Highway residential area, and a specification on why the municipality displayed inaction and didn't destroy or dismantle that factory.

The municipality, in fact, did not respond to the questions and, skipping them, provided an abstract comment. The FOICA sent an inquiry again on August 19, demanding a proper response to the questions. The municipality again did not provide a proper response, moreover, the letter had the same content and was signed by the same official, which is a violation of the RA Law on Freedom of Information. On September 2, the FOICA submitted a complaint to the mayor.

**On August 23,** the Administrative Court held the first court hearing on the case of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO (founder of Fip.am website) v. Central Electoral Commission, demanding to oblige the commission to provide the information required by letter No. H-1864 of June 4, 2021.

We should remind that the lawsuit was on filed June 14 and accepted for proceedings on the same day. On August 24 the case was terminated on the grounds that the dispute between the parties had come to an end.

**On September 1,** Infocom.am correspondent Aspram Parsadanyan sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense asking for information on the sources of funding for the Russian military in Voskepar. The agency directed the journalist to the NSS and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the latter noted that the provision of that information is within the authority of the Ministry of Defense. The journalist did not receive an answer.

**On September 9,** Anna Avetisyan, a journalist at the Vesti.am website, addressed an inquiry to the RA Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Derenik Dumanyan, asking for information on the creation of a new video for the Armenian national anthem and the content of its possible variants.
 The agency said it had no information about the process, about which the journalist was skeptical and sent a double inquiry on September 13. In the second response, the ministry only added in which areas under its jurisdiction the filming took place and did not answer the questions regarding the content and funding.

**On September 21,** the same journalist sent an inquiry to Yerevan State University asking for information about the purpose of businessman Samvel Aleksanyan's visit to YSU on September 12. In response, the acting rector of YSU Hovhannes Hovhannisyan gave a general answer without referring to the visit of the mentioned businessman, which is an evasive approach for not providing information.

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

**On July 1,** the Administrative Court accepted for proceedings the lawsuit filed by Armenian Second TV Channel LLC against the RA Commission on Television and Radio, requesting to abolish the decision No. 93-A "On Issuing a License to Recognize the Winners of the Competition of Capital Broadcast for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex".

The lawsuit was filed on June 24, a hearing was also held on August 17, and the lawsuit was upheld on August 25. The court found that the decision No. 93-A was made in violation of legal norms and should be annulled.

On September 29, the verdict was appealed to a higher instance.

**On July 14,** the chairman of Armenian Institute of International and Security Issues Styopa Safaryan filed a cassation appeal for the second time against the judgement made by the Court of Appeal, which partially upheld his complaint against the judgement by the Court of General Jurisdiction on the case of *Taguhi* *Aslananyan v. Styopa Safaryan.*

We should remind that on October 29, 2019, the above mentioned Institute 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 that they could not invite him “either to the sauna, or to their place”.[[87]](#footnote-87) On this occasion, journalist Taguhi Aslanyan filed a lawsuit on November 14, 2019, which was partially upheld: the court obligated the defendant to apologize to the journalist for the insulting expressions and to pay 600.000 AMD in compensation. On January 25, Styopa Safaryan applied to the Court of Appeal, appealing the decision of the Court of First Instance dated December 4, 2020. On April 23, the Court of Appeal partially upheld the defendant's appeal, changing only the text of the apology, which according to the verdict should be published in the press. On the remaining part, the act of the first instance was left unchanged.

On May 31, the defendant and on June 9 the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation, which returned the complaints for corrections of documents on June 23. On August 18, the Court of Cassation rejected to accept for proceedings the defendant's second appeal.

**On July 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the Investigative Journalists NGO v. the National Security Service, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 26, 2020, and was caused by the video released by the NSS on July 15, in which the publication of the Hetq.am website belonging to the NGO, about the shelling of the Tavush border village of Aygepar was presented as misinformation among the posts of Azerbaijani media materials and social media users.[[88]](#footnote-88) The website considers this an unfounded accusation, as the information provided by Hetq.am from the site was confirmed by the representative of the Ministry of Defense, and the Human Rights Defender.
 In a judgement made on August 6, the court rejected the lawsuit, and the reasoning is as follows: the activities of the media outlet are conditioned by the overriding public interest, but depending on national security, territorial integrity and the right to life, it cannot be considered absolute. In addition, according to the judgment, the service did not slander the plaintiff, did not discredit his honor, dignity and business reputation, therefore the claim is obviously unfounded and is subject to rejection. On September 10, the judgement was appealed to a higher court instance.

**On July 21,** Administrative Court held redistribution on the case of MELTEX LLC, the founder of A1 + TV Company, v. the Government of the Republic of Armenia and Commission on Television Radio.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 18, 2019, demanding annulment of acts from 7 broadcast licensing competitions held in 2003. *Armenia TV* CJSC, *Mo TV Media Holding* CJSC, *ArmenAkob* LLC, *AR TV* LLC and *Husaber* CJSC are involved in the case as the third party.

On April 6 of this year, the Administrative Court rejected the lawsuit, and on May 10, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal. As of September 30, no other developments have been recorded.

**On July 29,** the founder of the *Iravunk* newspaper LLC, former MP Hayk Babukhanyan filed a cassation appeal againt the judgement by the Court of Appeal on the case against the Executive Director of Open Society Foundations-Armenia Larisa Minasyan, which dismissed the complaint against the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction. The dismissal was conditioned by the fact that the defendant’s intention to discredit and humiliate the plaintiff’s honor and dignity was not substantiated, which also lied on the basis of the initial judgement.

We would like to remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 4, 2019, 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.[[89]](#footnote-89)
 On August 25, Hayk Babukhanyan’s cassation appeal was returned for corrections and was filed again on September 22.

**On August 6,** Armenian Second TV Channel LLC filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Commission on Television and Radio demanding to recognize Armenian Second TV Channel LLC as the winner of the Competition of Capital Broadcast of Slots in the Public Multiplex and to make a decision on issuing a license. On August 13, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, on August 20, the plaintiff appealed that decision in the Court of Appeal. On September 3, the complaint was accepted for proceedings.

**On August 11,** the Administrative Court held a court hearing on the case of Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. Commission on Television and Radio, demanding to abolish the decision No. 86-A on applying an administrative penalty, dated May 27, 2021.
The lawsuit, filed on June 4, was rejected on August 23.

**On August 25,** the founder of Fip.am website, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the staff of the National Assembly, demanding to recognize the fact of violation of the right to information and to oblige to provide the minutes of the sitting dated August 11, 2021. The matter refers to the restrictions applied in the NA session hall on August 11, when the media representatives were forbidden to work and to videotape from the press room after the heated argument between the political forces, and the NA Speaker also instructed to turn off the live broadcast from the parliament. This case is presented in the section of "Pressures".

On September 1, the lawsuit was rejected. The court substantiated its decision as follows: in the case of the first claim, the lawsuit is not subject to trial, as it is beyond the jurisdiction of the Administrative Court, and in the case of the second claim, the lawsuit can be accepted if the plaintiff applied to the administrative body with the request to implement the action and received a rejection (or the timeframe for its implementation has expired). The case was handed over to the court archives on September 15.

**On September 6,** the founder of Fip.am website, Union of Informed Citizens NGO filed 2 lawsuits in the RA Administrative Court against the National Assembly Council, demanding to annul the Sub-clause 4.1 of the Appendix Clause 22 to the decision No. DCNA-44-L regarding the work of journalists in the NA territory,[[90]](#footnote-90) which restricts the movement and activities of the journalists in the NA territory, and to suspend that sub-clause before the final judicial act enters into force.

No development has been recorded regarding the first lawsuit. As for the other, on September 13, the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the plaintiff in this case is not entitled to apply to court, as there is no legal claim, and "the applicant is not a holder of the right that is the object of the violation".

**On September 8,** the founder of the Fip.am website, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, filed a lawsuit in the RA Administrative Court against the National Assembly, demanding to annul Clause 2.8 of the RA NA Speaker's decision NO-01-L. The matter refers to the a provision of the decision made on July 30, "On approving the security rules operating in the area and the building of the NA residence of the Republic Armenia", which states, “It is prohibited to record, videotape or photograph security guards during their professional activities in the area of ​​the protected object, including at the checkpoints”.

On September 16, the lawsuit was returned. The court noted that the cases on the lawfulness of normative legal acts adopted by the RA NA Speaker are not within the jurisdiction of the RA Administrative Court, and the judge issued a special opinion on this lawsuit, not considering it necessary to refer to the grounds for returning the application.

The case was handed over to the archive on September 22.

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1. <https://www.facebook.com/TTaguhi/posts/847407042872559> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.parliament.am/chairman_decisions.php?sel=show&ID=1098&lang=arm> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [https://khosq.am/2021/08/03/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-87/](https://khosq.am/2021/08/03/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-87/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [https://khosq.am/2021/08/05/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-88/](https://khosq.am/2021/08/05/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-88/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [https://khosq.am/2021/08/11/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-89/](https://khosq.am/2021/08/11/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-89/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [https://khosq.am/2021/08/25/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-90/](https://khosq.am/2021/08/25/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-90/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://hetq.am/hy/article/134422> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.e-draft.am/projects/3382> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [https://khosq.am/2021/07/07/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-86/](https://khosq.am/2021/07/07/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-86/) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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11. <https://hetq.am/hy/article/136159?fbclid=IwAR0wus8ldiB9LyWsfUOHCw5H7ERV2E93IvQcrdiw9kh2xP1nvOgM3K00exI> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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