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COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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

**2022 first quarterly report by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression**

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*The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression regularly submits to the public its reports on the working environment and issues of Armenian media and its personnel, on the status of the freedom of expression and the violations of the rights of media outlets and those of journalists. This report reflects the data from the first quarter of 2022.*

*The sources of facts included in the report are the following:*

*- phone calls to CPFE “hot line”,*

*- meetings and conversations of the CPFE experts with mass media personnel,*

*- replies to official inquiries sent to public bodies,*

*- materials from court cases with media involvement,*

*- materials disseminated by the partner journalist organization,*

*- publications by the mass media.*

***Contents***

***Brief Summary ․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․………...․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․ 3***

***Media Activities Environment ․․․․․․․․․․․․……………………….․․․․․․․․․․․․. 4***

***Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media Outlets (general figures) ........8***

***Physical Violence Against Journalists ․․․․․․․․․․․․……………………….․․․․․․ 10***

***Pressure on Media and Their Personnel …………………………․․․․․․․․․․…... 11***

***Violations of Right to Receive and Disseminate Information ………․․․․․…... 41***

***Other Events on Acivity of Media and Journalists ․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․․…... 48***

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***The views and assessments expressed in the report belong to the CPFE and may not coincide with the international views and opinions of the National Endowment for Democracy.***

***BRIEF SUMMARY***

 The first quarter of 2022 was a relatively quiet period for journalists and the media activity. The number of violations of their rights has significantly decreased. **1** case of violence was recorded, when a journalist was detained while covering a mass protest, as well as **12** cases of various other pressures. **7** new lawsuits have been filed against media outlets and journalists, all of which are based on defamation and insult under Article 1087 Part 1 of the RA Civil Code.

Among the **12** cases of the above-mentioned pressures are the manifestations of insulting and disrespectful attitude towards the media representatives, as well as attempts of humiliation and obstruction of their work recorded during the quarter. Only one of these incidents has been investigated by law enforcement agencies.

In the period under review, in contrast to the decrease in physical violence and other types of pressure, there was a significant increase in violations of the right to receive and disseminate information․ There are **45** such cases, which is 30 more than in the same period last year. The media outlets continue to complain about the unnecessary delays and refusals to provide the requested information by the state agencies.

 International institutions continued to focus on the legislative changes made in Armenia last year, which posed threats to freedom of speech and the unhindered operation of the media. In particular, this assessment refers to the criminalization of the so-called “serious insult” and the tripling of caps for pecuniary compensation for insult and slander. These regressive changes became a target of criticism earlier this year in a resolution passed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in the reports of international human rights organizations *Freedom House* and *Amnesty International*, deemed as unfounded restrictions on freedom of expression.

More than 10 Armenian journalistic organizations consider it necessary not only to immediately review these changes, but also to reform the entire media legislation. This is conditioned by the need to abandon outdated approaches and principles, to apply modern regulations in the conditions of rapid development of information technologies, and to introduce the best international experience in our country. Therefore, in February-March, the representatives of these organizations initiated a series of discussions with the officials of the executive and legislative bodies, initiating a process of joint work on the reforms of the media legislation.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

*The right to freedom of expression in Armenia continues to be unreasonably restricted․* This is the assessment of the international human rights organization *Amnesty International*, which was published on March 29 in the annual report “The State of Human Rights in the World”[[1]](#footnote-1). The reason for this strict assessment is the legislative changes adopted by the Armenian authorities in 2021, which threaten the realization of the right to free expression in the country. We should remind that on March 24, 2021, the National Assembly adopted the draft law, according to which the caps for pecuniary compensation for insult and slander, stipulated in Article 1087 Part 1 of the RA Civil Code, were tripled. The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Making Amendments and Addenda to the RA Criminal Code entered into force on August 30th, criminalizing the so-called “serious insults”, namely swearing. By the way, public and state figures and a number of other groups enjoyed a higher level of protection, and insulting them would lead to more severe punishment, than in the case of an ordinary citizen.

 During the first quarter of 2022, the dangers arising from the problematic legislative changes continued to remain in the discussion domain of both local journalistic organizations and international institutions, causing serious concern.

 On January 27, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution calling on the Armenian authorities to decriminalize “the serious insult”.[[2]](#footnote-2) The media section of the document, entitled: “Activities of Democratic Institutions in Armenia”, states that after the Karabakh war, in response to the unprecedented dissemination of misinformation and hate speech, the country's authorities criminalized serious insults to public figures and increased the amount of pecuniary compensation for insults and defamation. The Assembly called on the Armenian authorities to ensure that a balance is preserved between ensuring freedom of expression and the dignity of the individual, and that criminalizing “serious insult” will not be applied arbitrarily against individuals or the media. The resolution makes references to reports by the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, in particular on ineffective and regressive legislative changes in recent years, the dissemination of hate speech and false news in the media and television, as well as lawsuits against media outlets.

 By the way, on March 22, the Constitutional Court was supposed to examine the application of the former Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan to check the constitutionality of the legislative change on “serious insult”, but the examination was postponed until April 26.

 On March 17, the international human rights organization *Freedom House* published its traditional report “Freedom in the World 2022”, in which Armenia maintained its position with an overall index of 55 out of 100 points, ranking among the partially free countries.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the issue of media freedom, Armenia received 2 out of 4 points. In this section, the organization referred to the data of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, pointing to the cases of violence and restrictions of media personnel during 2021. Here, too, a reference is made to the above-mentioned legislative changes, which can be easily abused, restricting the right of the media to express themselves freely, and being used as a tool against the media, which criticize the officials. The report reiterated that most media outlets pursue political interests and remain polarized.

In terms of reforming the media legislation, the development of a new law on “Mass Media” has remained urgent, which continues to be actively discussed in expert circles. The bill on amendments and addenda to the law, adopted on December 10, 2021, did not address a number of important issues in terms of the process of media accreditation in state institutions, the transparency of media property and financial sources, the introduction of self-regulation system, or clarifying the concepts of “media” and “journalist”, given the existence of modern technologies.

 As for the new law “On Audiovisual Media”, which entered into force in 2020, during the two years of operation, a number of problems have emerged that need to be resolved. In this regard, it is also possible that the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media conducted an expert examination at the request of journalistic organizations and provided its conclusion with relevant recommendations. This document can serve as a sound basis for reworking the problematic provisions of the law. In particular, they refer to the issues of creation of a favorable legal framework for the creation of private multiplexes, the independence of the Commission on TV and Radio, the transparency of its activities, impartiality in the licensing process, as well as the guarantee of the independence of the Public TV and Radio Company and its Council.

 The situation is also not favorable in terms of freedom of information. The trend continued during the quarter, when officials unnecessarily refused or delayed the provision of information to the media, or the answers were incomplete. This situation is particularly alarming in the context of the polarization and widespread dissemination of false news in the political arena, media and the society, when the need for official information becomes even more evident. **45** cases of violation of the right to receive and disseminate information were recorded, which is 30 more than in the same period last year.

In this regard, the project developed by the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia was noteworthy, which proposed to tighten the responsibility of the officials who ignore or respond inappropriately to the inquiries addressed to them. The proposal to make relevant amendments to the RA Code on Administrative Offenses was acclaimed by the Ministry of Justice on February 1, and on March 24 the Government approved it. The draft envisages increasing the amount of the fine from 10-50 thousand AMD defined by the Article 189 Part 7 of the Code for the above-mentioned violations, making it 30-70 thousand AMD. And in case of repeating the same violation within a year after applying the administrative penalty, the current fine in the amount of 50-100 thousand AMD is envisaged to be increased to 100-150 thousand AMD.

Many legislative changes are still necessary for the development of freedom of information. In particular, it is necessary to ensure the transparency of representation expenses by the state leaders, access to data on business trips of officials, clarification and modernization of procedures for declassification of confidential documents, taking into account both security issues and the public benefit.

Meanwhile, following the journalists' complaints, we are convinced that by making reference to state secrets, officials often avoid answering questions of obvious public importance. During this quarter, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stood out with such behavior.

 Thus, according to journalists, the Ministry of Defense considers the information on bonuses a state and official secret.[[4]](#footnote-4) And in case of “the most innocent” questions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even refers to the departmental list of data subject to encryption left by the previous authorities and unchanged by the current authorities.[[5]](#footnote-5)

According to another observation, the absence of a spokesperson in the RA Prime Minister's Office complicates the work of journalists․ In order to get the government's opinion on urgent issues, it is usually necessary to rely on the answers to written inquiries, which in terms of time do not allow to provide operative information to the public, while it is accepted that in such cases the spokesperson is authorized to present the official position.[[6]](#footnote-6)

At the end of last year, the decree of the RA Government, dated December 9, also caused concern to CPFE, stipulating the removal of information on the flights of officials from govtravel.am website. Besides, another draft law, which proposed not to publish on the e-gov.am platfrom information and details on the business trips of officials, as well as the details of single-source procurements, along with other kinds of information, was under discussion.

However, as a result of the CPFE inquiry addressed to the RA Government, it turned out that a decision was made not to proceed with the latest draft, “taking into account the commitment of the Government to act in a transparent and accountable manner.” At the same time, we were informed that the RA Government is working to develop a common information and communication policy, after which uniform regulations will be made for approaches to the dissemination of information.

***In general, as the Armenian media legislation is outdated and the recent amendments do not meet international standards, the CPFE has initiated a process with partner journalistic organizations to elaborate a comprehensive media development concept based on which new bills will be developed in line with modern requirements, taking into account international best practices. This initiative was discussed at the March 15 working meeting in the Parliament, which was attended by the Chairman and a number of members of the NA Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport, the RA Minister of Justice and Ministry officials, as well as heads and experts of journalistic organizations. As a result, an agreement was reached to sign a trilateral memorandum of cooperation, to jointly elaborate the above-mentioned concept, and to initiate legislative reforms based on it.***

 During the first quarter of 2022, the CPFE continued to monitor violations of the rights of journalists and the media, and recorded **1** case of physical violence and **12** other types of pressure. In connection with the most extraordinary cases, the CPFE made statements with partner organizations. Thus, on January 20, during the regular session of the National Assembly, referring to the activities of journalists of TV channels and online platforms associated with political forces or figures, Vahagn Aleksanyan, an MP of the Civil Contract faction, called them “verbal prostitutes”. In fact, accusing the media of spreading insults and hatred, the MP himself used such words, moreover, repeating them several times in his speech and reaffirming them at the next session. Journalistic organizations have strongly condemned this behavior of the representative of the ruling party, which not only does not comply to the status of an MP and the ethical norms related to it, but also creates distrust towards a politician, whose vocation is to make laws, including ones aimed at counteracting insult and hatred and establishing responsibility for their dissemination. [[7]](#footnote-7)

Another statement was caused by the case of detaining a journalist and initiating a criminal case against her. Thus, on February 22, along with the protesters making demonstrations, the police detained Ani Nahapetyan, a correspondent at *Yerkir Media TV*, from the Republic Square of the capital. She was on duty and showed her journalistic certificate at the time of the incident. Later, at the police station, the law enforcement officers took Ani Nahapetyan's phone and deleted the shots she had taken inside the building. A criminal case was also initiated against the journalist on the charge of insulting the Prime Minister. The journalistic organizations demanded the Police to terminate the criminal case against Ani Nahapetyan, set an official investigation, prosecute the police officers who abused their powers, and take measures to exclude such attitude and actions towards journalists in the future.[[8]](#footnote-8) In response to the March 1 statement, the Investigative Committee informed that the body conducting the proceedings had been instructed to take all necessary measures for an objective and comprehensive investigation of the circumstances of the criminal case.

By the way, *Amnesty International* in its above-mentioned annual report also touched upon the pressures, attacks and threats against the media and NGOs in Armenia, and assessed their investigations as ineffective. In particular, the document mentions the cases of attacks and robberies of the offices of *Radio Liberty* and *Open Society Foundations* after the 44-day Artsakh war.

 One of the noteworthy events of the quarter was the ongoing conflict between the former Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan and the *Public TV Company*. According to the Human Rights Defender, the *Public TV Company* does not cover the activities of its office properly. In this regard, Arman Tatoyan's statement addressed to the *Public TV Company* and the Council of Public Broadcaster, dated December 28, 2021, was discussed at the February 2 session of the Media Ethics Observatory. During the session, he demanded clarifications on not covering the Defender's publications in the news program *Lurer*. The members of MEO met with the management of the Public TV Company, hoping to get insight into their positions and study the official explanation of the Council of Public Broadcaster, where it was mentioned that the Human Rights Defender himself had avoided cooperation.[[9]](#footnote-9) As a result, the Observatory proposed to consider the possibility of signing a memorandum of cooperation between the Human Rights Defender and the Council of Public Broadcaster, which would include the principles and regulations on the coverage of the Ombudsman's Office.[[10]](#footnote-10)

 Nevertheless, on February 18, the RA Human Rights Defender issued a new statement, reiterating his concern that not covering his activities on *Public TV Company's* news program *Lurer* was a policy agreed upon with the Council of Public Broadcaster. In addition, according to the Human Rights Defender, a policy to discredit the Defender's institution is carried out in the media.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2022 according to the following classification by the CPFE:

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

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

The relevant sections of the report list the facts on the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2022, as well as developments related to the previous incidents.

***In total, there were 58 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2022. 1 was a case of physical violence, 12 were cases of pressure against the media and their personnel, and 45 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 1st Quarters of 2021-2022**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2021 | 1st quarter of 2022 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **7 (8 victims)** | **1** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **20** | **12** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **15** | **45** |

 **Lawsuits Against Media and Journalists in the 1st Quarters of 2021-2022**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2021 | 1st quarter of 2022 |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | **10** | **7** |
| 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 first quarter of 2022 there was 1 case of physical violence against media workers, which was caused by the police officers. Below we present facts and developments related to both that case and past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

 **On January 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the trial on the fact of violence against Artak Khulyan, correspondent at *Shantnews.am* news website, and Hovhannes Sargsyan, cameraman at *Factor.am* news website.

We should remind that the criminal case was initiated in connection with the violence that took place during the days of the April Revolution in 2018, including against representatives of media outlets. It was sent to the 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).

Court hearings on the case were also held on February 10, May 3, 17, 31; the next one is scheduled for May 27.

**On January 25,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes (Artashat residence) held a trial on the case of violence against journalist Ani Gevorgyan.
 We should remind that on June 4,2021,during the coverage of the meetings of the acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the city of Artashat, Ararat Marz, one of the citizens snatched the phone of *Tert.am* correspondent Ani Gevorgyan, insulted and slapped her.[[11]](#footnote-11) On September 3, the criminal case, initiated on the fact of violence, was submitted to the court with an indictment against two persons, sister and brother Sona and Vahagn Hakobyans. The first was 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on March 16, the next one is scheduled for May 10.

 **On February 22,** during a protest rally against the visit of Azerbaijani MPs to Yerevan, police detained Yerkir Media TV correspondent Ani Nahapetyan, who was on duty and was wearing a media badge. In the Police department, the law enforcement officers took the journalist's phone and deleted the videos made from inside the building. Besides, among the other detained citizens, a criminal case was initiated against her as well, under the article on hooliganism. The journalist was charged for swearing at the authorities, which she denied, and in turn reported about the crime in the Police.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations issued a condemning statement, after which, on March 1, the Investigative Committee, in response to that statement, informed that the body conducting the proceedings had been instructed to take all necessary measures, for an objective and comprehensive investigation of the circumstances of the criminal case.

In response to the CPFE's inquiry, the RA Prosecutor's Office stated that on March 9, a criminal case was initiated on the occasion of the journalist's report, under Article 164 Part 2 of the RA Criminal Code, based on materials prepared by the NSS Investigation Department. The pre-investigation continues, there is no person involved as an accused.

 **On March 4**, 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 2018-2021, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 20.

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

*In the first quarter of 2022, 12 cases of various pressures against the media and their personnel were registered. All those pressures are presented below, in this subsection of the report, along with the developments and outcomes of similar facts, registered in the previous years, in chronological order.*

 **On January 5,** the Administrative Court of Appeal ruled to leave the verdict of the Administrative court on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. the Commission on Television and Radio* unchanged (with *Public TV of Armenia CJSC* involved as the third party).
 This refers to the lawsuit filed by the LLC on June 24, 2021, with the demand to abolish the decision No. 93-A dated June 4, 2021, regarding the rating assessment of the participants of the competition for licensing the use of slots of the Capital Broadcast in the Public Multiplex. By the decision dated August 25, the Administrative Court upheld the lawsuit, finding that Decision No. 93-A had been made in violation of legal norms and should be abolished. On September 29, the defendant appealed the verdict to a higher instance. After the latter's decision, the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation on February 4. As of the end of the quarter, no other developments have been registered.

 **On January 11,** the Administrative Court held a court hearing on the second case of the same plaintiff. We should remind that this lawsuit was filed on March 15, 2021, against the Commission on Television and Radio, demanding to obligate it 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. *ArmNews CJSC, Shark LLC, Multi Media Center TV CJSC, Armenia TV CJSC, A-TV LLC, Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., Free News LLC, Meltex LLC, Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC, Husaber CJSC, Shant LLC*, and the Ministry of High-Tech Industry were involved as a third party. A court hearing was also held on March 14, the next one is scheduled for September 14.

**On January 5,** the Court of Cassation returned the defendant's appeal against the decision of the Court of Appeal, which had rejected the appeal against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *Gegham Vardanyan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, v. Yerkir Editorial Office Ltd*. The Court of First Instance decided to uphold the lawsuit partially. Yerkir Editorial Office Ltd. was obliged to publicly refute the information about Gegham Vardanyan, considered defamatory, to apologize to the plaintiff, to be confiscated 300,000 AMD in his favor as compensation for insult and 700,000 AMD as compensation for defamation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 9, 2020 demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and insulting, an apology and confiscation of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article, entitled: “Whatever the Result of the Investigation Initiated by Myasnikovich, the Consequences will not be Particularly Severe for Gegham Vardanyan. REX” and published on *Yerkir.am* website on September 2, which accuses Gegham Vardanyan of corrupt deals.[[13]](#footnote-13)

On February 4, the appeal was refiled to the Court of Cassation, and on February 23, a decision was made to leave the appeal without trial, as the defendant did not state the specific norms of substantive or procedural law that were violated by the Court of Appeal, obstructing the essence of justice.

**On February 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on another lawsuit of the same plaintiff, against *Pastinfo Ltd.*, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article entitled: “The Armenian Representative in the Eurasian Economic Commission is Suspected of Abuse” published on *Pastinfo.am* website on August 31, 2020 .[[14]](#footnote-14)

The next hearing on the case is scheduled for April 7.

 **On January 7,** citizen Samvel Hayrapetyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Russian-based political scientist Mariam Hovsepyan and *Armdaily News Agency LLC*, demanding refutation of insulting expressions, apology and compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation, as a result of the insult. This refers to the article published on *Armdaily.am* news website on November 4, 2021, entitled: “Who and Why has Spread the News on Diana Martirosyan Beating Three Azerbaijanis? Mariam Hovsepyan Provides Details”[[15]](#footnote-15), where the defendant mentioned that the programmer Samvel Hayrapetyan was fulfilling certain orders through “mushroom sites”, spreading misinformation, false news, and as a result, provoking ethnic clashes.

The lawsuit was returned for corrections on January 24. It was refiled on February 2 and accepted for proceedings on the 11th of the same month. As of March 31, no other developments have been registered.

**On January 10**, Ara Mkrtchyan, the Head of Kasakh Community in Kotayk Marz, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan for the second time against Yelena Zohrabyan, the Head of the Public Affairs Department of the Urban Development, Technical Standards and Fire Safety Inspectorate, as well as against the *Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC*, demanding a public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

 The first lawsuit was filed on December 7, 2021, which was returned for corrections. The lawsuit was caused by a report aired on the TV company’s news program *Lurer* on November 2, entitled: “MP Anna Mkrtchyan’s Father, the Head of Kasakh Community, “Donated” a Part of the Community to His Son”. The report presented the plaintiff’s possible corrupt transactions, found out by the inspection body.[[16]](#footnote-16)

On January 21, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and a trial is scheduled for May 20.

 **On January 11**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings the lawsuit of Arthur Vardanyan, the leader of All-Armenian National Statehood Party, filed on December 27, 2021, against *Zhoghovurd Newspaper’s Editorial Office LLC* and Sevak Vardumyan, the journalist at the same newspaper, demanding refutation of the defamatory information and confiscation of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: “How did the Accused in Terrorism Attempt Enter the National Assembly?” and published on the website *Armlur.am* owned by *Zhoghovurd Newspaper’s Editorial Office LLC*. In the article, the author Sevak Vardumyan raised the question of how Arthur Vardanyan, who is accused of “seizing power by force” and is on a criminal case, appeared at the NA sessions.[[17]](#footnote-17)

On January 17, the lawsuit filed by the same plaintiff with the same claims against *Hraparak Daily LLC* was accepted for proceedings. The lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: “The Gang Leader in the National Assembly” and published in the newspaper and on the eponymous website on December 3.[[18]](#footnote-18)

As of the end of the quarter, no developments have been registered.

 **On January 12,** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the defendan’t appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of the *SOS Children's Villages Armenian Charitable Foundation v. Iravunk Media LLC*, by which the claim was partially upheld on October 13, 2021. *Iravunk Media* was obliged to refute the defamatory data, to pay compensation in the amount of 500.000 AMD in favor of the Foundation, and the court expenses in the amount of 314.000 AMD

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on May 14, 2020, was caused by the article, entitled: “What is Going on in the Ijevan Branch of SOS Children's Villages?” published on *Iravunk.com website* on January 8.[[19]](#footnote-19) The website, citing its own sources, stated that the Foundation's employees were engaged in robbery. The lawsuit was filed with the claim of public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation of the damages caused to the business reputation.

The publication of the judicial act is scheduled for April 1.

**On January 18,** the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan continued the trial on the case of *Lara Aharonyan, head of the Women's Resource Center NGO, v. Hayeli Club and Live News Media LLC*, demanding compensation of damage caused to her honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD.

The lawsuit was caused by a video entitled: “Member of the CC Board of Trustees Lara Aharonyan is Involved in Sexual Profanity of Childern: Hayk Ayvazyan” published on April 24, 2019, in which one of the guests of Hayeli Club, Hayk Ayvazyan, made assessments of Aharonyan's activities during a press conference. The video was posted on *Hayeli.am* and *Livenews.am* news websites.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 27.

**On January 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary hearing on the case of *businessman Khachatur Sukiasyan v. Journalist and ARF member Spartak Seyranyan* (*Yerkir.am* news website), demanding a public apology, publication of the court judgement, refutation of information considered defamatory, as well as payment of a compensation.

We should remind that as was the case for the other lawsuits of the same plaintiff, this one also, filed on April 19, 2021, was caused by the article published on different websites on March 25, entitled: “Beware. Khachatur Sukiasyan's Petrolium Spoils Cars. Déjà vu”,[[20]](#footnote-20) with a link to an unidentified Telegram channel.

On March 7, the court made a decision on the distribution of the burden of proof. A court hearing was held on March 24, and the publication of the judicial act was scheduled for April 14.

**On January 31,** a regular court hearing was held on the case of the same plaintiff against *Media Plus LLC*, the founder of *Yerevan.Today* website, with the same claim.[[21]](#footnote-21) In this case, the plaintiff stated the amount of compensation - 3 million AMD. A court hearing was held on March 16, the next one is scheduled for July 12.

**On February 8,** a regular court hearing continued on the case of the same plaintiff against *168 Zham LLC*, the founder of *Blog.168.am* website, demanding 2 million AMD of compensation. [[22]](#footnote-22)

On March 1, the court decided to partially uphold Khachatur Sukiasyan's claim․ The website was obliged to publish a refutation and pay 100,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee. The court found that the Telegram social network is an unidentifiable source and citing the publications made by unknown persons on that platform does not release the defendant from the liability for the insult or slander defined by the RA Civil Code.

Khacahtur Sukiasyan’s **next lawsuit** is against *News AM LLC*, the founder of *News.am* website.[[23]](#footnote-23) A court hearing on the case was held on March 7, the next one is scheduled for April 15.

**On January 27,** a regular court hearing was held on the case of *Mega Trade LLC, owned by the businessman, v. Yerevan.today* with the same cause and demand, filed on the same day. The next one is scheduled for April 4. **On February 4,** a regular court hearingwas held on the case against *News.am,* thenext one is scheduled for April 18. **On February 17,** the decision of the Court of First Instance on the case of *Mega Trade LLC v. Armday.am* was published, by which the claim was partially upheld. The website was obliged to refute the information considered defamatory, pay 100,000 AMD to the plaintiff as an attorney's reasonable fee. **On March 2,** the trial on the case of the same plaintiff against Blog.168.am continued; the next court hearing is scheduled for May 13.

**On January 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *News AM LLC* *v. Dareskizb Ltd.*, *founder of Haykakan Zhamanak Daily.*

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by the article published on August 21, 2018 by *HZh* entitled: “Ararat, Armnews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media - All Fakes: Which Media Outlets were “Bought” by Kocharyan?”.[[24]](#footnote-24) According to the plaintiff, with a number of expressions in the publications about *News.am*, as well as with the title of the article, damage was caused to its business reputation. *News AM LLC* brought a claim of compensation of 200,000 AMD to the founder of *Haykakan Zhamanak*.

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for April 20.

 **On January 20**, during the regular session of the National Assembly, referring to the activities of journalists of TV channels and online platforms associated with political forces or figures, Vahagn Aleksanyan, an MP of the Civil Contract faction, called them “verbal prostitutes”. The MP reaffirmed his thoughts also at the session of January 21. Journalistic organizations have issued a condemning statement in this regard.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**On January 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan decided to leave without trial the lawsuits of journalists Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan against the Council of the Public Television and Radio Company (with *Public TV Company CJSC* involved as the third party) with a claim for repealing the interfering Administrative Act No. 46-L dated December 25, 2018, and on recognizing the orders of the termination of these journalists’ employment contracts as invalid as a consequence. The reason is that the plaintiffs, having been properly informed of the time and place of the two successive court hearings, did not appear in court, did not file a motion to postpone the hearing or resolve the case in their absence.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed onJanuary 24, 2019. On December 9, the court upheld the journalists’ lawsuit. The defendants had appealed the decision, and on October 13, 2020, the Court of Appeal decided to uphold the appeal, overturn the decision of the Administrative Court and send the case for a retrial. (In its turn, on January 20, 2021, the Court of Cassation made a decision to not accept for proceedings the appeal of journalists Liana Karapetyan and Siranush Muradyan against the decision of the Administrative Court of Appeal). On March 15, the case was accepted for new proceedings in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan.

**On January 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Sasun Khachatryan, former Head of the RA Special Investigation Service and Chairman of the RA Corruption Prevention Commission, v.* *Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office*, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on September 24, 2021, and caused by the article published on September 11 in the newspaper and on *Armlur.am* website owned by the same company, entitled: “Sasun Khachatryan Has an Apartment in Moscow. He Signed His Indictment”[[26]](#footnote-26), in which the high-ranking official is attributed with real estate and money of great value, which the official did not declare. By the way, before applying to court, the plaintiff demanded the media outlet to publish refutation, which was refused.[[27]](#footnote-27) 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.

A court hearing was held on March 11, the next one is scheduled for April 25.

**On January 24,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the former NSS colonel Eduard Harutyunyan v. former MP Taron Sahakyan (with Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., founder of Zhamanak Daily involved as the third party)*, demanding public apology, as well as a refutation of the information considered slander and payment of a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by the May 29 article published in the daily newspaper and *1in.am* website, entitled: “The Harutyunyans’ Dynasty is Still Rooted in the State Administration System: Who Occupies a Post, What Post and Where?”.[[28]](#footnote-28)

A court hearing was also held on March 30, the next one is scheduled for May 25.

**On January 31,** the same defendant's appeal on another case of the same plaintiff was accepted for proceedings, where the third party was *Meltex LLC*, the founder of *A1 + TV* company.

This lawsuit was filed on September 18, 2019, and caused by a video released on *A1plus.am* on August 14 in which Taron Sahakyan talks about a former NSS official, in particular accusing him of “being related to drug supply”, “alienating strategic objects at the cost of a penny to his immediate surroundings”, “exporting cheap resources from Armenia and importing expensive ones”. [[29]](#footnote-29)

According to the verdict of November 24, 2021, the lawsuit was partially upheld. Taron Sahakyan was obliged to refute the defamatory information on the YouTube page of *A1 +* and an amount of 100,000 AMD was confiscated in favor of Eduard Harutyunyan as a an attorney’s reasonable fee. On December 24, the defendant appealed the verdict in the Civil Court of Appeal.

The publication of the judicial act is scheduled for April 14.

**On January 25,** Armen Martirosyan, CEO at *Antares Media Holding*, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against *Asekose LLC* (*Asekose.am* news website) and its founder Aram Harutyunyan, demanding public refutation of the defamatory facts, and compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity. The lawsuit was caused by the news published on the website on December 25, 2021, where another citizen's thoughts about the authorities were attributed to Armen Martirosyan. The website published a refutation on January 18 before the lawsuit was filed.[[30]](#footnote-30) Nevertheless, the lawsuit was filed, but was withdrawn before being accepted for proceedings on February 9.

**On January 26,** the Administrative Courtrejected the defendant’s appealagainst the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanon the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC*, *represented by Executive Director Samvel Mayrapetyan*, *v. the Commission on Television and Radio*. The claim was to abolish the decision N 2-A of the Comission on Television and Radio, dated January 8, 2021 “On the Change of the Number of Slots in the State-Metropolitan Broadcast Competitions for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex” and decision No. 14-A, dated January 15, 2021 “On Issuing a License to Recognize the Winners of the Competition of State Broadcast for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex”.

The lawsuit was filed on February 3, *Armenia TV CJSC, Husaber CJSC* (founder of *Yerkir Media* TV company), *Shant CJSC* (founder of the eponymous television company), *A-TV LLC*, *Multi Media-Kentron TV CJSC* (founder of *Kentron* TV company) were involved as the third party. On April 2 the court dismissed the lawsuit on the part of abolishing decision No. 2-A. Regarding the abolition of the decision No. 14-A dated January 15, the demand was upheld and that act was declared invalid. In addition, the court decided to confiscate 4,000 AMD from the Comission in favor of the plaintiff in compensation of the paid state fee, and 300,000 AMD as an attorney's fee. On May 5, the defendant filed an appeal.

On February 25, the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation, where the appeal was received on March 3.

 **On January 26,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Alvina Gyulumyan, a former member of the Constitutional Court, v. Dareskizb Ltd., the founder of the Armenian Times daily*, demanding refutation of slander and compensation.
 We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 22, 2018, was caused by the publication of an article stating that when Gyulumyan was representing Armenia at the European Court of Human Rights as a judge, she did not spare any effort to postpone the investigation of one of the cases in relation to the March 1, 2008, events in Yerevan. Alvina Gyulumyan’s lawsuit was rejected in the Court of First Instance on December 6, 2019 on the grounds of applying statute of limitations, and the plaintiff filed an appeal on December 30. On April 15, 2020, the Court of Appeal made a judgment to uphold Alvina Gyulumyan’s appeal, overturning the judgment of the Court of First Instance and sending the case to the same court for a retrial.

On February 1, the judge on the case made a decision of self-recusal․ One of the reasons is that the defendant's representative has shown open disrespect to both the court and the staff, and, in the judge's view, any of his decisions can be interpreted as biased. The case was redistributed on February 3, and the next court hearing is scheduled for June 16.

**On January 28,** Hripsime Jebejyan, a correspondent at the *Aravot.am* news website, asked Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan, who visited the Yerablur Military Pantheon in Yerevan, about the expensive official cars of members of the RA Government, hinting that the expenses made for officials did not correspond to the state of the country. A large number of users wrote swear words, threats and insults addressed to the journalist under this video.[[31]](#footnote-31) According to Hripsime Jebejyan, it was like an organized campaign, as everyone came up with almost the same wording.

 **On January 31,** the Corut of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a preliminary court hearing on the case of*health expert Samvel Kharazyan v.* *Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 16, 2021, and caused by the article published in the newspaper and on the *Armlur.am* website owned by 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”.[[32]](#footnote-32) 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...”. Court hearings on the case were also held on February 21 and March 23. Publication of the judgement is scheduled for April 13.

**On January 31,** *Hraparak Daily LLC* applied to theCourt of Cassation, appealing the verdict of the Court of Appeal on the case of *citizens Marat Grigoryan, Sargis Kelyan, Levon Harutyunyan, Liana Manukyan, Esther Manukyan, Tatevik Boyakhchyan v. Hraparak Daily LLC*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 30, 2018, demanding compensation for insult and slander. The lawsuit was caused by an article published in the daily on October 8, 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 scientific researcher’s salaries.[[33]](#footnote-33) The claim was partially upheld by a judgment passed on February 28, 2020. *Hraparak Daily* was obligated to refute the defamatory information published in the above-mentioned article and publicly apologize to him. Besides, a compensation of 200,000 AMD 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 it was upheld. The case was sent for a retrial.

On May 3, 2021, the Court of First Instance again partially upheld the lawsuit, essentially repeating the previous verdict. On June 4, the defendant appealed the verdict in the Civil Court of Appeal. On September 16, the appeal was rejected․ The Court of Appeal found that the journalist's judgments contained slander, were not in the public interest, were not based on facts, and were not value judgements.

As of the end of the quarter, no other developments have been registered.

**On January 31**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction Yerevan on the case of *former Vayots Dzor Governor Trdat Sargsyan v. Hraparak Daily LLC*, to leave the lawsuit without trial.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 30, 2019, demanding confiscation of a compensation in the amount of 2 million AMD and obligation for refutation of information considered defamatory. The lawsuit was caused by a publication in the newspaper, according to which Governor Trdat Sargsyan was present at the brutal beating of Lieutenant Colonel Ara Mkhitaryan. [[34]](#footnote-34)

On November 5, 2021, the court decided to leave the case without trial, as the plaintiff neither appeared in two sucessive hearings, nor filed a motion to postpone the hearing, resolve the case or continue the trial in his absence. Neither did the defendant file a motion to continue the trial of the case. On December 21, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, but did not prove the fact that he had not been notified about the court hearings, and on that basis the appeal was rejected. On February 23, the plaintiff filed a cassation appeal, which was received on March 23.

 **On Februar**y 1, the defendant on the case of NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) v. Iravunk Media Ltd. filed an appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan.
 The lawsuit, filed on August 4, 2020, demanding a compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity, was caused by a publication in the Iravunk newspaper, where thoughts were attributed to Alen Simonyan. He allegedly said that the ruling political team was not ready to work if no bonuses were to be paid.
 By the verdict of September 29, 2021, the court partially upheld Alen Simonyan's claim. Iravunk Media Ltd. was obliged to publicly refute the information considered defamatory and to pay 200,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.
 On February 15, the judge was replaced, and on February 28, the Court of Appeal accepted the case for proceedings. Publication of the judicial act is scheduled for April 29.

**On February 1,** *Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.* filed an appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, which partially upheld Chambarak Mayor Vazgen Adamyan’s lawsuit against the LLC, demanding compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 14, 2021, 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”.[[35]](#footnote-35) By the court verdict the media outlet was obliged to refute all the expressions, where the plaintiff was accused of corruption.

On February 11, the defendant's appeal was rejected due to inaccuracies. On March 28, the LLC filed an appeal against this decision as well in the Court of Cassation.

**On February 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected NA MP Hayk Sargsyan’s lawsuit against *Andradardz Press Club NGO*. We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by an article, entitled: “Another Precious Gift: A Cell-Phone Number that Costs 20 Million AMD for Hayk Sargsyan”[[36]](#footnote-36)and published on *Newspress.am* website owned by *Andradardz Press Club NGO*. The lawsuit was filed on June 21, 2019, demanding compensation of the damage caused to honor and good reputation through slander and insult.
 The court concluded from the examination of the case that the plaintiff did not present sufficient evidence that the defendant's statements were offensive and/or defamatory. In addition, through the mediation of the plaintiff's representative, an attempt was made to investigate the mentioned publication on *Newspress.am*, but it was not possible to find it. The court also decided to confiscate 100,000 AMD from the plaintiff Hayk Sargsyan in favor of the defendant as an attorney's reasonable fee.

On March 18, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the verdict in the Court of Appeal.

**On February 2,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan resumed the trial on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v.* *Hraparak Daily Ltd.*, demanding compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by an article published on May, 2019, entitled: “Hayk Sargsyan “Made a Row” on the Yerevan-Moscow Plane”.[[37]](#footnote-37) At the hearing of February 28, 2020, the court decided to leave the case 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 in the 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 Civil Court of Appeal. The latter abolished the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction, and the case proceedings resumed.

At the March 16 hearing, the plaintiff's representative asked for the judge's recusal on the grounds of biased attitude. The case was adjourned to discuss it.

 **On February 7,** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the defendant’s appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund* CJSC v.*168 Zham* *LLC*.

 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May13, 2021, demanding refutation of the information discrediting business reputation and a monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on *168.am* website on April 12, entitled: “Waiting for Investments”, which particularly states that the promised investments are not made by the fund, instead the Government provided large grants to the fund without organizing a tender.[[38]](#footnote-38)

 On December 2 the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. The court decided to confiscate 50 000 AMD from the plaintiff in favor of *168 Zham* *LLC* as an attorney’s reasonable fee. On December 29, the defendant appealed the decision in respect to court costs.

The Court of Appeal held a hearing on the case on March 17, the next one is scheduled for April 21.

**On February 7**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Deputy NA Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) v. Anna Gevorgyan, the director of the* *Haykakan Zham* *news website*, demanding public refutation of defamatory information and a compensation of damage.

The lawsuit, filed on May 19, 2020, was caused by an article, entitled: “Did He Pay for Silence?”, published on *Hzham.am* on April 20, which stated that Alen Simonyan had made a row in the restaurant, cursed, broke the table and the dishes, then paid the restaurant owner to keep silent.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 4.

 **On February 8**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a retrial on the case of *citizen Arthur Vardanyan v.* *168 Zham Ltd*. *and citizen David Pirumyan* with claims of obligating the defendant to apologize, refute the defamatory information and confiscating a compensation.
 We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 10, 2020, was caused by an article, entitled: “Nikol Pashinyan Talked to Arthur Vardanyan during His Campaign” and published on March 6 in *168.am* website.[[40]](#footnote-40) The website quoted Pirumyan: “The Prime-Minister warmly greeted the terrorist Arthur Vardanyan who was incomprehensibly released by the court during the former’s rule”. On June 15, 2021, the court decided to reject the claim on the grounds of statute of limitations, for which the defendant had filed a motion. On July 26, the plaintiff filed an appeal to the Civil Court of Appeal, where the appeal was upheld, the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction was overturned, the case was sent to the same court for a retrial.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 12.

**On February 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) v. Ani Hovhannisyan, the founder of Media Idea LLC and Analitik.am website owned by the company*, demanding compensation for the damage caused.
 The lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, was caused by 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.[[41]](#footnote-41) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2020-2021 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*).
 A court hearing on the case was held on March 28, 2022, the next one is scheduled for June 20.

 **On February 10,** unknown persons hacked two Facebook pages of *1in.am* news website. The editorial staff was deprived of the control over them.[[42]](#footnote-42) Given the large number of followers of the media outlet's Facebook pages (*1in.am* - 650 thousand, recreational page *Entertrain* - 1.7 million followers), the editorial staff thinks that this is a serious threat to Armenia, being in an information war.

**On February 11,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the defendant’s appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *the former Governor of Ararat Marz Garik Sargsyan v. 168 Zham Ltd.,* which partially upheld the lawsuit on August 2, 2021: to oblige *168 Zham LLC* to publish a refutation on *168.am website*, to confiscate from the defendant 700,000 AMD as a compensation in favor of the plaintiff, and 18,000 AMD as a state fee.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on Decmeber 20, 2019, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, and public refutation of defamatory information, and was caused by the article, entitled: “Again an Incident with the Participation of Governor of Ararat” published on *168.am website*, which stated that Garik Sargsyan was again part of another fight and that the barber Serob was beaten for not cutting the Governor's hair asking him to wait for his turn. Hence, the barber was not allowed to continue his business in Nor Kyank community.[[43]](#footnote-43)

On March 10, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation, which received the appeal on March 28.

 **On February 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *St. Gregory the Illuminator Medical Center v. Hraparak Daily LLC*, demanding refutation and a compensation for defamatory information discrediting business reputation.

The lawsuit, filed on January 11, 2021, was caused by an article, entitled: “One of the Deputy Directors of St. Gregory the Illuminator MC Lost 1 Billion AMD in Toto”, published in the December 9, 2020 issue of *Hraparak Daily*. The article stated: “One of the deputy directors made bets at the Toto bookmaker's office, using the hospital's cash register and lost great amount of money, over 1 billion AMD. As a result, the hospital staff is deprived of a salary…”. On the day of the publication of the article, the medical center refuted the information of the media on its Facebook page, considering it an absolute lie, which is discrediting the reputation of the medical center.[[44]](#footnote-44) *Hraparak* was offered to publish a refutation, which was not done.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 20.

 **On February 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continues the trial on the case of *businessman Vahe Keushgueryan v. Dareskizb Ltd*., during which a decision was made on the distribution of the burden of proof.

The lawsuit was filed on October 12, 2020, demanding to refute the information considered insulting and defamatory. 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 alienate the Chrran waterfall near the border village of Khachik, which is the most picturesque place in the village, selling it to the Armenian American Vahe Keushgueryan. [[45]](#footnote-45) 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on March 25, the next one is scheduled for May 16.

 **On February 12,** Boris Murazi, the editor of the *Politik.am* news website, posted on Facebook that a group of people had broken into the editorial office, introduced themselves as the parents of killed soldiers, and stated that they should take revenge on Murazi.[[46]](#footnote-46) The reason is the latter's earlier Facebook post that President of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan sold his lands before the war. One of the intruders, not finding Murazi in the editorial office, called him and threatened to kill him.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The RA Prosecutor General's Office informed the CPFE that Boris Murazi's post had not appeared in the sight of the RA Prosecutor General's Office, besides, no application or report about it had been received.

**On February 14,** theplaintiff on the case of *Lydian Armenia company v. journalist Tehmine Yenokyan* filed an appeal in the Court of Appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes (Vayk residence)*.* And on March 3, the same was done by the defendant.

The lawsuit was filed in the Court of First Instance on September 5, 2018, and was caused by Tehmine Yenokyan’s live-stream on her Facebook page from the mineral water drinking hall of Jermuk City on August 12. According to the plaintiff, the journalist during her public speech made expressions discrediting the business reputation of the company, for which they demand 1 million AMD of compensation, as well as refutation of data considered defamatory via a Facebook public live-stream from the same venue. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2020 and quarterly reports for 2021 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*).

On December 15, 2021, the lawsuit was partially upheld by a court decision. Tehmine Yenokyan was obliged to refute the data considered defamatory, particularly the following statement: “Lydian has made provocations many times, spread false information, tried to provoke hostility, as well as inter-community and interstate disputes among Gndevaz, Jermuk, Kechut, Gorayk, Saravan and several other communities...”. In addition, the court decided to confiscate 12,000 AMD from Tehmine Yenokyan in favor of Lydian Armenia CJSC as a pre-paid state fee, and 100,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.

On March 17, both the plaintiff’s and the defendant’s appeals were returned for corrections, and on the 28th the plaintiff again applied to the Court of Appeal.

**On February 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the investigation of the criminal case, related to the execution of the judicial act implemented by the lawsuit of *the second President of the Republic of Armenia Robert Kocharyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.․*

We should remind that on July 6, 2020, the Court of General Jurisdiction of 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 partially upheld the lawsuit, filed by Robert Kocharyan against *Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.,* demanding a public refutation of the defamatory information, as well as compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the articles about R. Kocharyan, published on *1in.am news website*, which is owned by the company, on June 7, 23 and 24, respectively (For details see the annual and quarterly reports of CPFE, 2019-2021 on *www.khosq.am, Reports* section).

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 4.

**On February 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker (currently NA Speaker) Alen Simonyan v. Gegham Simonyan, the domain owner of Alternativ.am website*, demanding compensation of the damage caused to his honor and 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?”, which was published on *Alternativ.am* *website* on August 20 of the same year. The article particularly stated that Alen Simonyan took $300,000 from Vivaro company and promised to use his ties in the Government to keep the company out of scandals and away from accountability for violations .[[48]](#footnote-48)

By the verdict of March 10, 2021, Alen Simonyan's lawsuit was rejected. According to the court, the plaintiff did not substantiate the fact that the defendant Gegham Simonyan is the author of the disputed article, published on *Alternativ.am website,* the alleged slanderer and the proper defendant. On April 9, the plaintiff appealed the verdict, and on July 14, the Civil Court of Appeal upheld the appeal. The case was sent to the same court for a retrial.

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 15.

**On February 16,** 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.* *Skizb Media Kentron* Ltd., *founder of* *1in.am* *news website*, demanding public refutation of defamatory information and compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity.
 The lawsuit was filed on August 31, 2020, and was caused by the article published in *1in.am* on July 31, where it is said about the plaintiff that he has served in the RA NSS for more than 20 years, and according to the rumors circulating: “For years, he was paid in an envelope by the chief accountant of the South Caucasus Railways Company for “turning a blind eye” to the robbery on the railways, organized goods smuggling, and engaged in sponsorship”.[[49]](#footnote-49)

A court hearing was also held on March 2, the next one is scheduled for June 9.

**On February 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the preliminary court hearing on the case of *former Zoo Director Ruben Khachatryan v. journalist Narine Kirakosyan*, demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation of non-pecuniary damage.

The lawsuit was first filed on September 24, 2019, then it was returned upon the request of the plaintiff and refiled on November 13. The lawsuit was caused by the journalist’s Facebook post on August 25, where she stated that Ruben Khachatryan had inflicted great damage to the animals by declaring himself a sole leader. (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2019-2021 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 3.

**On February 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings the case of *lawyer Aram Orbelyan v. the Republic of Armenia*, *in the person of the National Security Service and the Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC,* for a new trial.

The lawsuit, filed on March 3, 2020, demanding a refutation of the defamatory information and a compensation for the damage caused, 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.[[50]](#footnote-50)

On July 26, 2021, the Court decided to reject the lawsuit by regarding the judgements presented on TV as value judgements, to confiscae 100.000 AMD from Aram Orbelyan in favor of *Armenian Public TV* Company CJSC as the attorney’s fee. The court judgement of August 30 was appealed, which was upheld on December 15: the veridct of the Court of First Instance was completely overturned, the case was sent back to the same court for a retrial.

A court hearing is scheduled for April 8.

**On February 21,** 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 Liza Chagharyan's Facebook post on April 13: “This one, named vahan babayan, may claim the first place in global slobber competition.”
 The next court hearing is scheduled for May 16.

**On February 21,** the Court of General Jursdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *already former* *NA MP Vahe Enfiajyan v.* *Social Media LLC*, *the founder of Mamul.am website*, demanding public refutation of the information discrediting his honor and dignity and a compensation for defamation.
 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 16, 2021, 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”. [[51]](#footnote-51)
 On March 9 of this year the lawsuit was partially upheld: the court obligated *Social Media LLC* to refute the defamatory information about Vahe Enfiajyan on the *Mamul.am* website, noting also that Liana Manukyan mentioned in the article was not Vahe Enfiajyan's assistant.

**On February 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *citizen Siranush Abelyan v. the chief executive of Politcom.am news website Lilit Silanyan*, demanding apology for the slander and publication of a refutation.
 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 3, 2021, and was caused by the issue related to the provision of loans in one of the banks, which was posted on the website. After the publication of the article, the bank employee, the plaintiff, expressed her disagreement with news, as a result of which it 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.
 The next court hearing is scheduled for June 13.

**On February 22**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *citizen Gevorg Harutyunyan v. citizen Larisa Harutyunyan and Shark LLC (the legal entity representing 5 TV)*, demanding refutation of the defamatory information, discrediting honor and dignity, public apology and a monetary compensation.
 The lawsuit was filed on November 11, 2021, and was caused by the news report for *Haylur* of *5 TV* on October 16, entitled: “She Makes me Grieve; the Neighbor doesn’t Allow to Insert a Khachkar in Tribute to Heroes”[[52]](#footnote-52), particularly the assertion of the defendant that Gevorg Harutyunyan had lashed out at Larisa Harutyunyan with a knife, besides, had intended to burn the woman with petrol.
 On November 24, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the motion to apply injunction to put a freezing order of 9 million AMD on the property of the defendant Larisa Harutyunyan, was upheld.
 The next court hearing is scheduled for April 26.

**On February 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor Marzes (Masis residence) accepted for proceedings the case of *journalist and anchor Nver Mnatsakanyan v. Hayeli Club and Garnik Isagulyan*, to conduct retrial after the overturn.

The lawsuit, filed on May 15, 2019, with claims of apology and publication of the judgment in the media, was caused by the video, entitled: “Hey, Nver, aren’t You Ashamed? You will Serve Whoever Pays You: Garnik Isagulyan” published on *Hayeli.am* website on April 14, 2019, where the latter made his assessment on Nver Mnatsakanyan's activities.[[53]](#footnote-53)

By the decision of August 16, 2021, the Court rejected Nver Mnatsakanyan’s lawsuit finding that the plaintiff failed to substantiate the fact that the defendant was seeking to insult the plaintiff and to discredit his honor and dignity, and that the disputed statements were not addressed to the plaintiff. However, on December 24, the Civil Court of Appeal decided to overturn the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction and send the case to the same court for a retrial. The Court of Appeal concluded that the publicity of the statements made by the defendant and the fact that they referred to the plaintiff's person were indisputable.

The court hearing is scheduled for April 6.

**On February 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Armdaily News Agency Ltd*., demanding compensation of the damage caused to his honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult

 The lawsuit was filed on November 25, 2020 and was caused by an article, entitled: “URGENT. Criminal Authorities Ara and Alik Banduryans from Noratus Intimidate My Step MPs. Mediaport” and published on *Armdaily.am* website on November 20, in particular, the phrase “the one who held bottles”, used about the MP.[[54]](#footnote-54)

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for June 2.

 **On February 23**, 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*., demanding refutation of defamatory information and a compensation.

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.[[55]](#footnote-55) 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. 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 next court hearing on the case is scheduled for April 6.

**On February 23**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Styopa Safaryan, the former Chairman of the Public Council, v. LiveNews correspondent Taguhi Aslanyan*, demanding public apology and 1 million AMD in compensation.

 The lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2021, was caused by the expressions of the journalist, posted on Facebook on June 20, stating: “You are not just rejected, but pissed…”.[[56]](#footnote-56) The journalist, making reference to an unidentified source, has written that the neighbors have pissed on Styopa Safaryan for serving the Prime Minister.

The next court hearing is scheduled for April 19.

**On February 24**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the appeal of the already former Chairman of the Public Council Styopa Safaryan against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, which had rejected Styopa Safaryan’s lawsuit against the *168 Zham Ltd.* and its founder Satik Seyranyan, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information, removal of the article, and a compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity, and business reputation.

The lawsuit was filed on January 14, 2021, and was caused by the news piece entitled: “Vladimir Solovyov's reaction to Styopa Safaryan's post” and published on *168.am*, owned by the company, on October 13, which attributed expressions insulting Styopa Safaryan to Solovyov.[[57]](#footnote-57) On July 23, the court rejected the lawsuit and also ordered to pay 100,000 AMD in favor of the defendant as an attorney's reasonable fee. The decision was based on the fact that the statute of limitations had expired. (For details see CPFE’s annual report for 2021 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The Court of Appeal found that the appellant had not presented any grounds about influence on the outcome of the case due to the violations attributed to the court, and the decision of the first instance was left unchanged.

#

 **On February 25,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan decided to terminate the proceedings of the case of Rector of Yerevan State Medical University Armen Muradyan v. Minister of Health Arsen Torosyan (with *Public TV Company of Armenia* involved as the third party) on the grounds that the plaintiff withdrew the lawsuit. Besides, the court decided to confiscate 110,000 AMD from Armen Muradyan in favor of Arsen Torosyan as an attorney's reasonable fee.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 2, 2019, and was caused by statements made by Arsen Torosyan on *Public TV*, according to which some of Armen Muradyan's statements were rendered as false.[[58]](#footnote-58) Arsen Torosyan also said that Armen Muradyan had organized a campaign against him. The plaintiff claims refutation of defamatory statements on Facebook and Public TV air and a compensation in the amount of 2 million AMD for the damage caused.

 **On February 28**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan decided to terminate the case of *Arevik Anapiosyan, former Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, v. Media Plus LLC*, on the grounds of concluding a reconciliation agreement between the parties.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 20, 2020, demanding public refutation of defamatory information and claiming 2 million AMD in compensation from the plaintiff. The lawsuit was caused by articles published on the *Yerevan.Today* website owned by the company on March 26 (“Arevik Anapiosyan Speaks about Her Involvement in the Case under Investigation by the NSS and Her Resignation”)[[59]](#footnote-59) and on April 8 (“NSS Confirms It is Investigating a Criminal Case against MoESCS Officials”).[[60]](#footnote-60) The articles stated that the NSS was preparing materials on a criminal case related to Arevik Anapiosyan, and that her resignation had to do with this case.

 As a result of the verdict the parties also renounced all material claims against each other.

**On February 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Arusyak Mkrtchyan v. Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office*, demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation of damage.

The lawsuit was filed on August 12, 2019, and was caused by an article published on *Armlur.am* website on July 12, entitled: “A DJ in Healthcare Sector: Circa $ 20,000 to the Minister's Acquaintance”.[[61]](#footnote-61) The author has noted that the RA Ministry of Health has allocated over 9.5 million AMD from the state budget to *In Progress Production Company*, founded by Arusyak Mkrtchyan, i.e. DJ Vaccina, to film social ads.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 18.

**On February 28,** *the Union of Journalists of Armenia NGO*, its President Satik Seyranyan and *168 Zham LLC* filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the *CIVIC.AM* news website and Chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression NGO Ashot Melikyan to oblige them to refute defamatory information, to publish the refutation text, as well as to demand compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and/or business reputation.

 The lawsuit was caused by the interview with Ashot Melikyan published on *Civic.am* news website on January 31, where the latter, referring to the January 29 congress of *the Union of Journalists of Armenia*, particularly said: “It was not a congress of the Union of Journalists, but more an alliance of Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan's propagandists, who had gathered to decide what to do next and to elect the head of that organization serving their camp ... .”

The lawsuit was returned on March 16 for corrections and was refiled on March 28.

**On March 1**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) v. Tert.am journalist Ani Gevorgyan,* demanding public refutation of information considered defamatory.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 13, 2021, and 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.[[62]](#footnote-62) By the way, during the hearing on October 5 upon the decision of the court, *News.am LLC* was involved as a third party siding with the defendant. Hence, a decision was made to complete the lawsuit, i.e. to urge Ani Gevorgyan to refute the slander in public on *News.am*, and if impossible, on the Facebook page of the defendant. Besides, a sum of 2 000 000 AMD was to be confiscated from Ani Gevorgyan in favor of the plaintiff as compensation for slander.

A trial was held on March 21, and the next hearing is scheduled for April 15.

 **On March 9,** NA MP Khachatur Sukiasyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the editor-in-chief of *Newsmedia.am* website Gayane Zargaryan, demanding refutation of the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on January 31 on the above-mentioned website, entitled: “In the Footsteps of Famous Criminal Kingpin Kanakertsi Tuy's Murder: Did “His Majesty” Gagik Jhangiryan and Khachatur Sukiasyan, Also Known as Grzo, “Give Their Blessing” to the Sacred Task of Granting Hakob Simonyan Freedom?”.[[63]](#footnote-63)
 After filing the lawsuit, on March 15, the website published a refutation, apologizing to Khachatur Sukiasyan for the concern and the damage caused. [[64]](#footnote-64) The website's editorial office also noted that it had disseminated unfounded and untrue information on the above-mentioned articles without identifying their authenticity.

On March 21, the court decided to return the lawsuit, as the plaintiff applied to the court on March 18 with that request.

 **On March 9,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Kazakhstan Hayk Terteryan v. Hraparak Daily LLC,* demanding refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the expression discrediting his business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 2, 2021, and 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.[[65]](#footnote-65) 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, it did not satisfy the plaintiff.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 2.

**On March 10**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Karen Melik-Tangyan, the already former Director of the Mother Armenia Museum of Military History at the RA Ministry of Defense v. Social Media LLC*, demanding compensation of the damage caused to his honor and dignity.
 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 10, 2021, and was caused by the article, entitled: “Military or Gangster? The Head of the Museum is Out of Order” and published on the page “Spokesperson” in *Mamul.am* website owned by *Social Media LLC* on November 11. The article was later removed from the page.

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

 **On March 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the former Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and current Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan v. Anna Gevorgyan Private Entrepreneur* (founder of *Hzham.am* news website).

The lawsuit was filed on June 22, 2020, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article published on *Hzham.am* website on May 15, entitled: “My Step Party Members are Interested in the Real Estate Market”, which states in particular that the province governors, led by Minister Suren Papikyan, are buying houses in the capital “without paying” as they provide services, demanding an apartment as a donation.[[67]](#footnote-67) On December 17, the motion to apply injunction of a freezing order on the property was upheld.

On March 31, 2022, the court ruled to reject Suren Papikyan's lawsuit and maintain the injunction of a freezing order on the private entrepreneur in the amount of 1,200,000 AMD, until the decision enters into force.

**The court ruled that the name of the author of the article, Armen Sargsyan, was posted at the end of the disputed article, that is, a proper reference was made to the source of the information - the author, and this is a sufficient ground to release the defendant on the case from liability, in accordance with Article 1087.1 Part 6 of the RA Civil Code.**

**On March 11**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal against the verdict of the Court of First Instance on the case of citizen *Emma Kirakosyan v. A-TV Television LLC* *and other citizens*, and the verdict was left unchanged.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on March 22, 2019, with the demand to pay compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, was caused by the February 22, 2019 issue of *the Semi-open windows program* of the above-mentioned TV company about 20 years of litigation, the reason for which, according to the voiced opinion, is Emma Kirakosyan.[[68]](#footnote-68) On July 10, 2020 the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the statements made during the broadcast were value judgments that had been expressed in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention on the Right to Freedom of Expression. As for Emma Kirakosyan's demand to oblige the TV company to refute the defamatory data, the court found that the statements were made by the respondent citizens, and in case of upholding the lawsuit, they should have refuted it themselves. On August 17, 2020 the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal, and the appeal was upheld by the decision of December 18․ The decision of the court of First Instance was overturned and sent to the same court for a retrial.

On October 22, 2021, the lawsuit was rejected. The Court of General Jurisdiction again found that the TV company had acted in good faith. On November 25, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal.

**On March 14,** the Court of Cassation accepted for proceedings the plaintiff’s appeal against the decision of the Court of Appeal on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Iravunk Media LLC* *and Journalist Ilona Azaryan*.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on June 13, 2019, demanding 1 million AMD in compensation for insult and defamation, 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- **CPFE**) reached the NSS with Hayk Sargsyan’s help.”

On March 2, 2021, the court partially upheld the lawsuit. 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, the defendant and on April 30, the plaintiff appealed to the Civil Court of Appeal. At the September 28 hearing, this court decided to overturn the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction regarding the claim against *Iravunk Media LLC* and to reject the lawsuit, to overturn the case regarding Ilona Azaryan, and to send it to the same court for a retrial. Besides, it was decided to confiscate 150,000 AMD from Hayk Sargsyan in favor of *Iravunk Media LLC* as an attorney's fee. On November 23, the plaintiff appealed the decision in the Court of Cassation.

 **On March 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Armenuhi Hovsepyan, founder of Newspress.am website*, demanding a compensation of the damage caused to the honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

The lawsuit, filed on April 13, 2020, was caused by posts and live broadcasts on the defendant's Facebook page, dated March 20, where, according to Hayk Sargsyan, a number of expressions were made in the plaintiff’s address in an ironic and insulting tone, criminal slang and street jargon. In particular, “Tell little Hayk, who used to hold the water bottle for Nikol, that I have collected good bottles for him to hold”, etc.

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for May 31.

**On March 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the preliminary court hearing on the case of *NA MP Sophia Hovsepyan v. Anna Gevorgyan, editor of Haykakan Zham analytical agency*, demanding refutation of slander and a compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on July 29, 2020, and was caused by an array of publications on *Hzham.am*. Thus, on March 13, it was mentioned in the article, entitled: “Concerned that Money Could be Allocated” that “The candidate, who Sophia Hovsepyan supports, will distribute “presents” in the form of money in Geghanist, prior to the local self-government bodies’ elections, to be held on Sunday.”[[69]](#footnote-69) On June 1, it was mentioned in the article, entitled: “Velvet Corruption” that “Sophia Hovsepyan, NA current MP, who used to hold the office of Shirak’s Deputy Governor, would extort presents from the heads of provincial infrastructures.”[[70]](#footnote-70) It was stated in the article “The MPs of Civil Contract about Their Own Accomplishments”, published on July 10, that the MP has bought two apartments thanks to the bonuses.[[71]](#footnote-71)

A trial is scheduled for June 22 of this year.

**On March 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Suren Papikyan (currently Minister of Defense) v. Media Plus LLC*, demanding public refutation of the data considered defamatory presented in the article, published on June 11 on its website *Yerevan.today*, entitled: “Armenia's New Millionaires. Papikyan Became a Dollar Millionaire on the Incomes from Asphalt in 3 Years”.[[72]](#footnote-72) The lawsuit was filed on June 17, 2021.

A trial is scheduled for April 29.

**On March 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Yeghitsi Luys-BK Ltd. v. Public TV Company of Armenia and Head of Charentsavan Community Hakob Shahgaldyan*, demanding refutation of the information considered as defamatory.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on January 10, 2020, was caused by the broadcast of a report on issues related to the use of community owned territories during the news program on the *First Channel of Public TV* *– News in 60 Minutes* on November 30, 2019.[[73]](#footnote-73) The plaintiff considered Hakob Shahgaldyan’s comment on the quality of his work as defamatory. *Yeghitsi Luys-BK Ltd*. demanded from *Public TV* to publicly refute the defamatory information on air, and claimed from the head of Charentsavan Community Hakob Shahgaldyan the payment of monetary compensation of 2 million AMD.

The next court hearing on the case is scheduled for June 8.

**On March 16,** NA Deputy Speaker Hakob Arshakyan filed a lawsuit against *Lurer.com* and *ArmDay.am* news websites, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information contained in the mentioned websites and a compensation in the amount of 500,000 AMD from each.The lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: “Post-Revolutionary “Accomplishments” of Former Employers of Civil Contract Officials. Part I”, published on February 14 first on the former[[74]](#footnote-74), then on the latter[[75]](#footnote-75) websites with a difference of a few minutes. The article particularly states: “Hakob Arshakyan has made Government adopt a decision, by which the state shall take a loan in the amount of $10 million from the World Bank to build an Engineering City in Jrvezh in cooperation with Hakob's former employer (National Instruments), Hakob's own firm (Araxis Engineering) and several other companies.”

As of March 31, the lawsuit has not been accepted for proceedings.

 **On March 17,** Senik Julhakyan, director of Armhydroenergy Project CJSC, filed two lawsuits in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hmayak Hovhannisyan, Chairman of *the Political Scientists Union of Armenia* and *BAC TV online* TV Company, demanding a public apology for insult, as well as refutation of information and confiscation of a compensation for defamation.The lawsuit was caused by the political scientsit’s thoughts expressed on the air of the TV Company on December 21, 2021[[76]](#footnote-76) and January 15, 2022,[[77]](#footnote-77) according to which the plaintiff obtained construction permit through corruption transactions and that through him the former RA President Serzh Sargsyan wants to take over the building of the Armhydroenergy Project Institute, where the office of *Political Scientists Union of Armenia* is located.

The first lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on March 25. The second one has not been accepted for proceedings as of March 31.

 **On March 17**, *Europe in Law* Association NGO, its President Lousine Hakobyan, and superior legal councilor Tigran Yegoryan, again filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against *Hraparak Daily* LLC, demanding a compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed for the first time on October 7, 2021 and returned due to inaccuracies in the documents. The lawsuit was caused by the article, published on August 27 on *Hraparak Daily* website, entitled: “An Open Network of Agencies under the Disguise of the Community of Human Right Defenders”.[[78]](#footnote-78) The author of the article mentioned particularly that in addition to other advocating NGOs and human right defenders, the plaintiffs are also involved in the network of foreign agencies, whose hidden and at times evident motive is to change the Government in Armenia, and not to fight for human rights

As of March 31, the lawsuit has not been accepted for proceedings.

**On March 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the *GN Tobacco Sweden AB* company *v Golos LLC, founder of Golosarmenii.am* *website*, demanding refutation and a compensation of the damage (3 million AMD) caused to its business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filedon June 22, 2020, and 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.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 30.

 **On March 23**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Anriva Tour LLC v. Ani Alexanyan* (with *Public TV Company of Armenia* CJSC and *Educational Planet* LLC as third party), demanding compensation for the damage caused to business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 1, 2019, was caused by the statements made on the *One Window* program about *Anriva-Tour* on the Public TV Channel on July 1, which the plaintiff considers to be defamatory.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The next court hearing is scheduled for July13.

 **On March 24,** the Court of General Jurisdiction held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Demi Pharm LLC v. Hetq LLC*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and confiscation of a compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on June 10, 2021, and was caused by the article published on *Hetq.am* website on May 6, entitled: “National Institute of Health Registers Children's Vitamins with Violations.[[80]](#footnote-80) The article mentions that *Demi Pharm* assured the website that children's vitamins had to have a state registration, and it was trying to buy some time to make up for the inexistent registration document, which was granted by the National Institute of Health in a suspiciously short period and with various violations.

The next court hearing is scheduled for July 14.

**On March 25**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Mher Terteryan, the leader of the United Homeland Party and an advisor to former Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan, v. lawyer Hakob Charoyan (with Live News Media involved as the third party),* demanding refutation of information considered defamatory and compensation of damages caused to honor, dignity and business reputation.

 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 22, 2021, and 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 and his lawyer Hakob Charoyan spoke during the program.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 30.

 **On March 27,** on the day of the Vedi Community elections of the Council of Elders, one of the supporters of the ruling Civil Contract party obstructed the work of journalists, telling them rudely, “Gather up, and clear out of here!”.[[82]](#footnote-82) In particular, he got into an argument with Mariam Petrosyan, a correspondent at *168․am* news website, and Suzy Badoyan, a journalist at *Yerevan.Today* website, noting that they have no right to talk about the war and ask questions about it.

In response to the CPFE's inquiry, the RA Prosecutor's Office stated that the facts related to the case had been sent to the Vedi Division of the RA Police in order to find out the existence of features that seriously hindered the journalists' professional activities and inflicted severe insults conditioned by their public activities. As a result of the investigative actions, including video surveillance and contacting the journalists, no obvious features of criminal acts were revealed, and the case was left with no consequences.

**On March 28,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the defendant’s appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *citizen Edgar Janibekyan v. Shamshyan Media LLC and its founder Gagik Shamshyan*, by which the LLC was obligated to refute the defamatory expressions through *Shamshyan.com* website and to pay the plaintiff 100,000 AMD in compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 14, 2020, was caused by an article on *Shamshyan.com*, entitled: “Discovery of Another Large Batch of Drugs by the Arabkir Police in Yerevan. The 26-year-old Suspect Acquired It Through Telegram․ Photographic Report”, published on June 14, where it was stated that Edgar Janibekyan was one of those detained.[[83]](#footnote-83)

**On March 31**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the court hearing on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC and its Executive Director David Papazian v. Hraparak Daily LLC and journalist Suzan Simonyan*, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation, and a monetary compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on August 2, 2021, and 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 Director of the CJSC David Papazian published a Q&A talk, addressing the deal signed with Air Arabia company on July 14.[[84]](#footnote-84) Then the journalist expressed a final thought, “The state invests, the businessman puts the money in his pocket... .”

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 18.

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

*In the first quarter of 2022, the CPFE recorded 45 facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. In only one of these cases a lawsuit was filed with the court, demanding provision of official information. The facts recorded during the period under review, as well as the new developments related to the events from past periods are presented below in chronological order.*

**On January 3,** the RA Administrative Court accepted for proceedings the lawsuit filed by the *Union of Informed Citizens NGO*, the founder of the *Fip.am* website, against the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, demanding provision of the questions sent to the press@gov.am e-mail for Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Facebook press conference, dated November 23, 2021, as well as the complete list of media outlets and organizations that sent them.

A court hearing is scheduled for April 20.

**On January 5,** *Transparency International Anticorruption Center NGO* and *Civilitas Foundation* filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine CJSC, demanding to provide the document requested on November 23, 2021, i.e. a copy of the contract, which is the basis for the acquisition of 60% of the shares of Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine CJSC by *Industrial Company* Joint-Stock Company.

The lawsuit was returned on January 18 because, according to the court, the plaintiffs' claims are not part of the same action; they are two separate unrelated claims to protect the subjective rights of each of the plaintiffs, so they cannot be filed in a single lawsuit.

On February 4, the plaintiffs filed an appeal against this decision, which was upheld on February 28, and the case was sent to the court to discuss the issue of accepting it for proceedings. The court hearing has not been scheduled as of March 31.

 **On January 5,** *Freedom of Information Center of Armenia* sent an information inquiry to the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, asking to provide the full text of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's speech at the Sixth Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on December 15, 2021, as the Prime Minister's main highlights are not clear in the statement published on the official website. The Office of the Prime Minister refused to provide the required information, stating as a reason that the summit session was held behind closed doors. According to the FOICA, the rejection is unfounded, as there is no reference to the grounds for rejection prescribed by law.

**On January 12,** *the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia* sent inquiries to a number of public administration and local self-government bodies, requesting data on the implementation and publication of statistics on the inquiries. For various reasons, 8 responses were evaluated as incomplete: they were the responses by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Defense, as well as the Cadastre Committee, Armenian Nuclear Regulatory Authority and the RA Police.

**On January 26,** *the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia* sent inquiries to a number of public administration and local self-government bodies, requesting to provide the inquiry conduction procedure for receiving information (a copy), as well as to inform by what procedure the inquiries for receiving information through social networks are registered. For various reasons, 6 responses from the following institutions were evaluated as incomplete: Ministry of Defense; Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body; Statistical Committee; Urban Development, Technical Standards and Fire Safety Inspectorate; RA Police, and National Security Service. The inquiries were left unanswered by 3 institutions: Gyumri and Vanadzor Municipalities, as well as Health and Labor Inspection Body.

**On January 12,** the *Irakanum.am* news website sent a written inquiry to the RA Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan, requesting information on how many victims there were in the Armenian army after the signing of the trilateral document on November 9, 2020.[[85]](#footnote-85) By the inquiry, the website asked to indicate how many were killed by the enemy, how many by interpersonal and other reasons. Besides, the editorial office inquired how much territory had been ceded to the enemy by the Armenian side during the same period. The Ministry of Defense, however, refused to answer the questions, reasoning that they contain a state secret.

 **On January 17,** *168․am* news website wrote that, to date, they had not received the answers to the questions addressed to the RA Ministry of Defense on December 17, 2021. The questions of the website, in particular, referred to the demand and quality of air-launched missiles and the activity of Kalashnikov Plant.[[86]](#footnote-86) The website writes that all the terms prescribed by law have expired, but the agency has not responded in any way.

 **On February 2**, the plaintiff on the case of *Levon Barseghyan, the President of the Asparez Journalists’ Club, v. the National Security Service*, applied to the Court of Cassation, appealing the decision of the Court of Appeal, according to which the appeal against the verdict of the Court of General Jurisdiction had been rejected on the grounds that the information gained through operative actions was not subject to publication.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 26, 2020, demanding to obligate the NSS to provide the requested information. Previously, the plaintiff had asked the NSS to provide all the information they had about him. The answer to the inquiry did not satisfy Levon Barseghyan, so he applied to the court with the aim to create a precedent so that the citizens are provided with information about themselves by those who hold it.

 On March 16, the cassation appeal was rejected.

##

 **On February 7,** the correspondent of *Infocom.am* news website Milena Khachikyan wrote that still on December 20, 2021, she submitted a written inquiry to the RA Prosecutor General's Office, asking whether the information about the capture of two Azeris in Jermuk was true, and, if so, whether a criminal case was initiated on the occasion of the incident, what was the status of the mentioned persons, etc..[[87]](#footnote-87)

The Prosecutor's Office informed the journalist that the inquiry was redirected to the Chief of the Military Police of the RA Ministry of Defense. On December 29, the latter informed the Prosecutor's Office that the inquiry was beyond the authority of the Military Police of the Ministry of Defense. On January 5, 2022, the Prosecutor General's Office again sent a reply letter to the Ministry of Defense, asking to inform the journalist about the results of the discussion on the case within the timeframe prescribed by law. Even after this letter, no answer was received from the Ministry of Defense.

**On February 7,** the *Civic.am* news website sent an inquiry to the ARF Party Office about the organization of the event dedicated to the 131st anniversary of the ARF, the venue, and the circle of invited guests. Eight days later, as a result of another call made to the party's office, they answered that “the ARF Supreme Body does not find it expedient to answer the questions.” The website notes that ARF members discriminate against journalists in providing information.[[88]](#footnote-88)

**On February 9,** the *Hetq.am* news website wrote that it had sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs to find out who was involved in the expert group on negotiations with Turkey. The agency replied that the personal data of the experts could not be provided without their consent. Accordingly, the website requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after receiving the consent of the experts of the field, to provide their names, in response to which the agency noted that the request could not be fulfilled, as it is beyond the authority of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Therefore, a logical question arises: if it is beyond the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then why does it mention in the answer to the previous inquiry that “personal data cannot be provided without the latter's consent?””, wrote the website.[[89]](#footnote-89)

 **On February 10,** the RA Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on the case of *Transparency International Anticorruption Center NGO, Law Development and Protection Foundation, and Civilitas Foundation (founder of the Civilnet.am news website) v. the RA Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body*, demanding provision of the information requested on July 12 and the relevant documents. The requested information refers to the results of inspections carried out in the mining sector during a specific period, in order to understand the possible corruption risks.

The lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2021, and was accepted for proceedings on the 30th.

The next court hearing is scheduled for June 16.

 **On February 11,** journalist Hasmik Hambardzumyan wrote on Facebook that in response to the question about what is expected after the closure of *ArmNews TV*, whether a new competition is possible or not, the Commission on Television and Radio offered to apply in writing, and after sending the written questions, they said to follow the Commission's page, where the response would be published. Thus, the addressee of the inquiry deprives the journalist of the right to have exclusive material.[[90]](#footnote-90)

**On February 15**, the Administrative Court held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Freedom of Information Center of Armenia v. Yerevan Municipality*, demanding to oblige the Municipality to provide the requested information on 60/1 Silikyan Old Highway in Yerevan.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on November 1, 2021, and previously, on August 12, *the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia* sent an inquiry to Yerevan Municipality, requesting information on a stone factory, located on a community-owned land adjacent to the Silikyan Highway residential area and operating illegally for more than 10 years, and to clarify why that factory was not destroyed or dismantled. The Municipality, in fact, did not respond to the questions and skipped them, providing abstract comments.

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 19.

 **On February 17,** Seda Arakelyan, a journalist at the *Hetq Media Factory*, sent an inquiry to Yerevan, Echmiadzin, and Artashat water users associations, requesting information on the condition of the pumping stations, equipping, and to which areas the given stations supply. Yerevan WUA refused to answer the inquiry, reasoning that the provision of information is not in the public interest, the second inquiry was refused orally, and the third one received an incomplete answer.

 **On February 25,** the *Fastinfo* news website sent a written inquiry to the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting to provide information on the steps taken to evacuate the Armenians in Ukraine due to the Russian military operations. Did any of the Armenians there apply to the embassy or the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a request to evacuate, how many people were evacuated, etc.?[[91]](#footnote-91) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs only replied in an official letter that they were in constant contact with Armenians and did not provide factual data on the results of “the constant contact”, for example, how many people moved to neighboring countries - Poland, Russia, Moldova, Belarus or how many came to Armenia.

On February 25, Milena Khachikyan, a correspondent at the *Infocom.am* news website, sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Defense for information on the number of people being released from compulsory military service on legal grounds. At the end of the 5-day period prescribed by the law, on March 4, the Ministry of Defense informed that there was a need for additional study for the answer, so the requested information would be provided within 30 days. However, even after the expiration of that period, the answer to the inquiry was not received, and the calls addressed to the MoD Information and Public Affairs Department, as well as to the head of the department Gevorg Altunyan, remained unanswered for days. Only on March 29 was it possible to contact them, after which, on March 30, the answer to the inquiry was received with contents containing a rejection to provide information.

 Correspondent at the same website Nane Avetisyan did not receive an answer to the inquiry sent to the RA Ministry of Defense still on December 20, 2021. The journalist asked whether the Armenian troops withdrew from the Goris-Kapan highway in December 2020 based on a written agreement. The Ministry asked for 30 days to respond to the inquiry, but did not respond even after the expiration of the period.

**From February 28 to March 24,** *the Public TV Company* received the rejection from the RA Ministry of Economy on 6 urgent inquiries. Meanwhile, their topics were of public importance, about which it was necessary to receive official information. The inquiries concerned, in particular, the statistics of businesses moving from Russia and Ukraine to Armenia, state privileges granted to lawful economic entities, funds provided for the construction of a ski complex in Aragatsotn Marz and the terms of those works, state subsidies for ferry transportation of cargo, the project of the Ministry of Economy on the restrictions of exporting copper and molybdenum concentrate, and the organization of rural insurance. In any case, the press secretary of the Minister did not process the questions and sometimes even commented that the questions were “not serious”, “not urgent” and left them unanswered. Nevertheless, *the* *Public TV Company* covered those topics, but without official information and comments.

**On March 1,** *Hetq.am* news website wrote that the RA Police considers the information about a person declared wanted as a personal secret. Thus, *Hetq* sent an inquiry in an attempt to find out whether Hrayr Gyonjyan and Karen Arzumanyan, who were wanted in connection with the theft of EU grant programs, have been declared internationally wanted. They also requested to inform if the investigation for Gyonjyan and Arzumanyan was international, then why their names were not on the website of the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol). In response, the RA Police stated that the requested information contained personal data, which could not be provided without the written consent of those persons. “According to the Criminal Procedure Code, the investigation for the accused is the discovery of their whereabouts, the arrest and the handing over of the accused to the body conducting the proceedings. The police website, as well as the International Criminal Police Interpol website, contain information on many wanted persons. It is illogical to think that when they publish information on the latter, they get those persons' written consent,” stated the website.[[92]](#footnote-92)

 **On March 2,** *Zhoghovurd Daily*, based on the NSS statement, which said that “Since October 2018, the RA NSS has had a separate subdivision, the main function of which is to fight against corruption that hinders foreign investment,” sent an inquiry to find out what kind of detections were made by the law enforcement agency during approximately 4 years. In response to the inquiry, the agency noted that their detection and prevention were carried out exclusively within the framework of operative-investigative measures, the results of which are classified.[[93]](#footnote-93)

 The media outlet considers avoiding the answer under the guise of state secret to be unfounded.

**On March 4,** *Zhoghovurd Daily* wrote that it had sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Economy to find out how much investment had been made in Armenia since 2018 and whether they had provided positive signals to the economy, as promised. The Ministry answered that they had no data, and they also made use of the information of the RA Statistical Committee. As for the data presented by the Committee, according to the newspaper, immense efforts should be made to find the necessary analysis.[[94]](#footnote-94)

**On March 10,** *PressTime.am* news website wrote that it had sent an inquiry to the National Assembly to find out how much bonus had been distributed in the National Assembly after January 14, 2019, by the orders of Ararat Mirzoyan, Alen Simonyan and Hakob Arshakyan.[[95]](#footnote-95) The National Assembly responded to the inquiry, but did not give the proper answer to the question. “The parliament has sent us the references of all the orders on bonus payment during these years, but with them it is impossible to understand the sum of bonuses,” wrote the website.

**On March 14,** *Aravot.am* journalist Nelli Grigoryan applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for information on Azerbaijan's 5 proposals for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. There was no response to the inquiry.

**On March 18,** *PressTime.am* sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense asking to report the number of casualties of the RA Armed Forces since September 27, 2020, separately mentioning the number of servicemen killed in combat and non-combat conditions.[[96]](#footnote-96) In response, the agency made a reference to the data of the Department of Investigation of Particularly Important Cases of the General Military Investigative Department of the RA Investigative Committee, dated January 19, 2022, which were published on the *Investigative.am* website. *PressTime.am* notes that the mentioned publication contains information exclusively about the victims of the 44-day war, the servicemen with unknown whereabouts, as well as civilians, and there is no mention of the deaths that were registered after the war.

 **On March 22,** *the* *Freedom of Information Center of Armenia* sent an inquiry to Yerevan Municipality requesting information on how many illegal structures and/or buildings there are on the publicly owned lands of the capital. In response, Yerevan Municipality stated that such a census had not been carried out, and suggested that the request be redirected to the responsible state agencies of the field, operating under the Government. *The FOICA*, making reference to the response of the Municipality, sent the same inquiry to the Cadastre Committee and Urban Development, Technical Standards and Fire Safety Inspection Body, which stated in the reply note that “under Article 3 Paragraph 1 Sub-Clause 4 of the RA Land Code, the control over land use is reserved for the Head of the Community ...”. This confirms that the Municipality did not fulfill the given duty and avoided informing about it in its response.

**On March 24,** *Hetq.am* news website wrote that two months ago the Ministry of Defense announced that the aviation of the RA Armed Forces was replenished with new modern and multifunctional helicopters.[[97]](#footnote-97) The media outlet made a written inquiry to the agency about company that supplied the helicopters. In particular, the editorial office asked to deny or confirm the information that the helicopters were purchased from Moston Engineering Company owned by David Galstyan. The Ministry of Defense refused to provide any information about the company supplying the purchased new helicopters, reasoning that according to the provisions of the contract, the information contained in the document could not be provided to a third party. Meanwhile, *Hetq.am* did not request the Ministry of Defense for information on the content of the contract and its details, but asked to deny or confirm that it was purchased from the company owned by the above-mentioned person. In the same inquiry, the media outlet asked why the Ministry of Defense did not make a direct purchase from a Russian manufacturing company, but instead made use of intermediary organizations. The Ministry of Defense did not provide an answer to this question.

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

 **On January 14**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Armavir (Echmiadzin residence) held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Mariam Tashchyan, a journalist of Econews.am, v. Armen Tadevosyan, the president of the* *Armavir Zoo and Wildlife Rescue Center NGO*, demanding an apology for the insult and compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on August 23, 2021, was caused by the insulting remarks, made by the defendant on Facebook Live on July 24, after the journalist visited the aforementioned park during the journalistic investigation on July 9. The journalist saw how the brown bear (included in the red list) was kept in a cage and wrote a Facebook post about it on July 15. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on September 1. On October 20, Armen Tadevosyan filed a counterclaim in the same court, demanding refutation of the defamatory information and a compensation. On October 25, the court made a decision to accept the counterclaim for proceedings and examine it together with the initial claim.

A court hearing on the case was also held on February 25, the next one is scheduled for May 6.

**On January 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan partially upheld the lawsuit filed by *168 Zham Ltd*. and founder Satik Seyranyan against Styopa Safaryan, the Chairman of the Public Council, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information, apology for the insult, removal of the article, and a compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity, and business reputation.
 We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on November 2, 2020, was caused by Styopa Safaryan’s post on Facebook, dated October 13, according to which the *168.am* website, owned by the company, attributed remarks insulting Styopa Safaryan to the Russian journalist Vladimir Solovyov, which, however, the latter had not made. The plaintiff claims 2 million AMD in compensation for defamation and 1 million AMD in compensation for insult.
 The court verdict was as follows: in terms of defamation, 100,000 AMD to be confiscated from Styopa Safaryan in favor of Satik Seyranyan and *168 Zham Ltd.*, in terms of insult - 30,000 AMD and 150,000 AMD each as an attorney's reasonable fee. Besides, it was decided to oblige Styopa Safaryan to apologize on his Facebook page to Satik Seyranyan and *168 Zham Ltd.*, particularly for the following expressions: “Ask your question to the infamous lady” and “in the *168.am* website known to the Armenian public for its immorality”.

**On January 17,** the founder of *Fip.am* website *Union of Informed Citizens NGO* filed a lawsuit in the RA Administrative Court against the National Assembly, demanding to annul the sub-clause 4.1 of clause 22 of the appendix to the decision No.NACD-44-L[[98]](#footnote-98), which restricted the movement and work of journalists in the NA territory, and to suspend that sub-clause before the final judicial act entered into force.

 We should remind that the NGO filed lawsuits with the same content on September 6 and November 25, 2021, all of which were rejected or returned on the grounds that “the applicant is not a holder of the right which is the object of the infringement.”

This lawsuit was also returned on January 24, refiled on February 2, and accepted for proceedings on January 9. The court hearing is scheduled for May 17.

**On January 19,** the founder of the Fip.am website Union of Informed Citizens NGO, filed an appeal in the Court of Appeal against the decision made by the Administrative Court, which had rejected the the lawsuit filed against the National Assembly in November 2021, demanding to annul clause 2.8 of NO-01-L decision of the RA NA Speaker and to suspend the disputed provision of the above-mentioned decision of the Parliament Speaker, before the final judicial act enters into force. The Court substantiated that the disputed document was not an administrative act and could not be an object of dispute in the given instance.

 On February 14, the appeal was returned, on 28 it was refiled, on March 1 it was accepted for proceedings. No court hearing has been scheduled as of the end of the quarter.

**On February 18,** *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC* filed a lawsuit in the RA Administrative Court against the Commission on Television and Radio, demanding to recognize the absence of the legal relationship to impose an administrative penalty on the TV company in connection with the advertisement of “Shiraz Brandy” of Proshyan Brandy Company in accordance with Article 57 Part 8 of the RA Law “On Audiovisual Media” (broadcasting advertisements for strong alcoholic beverages is prohibited from 06:00 to 22:30) and to oblige the plaintiff to return the sum of the penalty in the amount of 200,000 AMD paid in advance.
 On February 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A preliminary court hearing is scheduled for June 28.

 **On the same day,** *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC* filed another lawsuit against the same defendant, demanding to recognize the absence of the legal relationship to impose a fine in the amount of one hundred times the minimum wage, stipulated in Article 57 Part 28 of the RA Law “On Audiovisual Media”, mentioned in the decision No. 86-A of the Commission, dated May 27, 2021, i.e. failure to provide information to the state regulatory body on the breakdown and amount of the income generated in the previous year.

**On March 7**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal against the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *the Investigative Journalists NGO v. the National Security Service*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 26, 2020, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information, and was caused by the video released by the NSS on July 15, in which the publication of *Hetq.am* (owned by the NGO) on the shelling of Tavush border village of Aygepar was presented as misinformation among the posts of Azerbaijani media materials and social media users.[[99]](#footnote-99) The website considers this an unfounded accusation, as the information provided by *Hetq.am* from the site of the incident was confirmed by the representative of the RA Ministry of Defense and the Human Rights Defender.
 The lawsuit was rejected by the decision of August 6, 2021. Accordingly, the Service did not slander the plaintiff, did not discredit its honor, dignity, or business reputation. Thus, the Court of Appeal left the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan in force, noting that there was even a differentiated conscientiousness expressed towards Hetq, taking into account its position in the media field, and the publication of the NSS, according to the court, was made in a way, that it was impossible to come to an unequivocal conclusion on the fact that *Hetq* periodical had disseminated misinformation.
 Investigative Journalists NGO intends to appeal the decision of the Court of Appeal.

**On March 22,** the Administrative Court held a preliminary court hearing on the lawsuit filed by Armenian Second TV Channel LLC against the Commission on Television and Radio on August 6, 2021, demanding to recognize the above-mentioned TV Channel as the winner of the Broadcast Competition for Licensing the Use of Slots in the Public Multiplex and to make a decision on issuing a license.
 On March 24, the court rejected the plaintiff's motion to apply an injunction, that is, to temporarily uphold the plaintiff's claim.
 The next court hearing is scheduled for July 7.

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