**

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

*REPORT*

*ON STATUS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ARMENIA AND VIOLATION OF MEDIA RIGHTS IN 2022*



*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 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 media personnel,*

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

*- materials from court cases with media involvement,*

*- materials disseminated by the partner journalist organization,*

*- publications by the media.*

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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 year 2022 was a difficult and busy year for the activities of the journalists and media, due to the need of covering the Azerbaijani military aggression against Armenia and serious escalations in the Artsakh conflict, domestic tensions and protests, and other extreme events. The situation was aggravating also because of the violence and various other kinds of pressure and obstructions against media representatives. The qualtitative visualization of these developments reveals an undulating pattern with rises and falls.

 Thus, in the course of the **first** quarter, which was relatively calmer, there was **1** case of violence and **12** cases of other types of pressure. Both indicators are lower than that for the same period in 2021. There were also **45** violations of the right to send and receive information, which is three times more than in the same period of 2021. In the course of the **second** quarter there was a surge in the total number of physical violence cases – **11** cases with **12** victims of which 10 (11 victims) happened during the coverage of the disobedience actions, organized by the opposition. Besides, **24** violations of the right to receive and disseminate information were recorded with **11 cases** of various types of pressure put on media outlets and their staff members. In the **third** quarter, **2** cases of physical violence were recorded with **3** victims, in the **fourth** quarter no case was recorded. The number of cases involving other types of pressure, including those in the form of lawsuits, were **18** and **14** respectively, and the violations of the right to receive information amounted to **20** and **26**. As it can be inferred, apart from physical violence cases, the intensity of all other types of pressure and the violations of media rights persisted throughout the year.

 The cases of obstructing the professional activity of the media representatives and the disrespectful and offensive beahaviour by some officials and law-enforcement body represenatives still cause concern. Those, as a rule, led to no consequences.

 The military activity launched by Azerbaijan against Armenia on September 13 – 14, became a serious threat to those media representatives who covered them. Particularly, in the border settlement of Sotk in the RA the opponent targeted a group of journalists and fired in their direction. Fortunately, no one suffered physical injuries.

 The Russian peace-keepers also created improper hindrances for Armenian media outlets during the year, prohibiting their entry to Nagorno Karabkh as well as banning the visit to the section of Lachin corridor where the Azerbaijanis have blocked the only life road, connecting Artsakh with Armenia and the external world ever since December 12. The peacekeepers have not presented any proper justification for these hindrances. As a result, the Armenian media outlets have been deprived of the possibility of familiarizing themselves with the situation and covering it, whereas the Azerbaijani media presented the issue purely from the stance of the official Baku, claiming that Artsakh was not in a blockade and that the Lachin corridor was functioning, thus causing misunderstanding in the international community.

 All the above-mentioned cases are described in detail in the relevant sections of the report, and CPFE, in joint action with partner organizations, issued statements on the more extraordinary ones.

 International organizations, too, issued statements, condemning the obstructions of the professional activity of the media outlets and their staff members, urging the RA authorities and especially law enforcement bodies who support the journalists, fulfilling their professional duties and not to be permissive for the violations of their rights.

Issues related to media legislation were in the focus of the attention of Armenian and international organizations, too. In order to prevent the regressive trends by the proposed and adopted legislative amendments, initiated by the authorities, 11 local journalistic organizations came up with an initiative which would entail partnership between the legislative and executive state authoties and the civil society organizations. As a result, the Committee for the Protection of Freedom of Expression, being authorized by 10 partner organizations, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Chair of the relevant Committee of the NA and the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Justice on April 19. Accordingly, the development for the Information sector development and media legislation reforms concept note was launched. The key principles of this document will serve as a basis for the future legislative amendments.

Nevertheless, the authorities have not yet given up the malicious practice of adopting legislative amendments without consultations with specialized NGOs or the receipt of international expert opinions. This was the practice after which on May 25 the amendments and supplements to the provision on the accreditation of journalists in RA Law “On Media” were adopted, and on December 22, a draft of making amendments and supplements to the Law “On the Legal Regime of the Marshall Law” was uploaded onto the e-draft.am official website.

The CPFE would like to note the positive developments that after the well-substantiated criticism by the journalistic and human rights activist community, the authorities refused to continue with the legislative provisions that defined criminal responsibility for the “grave insult” passed in 2021, and it was decided to remove them from the new version of the Criminal Code.

As compared with 2021, the number of lawsuits against media outlets and journalists halved, which, however, still remained quite high: **32** new cases were recorded. The majority of those cases, namely **30,** were based on Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code that have to do with insult and defamation. And in 2 cases, media outlets acted as a third party within the lawsuits with TV companies against the Commission on Television and Radio. The lawsuits were triggered by the competitions organized by the latter as a result of which Armenian TV Channel 2 and Yerkir Media were not awarded licenses. However, the authorization as provided for the Law on Audio-Visual Media lets them continue their activity and broadcast through cable or other technologies.

*In 2022, the international organization Reporters without Borders published its report where Armenia improved its positions with regard to the freedom of press, rising to the 51st position vis-à-vis 63 last year. [[1]](#footnote-1) According to Article 19 international organization’s report, Armenia was classified as a country with “less restricted” freedom of expression, coming 46th among 161 countries. By the way, Azerbaijan came the 136th, Turkey was the 141st, Iran was the 143rd, all three were classified as countries “in crisis.” And in the annual report of Freedom House organization – Freedom on the Net – Armenia was classified to the group of free countries, scoring 74 points, which is 3 points more than in 2021.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

The legislative amendments that were problematic to the media continued to remain in the focus of the attention local journalistic organizations and international entities at the beginning of the year. We should remind that in the pervious year of 2021 the parliament passed a law, tripling the ceilings of the monetary compensation for insult and defamation, as provided for Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code. Besides, the so-called “grave insult” – obscenity – was criminalized by the Law on Making Amendments and Supplements to the RA Criminal Code, by the way, public and state figures as well as a number of other groups were covered by stronger protection, because a stricter penalty was defined than in the case of an insult against an ordinary citizen.

On February 24, 2022, Freedom House international organization published its traditional report – Freedom in the World 2022 – where Armenia maintained its positions, scorring 55 out of 100 total points and was classified as “partly free.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In relation to the freedom of media, Armenia scored 2 out of the possible 4 points. Making reference to the legislative amendments, the authors of the report mentioned that they might be easily abused, limiting the media’s right to express themselves freely and using them as a tool against those media outlets which criticized officials.

Later, on April 21, Freedom House published its annual report “Nations in Transit 2022” where Armenia was classified as a partly free country, just as it was in the previous years, and it was emphasized that the Armenian media remains polarized with “most print and broadcast outlets are affiliated with political or larger commercial interests.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Besides, it was mentioned again that the legislative amendments passed in 2021 adversely impacted on the measurement of the media freedom.

“*In Armenia, the right to freedom of expression continued to be unduly restricted,*” – this is the assessment of Amnesty International international human rights organizations which was published on March 29, in the annual report on The State of the World’s Human Rights.[[5]](#footnote-5) This harsh assessment, too, was caused by the legislative amendments that threaten the realization of the right to free expression in the country.

Another report, published on May 3, by the international organization Reporters Without Borders emphasized the attachment of Armenian media outlets to the current authorities on the one hand, and to the former oligarchic forces, on the other. Although in the freedom of the press index the RA improved its positions, compared to the previous year, and rose from the 63rd to the 51st position, nevertheless, the legal framework did not sufficiently protect the media and did not meet the European standards. The legislative amendments, made by the authorities, did not solve the problems related to disinformation and hate speech that was growing more and more common, and the criminalization of “grave insult” and the tripling of the ceilings of compensation for defamation and insult are a serious threat to the freedom of the press. According to the report, legal provisions guaranteeing transparency of media ownership and financial sources were not implemented yet.[[6]](#footnote-6)

This criticism led to the authorities’ decision to abandon the provisions, defining criminal liability for “grave insult”, and it was decided to remove those provisions from the new version of the Criminal Code. This was announced by the RA Minister of Justice on June 10. In other words, that offense was decriminalized, which was pointed out as necessary by the Armenian journalistic and human rights community as well as the international organizations.

On July 7, the Freedom House, welcoming this progress, also highlighted the commitment, incorporated in the Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the government and civil society organizations. [[7]](#footnote-7) This is about the initiative of 11 local journalistic organizations, which entails the cooperation of the legislative and executive authorities and the civil society, aimed at the elaboration of a concept for the development of the media sector in Armenia and the reform of media legislation. On April 19, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed by the CPFE, that was authorized by 10 partner journalistic organizations, the Chairman of the relevant NA Committee, and RA Deputy Minister of Justice.[[8]](#footnote-8) The design of the above-mentioned concept was launched accordingly.

However, despite the aforementioned process, during the year and with no prior discussions with journalistic organizations, the authorities continued to come up with such controversial legislative initiatives that, in some cases, were even contrary to the international norms. Thus, on May 25, the Parliament adopted a project on amending and supplementing the RA Law “On Media”, according to which the state body can deprive a journalist of accreditation if the latter has violated the operations procedure in that agency twice within a year. Moreover, each body can set its own conditions. Reacting to this change, media experts noted that it did not comply with European norms and international best practices, that state departments should not have the authority to deprive a journalist of accreditation at their own discretion. By the way, the Committee to Protect Journalists international organization, CPJ, called on RA President Vahagn Khachaturyan not to sign this law, **[[9]](#footnote-9)** but he did not follow that appeal.

The Law “On Media”, in general, needs to be modernized and radically revised, be it in relation to the transparency of media ownership and financial sources, the development of a self-regulation system based on the norms of journalistic ethics, or the redefinition of the concepts of “media” and “reporter” in the light of modern technologies or the legal regulation of many other issues in the sector. However, CPFE and its partner journalistic organizations hold the conviction that this process should be carried out in accordance with the fundamental principles of the aforementioned Memorandum and the Concept, currently under development.

The same refers to the legislative amendements, regulating the broadcasting sector. Contrary to the agreements stipulated in the Memorandum, on June 6, a package of new bills of supplements and amendments to the Law “On Audiovisual Media” and other related laws was posted on the official e-draft.am website.**[[10]](#footnote-10)** These were developed without the knowledge and participation of journalistic organizations. This initiative was authored by the Ministry of High-Tech Industry, with the participation of the Commission on Television and Radio, the Board of the Public Broadcaster and the Union of Operators of Armenia NGO. This triggered another statement by CPFE and partner journalistic organizations, where specialized NGOs expressed deep concern both in terms of the content of the bills and the process of drafting and presenting them. In particular, the authors of the statement pointed out a number of setbacks, which hindered the development of a favorable legal framework for the creation of private multiplexes, the independence and transparency of the Commission on Television and Radio, impartiality in the licensing processes, as well as ensuring guarantees of independence for the Public Television and Radio Company and its Board.

Given all of the above, the journalistic organizations called on the Ministry of High-Tech Industry to recall the submitted package of bills and organize professional open discussions with stakeholder state institutions and non-governmenal entities in order to improve the legislative regulations for the broadcasting sector. And the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sports of the National Assembly and the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia were offered, in line with the provisions of the Memorandum of Cooperation with journalistic organizations, to collaborate with the Ministry of High-Tech Industry to ensure the proposal of amendments to the Law “On Audiovisual Media” was implemented in accordance with the processes as envisaged by the Memorandum. [[11]](#footnote-11)

By the way, the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Press, at the request of journalistic organizations, conducted an examination of the aforementioned package of bills and provided its conclusion, together with a list of recommendations. That document can serve as a good basis for revising the problematic clauses. Nevertheless, on September 30, another version of draft legislative amendments, related to the measurements of the TV audience, the formation and powers of a sectoral committee, was officially put into circulation.

The authorities had prepared another surprise of the kind at the end of the year, too. On December 22, on the same e-draft.am official website, the draft on amendments and supplements to the Law “On the Legal Regime in Martial Law” was posted, as proposed by the Ministry of Justice.[[12]](#footnote-12) This amendment proposed to limit the freedom of expression of opinion, the content broadcasted on television and disseminated through the Internet, block Internet applications and websites, social media platforms across the territory of the Republic of Armenia during the martial law. 11 journalistic organizations issued a joint statement in this regard, expressing a concern that the government published such a document in a country which states that democracy is its national brand. It should be noted that the provisions, included in the proposed bill were not based on proper discussions and consultations, the assessment of obvious risks and analysis of possible negative consequences. They are highly vulnerable from a professional point of view and therefore completely rejectable.

There is no doubt that the fight against fake news, disinformation, hostile propaganda and cyber-attacks is even more important especially in the times of martial law. However, the related legal regulations should be reasonable, more clearly defined, without loopholes that might allow for arbitrariness. If the authorities are more inclined towards this approach, they are simply obliged to bring the encountered problems to the attention of the public and provide the justifications and means for their urgent solution, organizing public consultations on the topic, by the way starting from ground zero, namely the analysis of the idea that would only be followed by the legislative initiative.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The concerns of the journalistic community regarding this bill are also justified by the argument that freedom of and access to information are unjustifiably restricted even in our daily life. The reason for this is that the culture of balancing security issues and public interest and making lawful decisions has not been established in the country yet. The CPFE recorded facts presented by media representatives on the avoidance of officials to provide information of irrefutable significance to the public, making unjustified reference to state or other secrets.

In this regard, the adoption of the draft law on making amendments to the RA Code of Administrative Offenses by the National Assembly on September 14 was important. Accordingly, the fine for the failure to provide official information subject to publication, which was previsouly set in the amount ranging from 10 to 50-fold minimum wage was raised to 30 to 70-fold minimum wage, and in case of repeating the same violation within one year after the application of the administrative penalty, the previously established fine of 50 – 100-fold the minimum wage was raised to amount 100 to 150-fold the minimum wage.

 The number of violations of the right to access and impart information did not decrease following these amendments which were meant to lead to stricter measures in terms of liability. A total of **115** such cases were recorded. Journalists reported that the Ministry of Defense had most frequently avoided provision of information and feedback, since it would, as a rule, qualify the requested information as a state, military or service secret. And the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the journalists claimed, would refer to the list of data to be classified as confidential which was set for the given agency, even with reference to the “most innocent” questions. By the way, this list is a left-over from the previous regime and has remained unchanged by the incumbent administration.

Meanwhile, as is known, the lack of accurate information, including the lack of it from official sources, creates fertile ground for the spread of disinformation and fake news. This has been stressed by reputable international organizations, too. For example, the Freedom House wrote on its Twitter page: “The Armenian authorities should support the independent media and civil society by maintaining an active dialogue with them and the people to counteract disinformation that poses threat to Armenian democracy around crucial topics for the country.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

This issue becomes even more urgent when covering the exacerbations of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. The lack of a clear state policy in the information sector, the highly flawed practices of the authorities in interactions with the media cause serious complications for the latter's activities, forcing them to face new, both internal and external challenges.

Thus, on August 4 and 8, the work of journalists at the Armenia-Artsakh border was obstructed. Russian peacekeepers did not allow them to visit Nagorno Karabakh and carry out their professional duties. The RA authorities did not take any visible steps to intervene and solve the problem. And since December 12, when Azerbaijan closed the only life road connecting Artsakh to Armenia and the whole world – the Lachin Corridor, and created a severe humanitarian crisis for 120 thousand Artsakh residents, it became impossible for the representatives of the Armenian media to work in that heated zone. In particular, the filming crews of Radio Liberty, Factor.am and Civilnet news websites, Journalists’ Club Asparez, as well as other media outlets and specialized organizations were stopped by the RA Police and NSS employees and were not allowed to go beyond Goris, or if they managed to overcome that unreasonable ban, filming crews reached the village of Lisagor the farthest, where the Russian peacekeepers already forbade them to continue their way. As a result, neither the audience of the Armenian media nor the international community had an opportunity to receive objective information about the newly-emerged situation. As of the end of the year, only the representatives of the Azerbaijani media were operating in an unhindered manner in the blocked section of Lachin Corridor, which would often distort the facts in their publications in favour of the official Baku’s propaganda, in particular, issuing false information that communication between Armenia and Artsakh was not hindered, thus misleading both their own public and the international community. In this regard, 11 journalistic organizations in Armenia issued a joint statement with urges addressed to both the RA government to regulate and facilitate the visits of media representatives to Nagorno Karabakh, and the world's leading media to send their reporters and film crews to the Artsakh conflict zone to have the severe humanitarian crisis caused by the closure of the Lachin Corridor actively covered and thereby prevent the disinformation of the Azerbaijani propaganda internationally.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The media representatives’ activity in the course of the large-scale military operations, too, was associated with serious risks. Thus, on September 14, the Azerbaijani units that invaded the RA territory targeted Armenian and foreign journalists and cameramen (7 people in total) in Sotk village of Gegharkunik marz and used artillery, firing at them twice. It was only a lucky coincidence that no one got hurt. Yet, in any case, targeting and shelling journalists and cameramen wearing the identification “Press” in the military zone is a gross violation of the requirements of the Geneva Convention. Making reference to this case, the RA MFA called to the international community and the entities specializing in the protection of human rights and freedom of speech to pay attention to this attempt at violating the right to collect and disseminate information, specifically aiming to obstruct the process of documenting and presenting the consequences of Azerbaijan's aggression to the international community.

Besides, media workers faced obstacles while covering domestic political and social events in the country. Such cases came about during both the mass protests organized by the political opposition, and communication with the representatives of the government, when the journalists encountered unjustified or disproportionate restrictions, as well as a disrespectful and unethical attitude.

Journalistic organizations covered these cases, too, calling on the police to be consistent in their activities, identify and bring the culprits to justice. Unfortunately, the criminal cases initiated on the grounds of such facts are, as a rule, terminated or left without investigation, claiming the impossibility of identifying those who commited the acts. However, an unbiased investigation could bring clarity to this matter, especially given that in many cases video recordings and footage from the scene are available. By the way, in its annual report, Amnesty International referred to the pressure, attacks and threats against media outlets and NGOs in Armenia and assessed the investigations of these cases as ineffective. In particular, this report mentioned the attacks on the offices of Radio Liberty and Open Society Foundations – Armenia after the 44-day Artsakh war.

“Violence against journalists in Armenia, as a rule, goes unpunished” - this is the observation of the international organization Reporters Without Borders in its annual report, published on May 3.

The data, extracted from the CPFE’s observations, indicate that the pressure against media representatives is increasing, especially when they cover mass demonstrations and protests. If the beginning and the end of the year were relatively calm in this respect, starting from the second quarter, the number of violent incidents increased sharply, due to the actions organized by the opposition. Thus, if only one case of physical violence was recorded during the first quarter, 11 journalists and cameramen were injured as a result of disproportionate actions of law enforcement officers in the second quarter, when the former were covering demonstrations and marches. Another case of physical violence against a media employee was registered in the National Assembly, again perpetrated by a representative of the government.

 All this did not go unnoticed by either local or international journalistic and human rights organizations. Thus, on May 2, when a number of media representatives were hindered from fulfilling their professional duties while covering the actions of disobedience organized by the opposition in Yerevan, 11 Armenian journalistic organizations made a joint statement, urging the Government to initiate an official investigation and hold accountable, in particular, the head of the Police Patrol-Guard Service Sargis Hovhannisyan and his subordinates who had exceeded their powers. In addition, the authors of the statement demanded from the supreme executive body to give appropriate instructions to both the National Security Service and the Police to act so that they do not violate the rights of media employees and be respectful to them.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Besides, the same journalistic organizations issued a statement condemning the actions of the police during the events on May 30, when the police used brutal force against Hrant Sarafyan, a journalist of the *Iravunk* newspaper and Vahe Sargsyan, the editor of YerkirMedia.am news website during a protest action held near the 3rd building of the RA government. Both media workers were performing their professional duties.[[17]](#footnote-17) The Investigative Committee and the RA Police responded to this statement, but instead of informing about the practical steps they had taken, they only welcomed “the participation of civil society in the strengthening of legality and legal order.”

The US State Department spokesman Ned Price spoke about the heated political situation in Armenia at that time, the protest actions and the violence against the journalists covering them, saying: “We believe that peaceful protests are an element of an open political system. We fully support the fundamental freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly. We urge people to express their opinions in a peaceful manner. We urge authorities to exercise restraint and encourage those protesting to refrain from violence and to respect the rule of law and Armenia’s democracy.”**[[18]](#footnote-18)** Freedom House also expressed concern regarding the violence against journalists, public figures and ordinary citizens during the protests in Armenia and condemned the disproportionate actions of law enforcement agencies in its tweet.**[[19]](#footnote-19)**

Apart from physical violence, various other types of pressure were applied against media representatives. During the year, the MPs of the ruling faction – Vahagn Aleksanyan, Khachatur Sukiasyan, and Kristine Poghosyan – as well as the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan and others stood out for their unfriendly attitude towards journalists.

 Although compared to the previous year, the number of new lawsuits filed against the media and journalists halved, nevertheless, it was significant: **32** new court cases were registered. The vast majority thereof, namely **30**, are based on Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code, which refers to insult and defamation. And in 2 cases, the media outlets act as third parties in the lawsuits of the TV stations against the Commission on Television and Radio.

When information and media related disputes arise, it is still problematic that the practice of resolving them through extrajudicial mechanisms is still not sufficiently applied. In particular, there are few cases when, before going to court or instead of it, an attempt is made to turn to the editorial office in order to realize the right to refutation or reply, or to submit a complaint to media self-regulation structures and solve the problem in that manner. Along with this, it is important that the courts have started to refer to the opinions and conclusions of the Information Disputes Council or the Media Ethics Observatory when examining the cases brought against media outlets.

In the previous reports, the CPFE noted that for more than 2 years, the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had switched to the remote format of press conferences, when media outlets and NGOs were given the opportunity to send one question in advance, but sometimes those questions were read out to him in an edited language or were not read out at all. This was the reason why dozens of media outlets boycotted Pashinyan's regular teleconference organized on June 27, urging him to return to the accepted format of direct communication. On July 7, Freedom House, too, addressed the issue in a tweet, urging the Armenian Prime Minister to take the concerns of the media seriously and leverage direct communication channels including through open and transparent press-conferences to ensure a healthy functioning democracy.**[[20]](#footnote-20)**

On October 28 and December 2, the tenders for the use of republican and capital city broadcasting slots in the public multiplex were concluded, as a result of which Armenian TV Channel 2 (H2) and Husaber CJSC (Yerkir Media) were not announced as winners and were not awarded a license. Let us remind that new tenders were announced as a result of disputes, as well as court cases, between Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC and the Commission on Television and Radio regarding the issuance of a broadcasting license. As early as on June 24, 2021, Armenian TV Channel 2 went to court, challenging the decision of the Commission on Television and Radio on not recognizing the Channel as the winner of the licensing tenders for the use of the slot in the public multiplex for broadcasting in the capital. And since the RA Administrative Court ruling of August 25, 2021, repealed the decision of the Commission on Television and Radio (the Appellate Court left the judgment unchanged, and the RA Court of Cassation decided on June 7, 2022, to reject the complaints of the Public TV Company and the Commission on Television and Radio), the Commission on Television and Radio had to once again announce a tender for licensing the use of the capital coverage slot in the public multiplex on September 15. Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC and the Public Television Company of Armenia CJSC applied to participate in it. The Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC was recognized as the winner of this tender.

On August 10, the Commission on Television and Radio of Armenia opened another tender, this time for licensing the use of the republican broadcasting slot in the public multiplex with Armenia TV CJSC, A-TV LLC, Shant LLC, Multi Media-Kentron TV CJSC, Husaber CJSC, and Armenian Second TV Channel LLC taking part in it. As a result of ranking-based voting in this tender, the license was not granted to Husaber CJSC and Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC.

After these tenders, both Armenian TV Channel 2 and Husaber CJSC applied to the Administrative Court with new claims, which are described below in this report.

The post-tender situation was peculiar because according to the 2020 Law on Audio-Visual Media, unlicensed but authorized companies may still broadcast via cable or other technological means.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 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 2022, as well as the developments related to the previous incidents.

 ***In total, there were 184 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2022. 14 were cases of physical violence, 55 were cases of pressure against the media and their personnel, and 115 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 previous year.

**Quantitative Data on Violations per Quarter in 2022**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2022 | 2nd quarter of 2022 | 3rd quarter of 2022  | 4th quarter of 2022  | Total |
| Physical violence against journalists | 1 | 11(12 victims) | 2(3 victims) | 0 | **14(16 victims)** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 12 | 11 | 18 | 14 | **55** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 45 | 24 | 20 | 26 | **115** |

**Quantitative Data on Violations in 2021-2022**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2021  | 2022  |
| Physical violence against journalists | 18(20 victims) | **14(16 victims)** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 108 | **55** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 99 | **115** |

**Lawsuits, Involving Media and Journalists in 2022 per Quarter**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2022 | 2nd quarter of 2022 | 3rd quarter of 2022  | 4th quarter of 2022  | Total |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 7 | 8 | 9 | 6 | **30** |
| Economic and other disputes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2  | **2** |

**Lawsuits, Involving Media and Journalists in 2021-2022**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 2021 | 2022 |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 61 | **30** |
| Economic and other disputes | 2 | **2** |

As in the previous reports, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression would like to note that the data in the table may not be comprehensive and do not claim absolute accuracy. Media representatives sometimes find it unnecessary to publicize facts about impediments to 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 2022, there were 14 cases of physical violence against media workers, with 3 victims. Below we present the facts and developments related to both those cases 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 and quarterly reports for 2018-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were held on February 10, March 3, 17 and 31, May 27, July 7, September 29, October 27 and Novembr 10, 2022. On December 23, on the grounds of the replacement of the judge, the case was moved to another court and was accepted for proceedings on December 28. A court hearing was scheduled for January 11, 2023.

**On January 25,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (Artashat residence) held the trial on the case of violence against the 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 Artashat City, Ararat Marz, one of the citizens snatched Ani Gevorgyan’s phone, insulted and slapped her.[[21]](#footnote-21) On September 3, the criminal case initiated on the fact of violence was filed to the Court with an indictment of two persons - sister and brother Sona and Vahagn Hakobyans.

Court hearings on the case were held on March 16, May 10, July 6, August 18, and on September 27 the Court found Sona and Vahagn Hakobyans guilty of the crime, defined by Article 164.1 of the former RA Criminal Code and impose a penalty of 200,000 AMD on the condition that it be paid within 1 year. The measue of restraint imposed on them – a signed acknowledgement of travel restrictions – will be maintained until the judgment enters into legal force, after which the ban on crossing the border will be lifted. The court order was not appealed and entered into force.

 **On February 22**, during the protests against the visit of Azerbaijani MPs to Armenia, the police detained Ani Nahapetyan, a correspondent at *Yerkir Media TV*, from the Republic Square of the capital, along with a number of protesters. She was on duty and showed her journalist’s badge 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 in the premises. Along with the criminal cases initiated against all the other protesters, a criminal case was initiated against the journalist, too, on the charge of hooliganism. The journalist was charged for swearing at the authorities, which she denied, and in turn reported about the crime in the Police.[[22]](#footnote-22)

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 164.2 of the RA Criminal Code, based on materials prepared by the NSS Investigation Department. The case was sent to the Investigative Committee on November 28. The preliminary investigation is underway.

**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 and quarterly reports for 2018-2022, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were also held on May 20, July 14, September 7 of 2022, and the next one was scheduled for January 16, 2023.

 **On April 26,** during the anti-government demonstrations organized by the ARF youth wing, their participants also burned tires at the intersection of Gyulbenkyan-Komitas streets in Yerevan, for which the law enforcement officers used force. This fact was recorded on camera by the Armenian correspondent of *Kavkaz-uzel.eu* website **Tigran Petrosyan**, who was pushed away from the place by the police, hindering his professional activities. By the way, the journalist wore an editor's certificate - a badge, and it was visible. Tigran Petrosyan alerted the Office of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression about the incident.

**On May 2,** during the disobedience actions organized by the opposition forces in Yerevan, the professional activities of a number of media representatives were hindered. In particular, the Head of the State Guard Service, Sargis Hovhannisyan, at the intersection of Proshyan-Baghramyan streets in Yerevan, first obstructed the work of *Mediahub.am* news website correspondent **Nare Gnuni** by hitting her hand-held loudspeaker, and State Guard Service employee Edgar Papinyan kicked the cameraman of the same website **Arman Gharajyan**, and damaged the camera. The representatives of the media outlet were trying to get a comment from the Head of the State Guard Service when he was talking on the phone.

On June 7, the Investigative Committee reported that the mentioned actions were exclusively aimed at ensuring the confidentiality of Sargis Hovhannisyan's telephone conversation, which is protected by RA legislation, therefore, the characteristics of the crime of obstructing journalistic activity envisaged by Article 164 of the RA Criminal Code are absent. The initiation of a criminal case was rejected.

**On** **May 2,** as a result of a clash between the police and citizens at the intersection of Sayat-Nova – Abovyan streets in Yerevan**, Lia Sargsyan**, correspondent at the *Yerkir.am* news website, felt bad and was given first aid.

**On May 2,** on Heratsi Street in Yerevan, law enforcement officers hit *AntiFake.am* website correspondent **Davit Fidanyan** on the shoulder, obstructing filming, while another journalist of the same website, **Ishkhan Khosrovyan**, was dragged at the intersection of Khanjyan-Sayat-Nova streets.

**On the same day**, law enforcement officers dragged **Edik Andreasyan**, an employee of the *Hraparak daily* and a publicist, bringing him into custody at the Vardanants-Yervand Kochar intersection in Yerevan, and later released him.

 **On May 4**, in the building of the National Assembly, **Suzy Badoyan**, a correspondent of the *Yerevan.today* news website, tried to get a comment from the Civil Contract faction MP Hayk Sargsyan regarding the actions of the opposition, but Sargsyan grabbed the journalist's phone, injuring her hand. After Suzy Badoyan's demand, the MP returned the phone.

**On May 6**, during the opposition rally in Yerevan, near the Victory Bridge, the work of the journalist of the *Aravot.am* news website **Ashot Hakobyan** was hindered while detaining the protesters. The website writes that the journalist's badge was visible, and the police major, seeing that he was recording the actions of the law enforcement officers, hit the camera, instructing the journalist not to take his picture.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The RA General Prosecutor's Office sent the case to the NSS Investigation Department with the task of preparing materials. The factual data obtained here also testified that the fact of Ashot Hakobyan being a journalist was not known to the RA police officer, therefore, the presence of the subjective side of the crime stipulated in Article 164 of the Criminal Code was not substantiated in the latter's act. The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed the CPFE that on May 26, a decision was made to reject the initiation of a criminal case.

 **On May 30,** during a protest organized by the opposition near the 3rd building of the RA Government, the police used brutal force against the journalist of the *Iravunk* newspaper **Hrant Sarafyan**, hitting and knocking him down. On the same day, during the clashes, the law enforcement officers also used force against **Vahe Sargsyan**, the editor of *YerkirMedia.am* news website, trying to detain him. Both journalists were there to cover the protest. In response to the statement made by 11 journalistic organizations in this regard, the CPFE received a letter from the Investigative Committee, in which it was said that the statement had been sent to the police for consideration. And on June 28, the Police Department told the CPFE that “they welcomed the participation of civil society in the strengthening of legality and legal order.” And that is it... As the author of the above-mentioned statement, the CPFE welcomes the willingness of law enforcement officers not to ignore the reports and demands of journalistic organizations, but expects more effective steps to be taken to solve the mentioned problems.

NA MP Taguhi Tovmasyan submitted a report on the aforementioned incidents to the RA Prosecutor General. The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed the CPFE that the given report was sent to the Investigation Department of the National Security Service with the task of preparing materials. The prepared materials revealed that the police officer, having lost his balance, carelessly touched Hrant Sarafyan and knocked him down. On June 16, a decision was made to reject the initiation of a criminal case based on the grounds of lack of corpus delicti under Article 164 of the Criminal Code.

**On June 3,** during the action organized by the opposition near the Government summer houses in Yerevan, during the clash between the protesters and the police, the cameraman of the *Yerevan.today* news website **Artyom Sargsyan** suffered, injuring his leg. According to the website's editor, the police snatched the camera monopod from the cameraman and beat the protesters with it. As a result, the live broadcast device belonging to the editorial office was also lost.[[24]](#footnote-24)

**On September 15**, a conflict arose in the National Assembly between the MPs of the ruling faction and the representatives of some media outlets accredited in the parliament, after which the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan ordered the law enforcement officers to remove those journalists from the Parliament building. As a result, Ani Gevorgyan, the *Mediahub.am* website journalist, was taken out by law enforcement officers with the use of force, they also dragged Geghaznik Hovakimyan, the cameraman from *Yerevan.Today*.[[25]](#footnote-25) More details of the case on putting pressure on other journalists, however, without the use of physical violence, can be found in the following section of our report. 11 journalistic organizations issued a statement condemning this incident.

In response to the inquiry by CPFE, the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia stated that after the incident, Arsen Babayan, the head of Amaras Expert Center NGO, filed in a crime report to the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Armenia on an allleged obstruction of the legal professional activity by a journalist. The respective report was forwarded to the Investigative Committee on September 30, where no criminal proceedings were initiated, because the report did not document such an incident, action or inaction that could reasonably be qualified as an act in compliance with any offense provided for by the RA Criminal Code.

**On September 15**, Artur Hayrapetyan, the reporter of *24lurer.am* news website, was physically abused while covering the protest action organized on Demirchyan Street of the capital. Police officers snatched the journalist’s phone, threw him on the asphalt and hit him, leaving him helplessly lying there. By the way, this happened after Artur Hayrapetyan had shown his reporter's badge. 11 journalistic organizations issued a joint statement on the occasion of this incident and condemned the violence.

In response to the inquiry made by CPFE, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed that on September 15, criminal proceedings were initiated in connection with the incident, and the preliminary investigation is ongoing.

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

*In 2022, apart from the above-stated cases of violence,* ***55*** *cases of various instances of applying pressure against the media and their personnel were registered.* ***32*** *of thoe instances are new lawsuits against media outlets,* ***17*** *are various manifestations of ill-treatment, insults, targeting and threats against journalists,* ***4*** *are incidents that have to do with the marshal law and the escalations along the border of the country, and* ***2*** *are hacking cases. All these 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).
 We should remind that on June 24 2021 the LLC filed a lawsuit, with the demand to abolish the decision No. 93-A dated June 4, 2021, regarding the rating assessment of the participants of the tender 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 judgment at the Court of Appeal, and after the latter's judgement, at the Court of Cassation. Here, on June 7, the complaint was rejected to be accepted for proceedings due to the insufficiency of grounds.

 **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 TV Channel 2 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, and on August 30, the Administrative Court partially upheld the motion of Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC on applying a measure to secure the claim, prohibiting the Commission on Television and Radio to hold a tender for assigning a slot of national broadcast in public multiplex until the judicial act resolving the merits of this case took effect. A court hearing on the case was held on September 28, and on December 1, the motion of the respondent on abolishing the means for securing the claim was rejcted. The next court hearing was scheduled for February 23, 2023.

**On January 26,** the Administrative Courtrejected the defendant’s appealagainst the judgment of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanon the case of *Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC*, *represented by Executive Director Samvel Mayrapetyan*, *v. the Commission on Television and Radio*. The claim was to abolish 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 Tenders 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 Decision No. 14-A, the demand was upheld and that act was declared invalid. In addition, the court decided to confiscate 4,000 AMD from the Commission in favor of the plaintiff in compensation of the paid state fee, and 300,000 AMD as an attorney's fee.

On February 25, the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation. This instance rejected the complaint on July 20.

**On August 9,** the same plaintiff turned to the Adminsitrative Court against the *Commission on TV and Radio*, claiming the abolishment of Decision N 103-A of July 15, 2022. This decision is on the recognition of the winner of the licensing tender for the use of the slot for broadcasting in the capital in public multiplex and on the issuance of the license, according to which the competitor of Armenian TV Channel 2 – BOON scientific and cultural foundation (Boon TV) was granted the right to broadcast. On August 16, the court decided to accept the lawsuit for proceedings. Court hearings were held on September 12, 26, 29, and 30. The publication of the judicial act was scheduled for October 10. The plaintiff turned to the Court of Cassation on December 2.

 **On September 19,** *Armenian TV Channel 2* filed another lawsuit against the *Commission on TV and Radio* (with BOON scientific and cultural foundation as the third party), claiming to oblige the Commission to recognize the plaintiff as the winner in the tender of March 24, 2022, for the use of the broadcast slot in the public multiplex with coverage in the capital and make a decision on the issuance of the license. On September 23, the lawsuit was returned because of the inaccuracies contained therein. On October 11, this decision of the court was appealed in a higher instance, and the complaint was upheld on November 21, and the decision on the return of the suit was abolished. There were no other developments as of the end of the year.

 **On December 21,** *Armenian TV Channel 2* filed a lawsuit with the RA Administrative Court against the *Commission on TV and Radio*, this time with a demand to announce the winners of the republican coverage slot licensing tender in public multiplex and repealing Decision N 143-A on licensing, dated December 2.

 On December 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and Armenia TV CJSC, ATV LLC, Shant LLC and Multi Media Kentron TV CJSC were involced in the lawsuit was a third party. A court hearing was scheduled for January 30, 2023.

**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.[[26]](#footnote-26)

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 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”[[27]](#footnote-27), 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 accepted for proceedings on February 11. On May 23,the plaintifffiled a motion to the Court to change the subject matter and the basis of the lawsuit, which was upheld on May 26. According to the amendment, the plaintiff demands from the defendant Mariam Hovsepyan public refutation of the factual information considered defamatory in the same media and confiscation of 1.5 million AMD, and from the media - publication of the defendant's refutation approved by the court judgment.

Court hearings on the case were held on September 30 and December 14, with the next one scheduled for January 16, 2023.

**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.[[28]](#footnote-28)

On January 21, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and a court hearing was held on November 18, with the next one scheduled for March 22, 2023.

**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* on November 26. In the article, the author Sevak Vardumyan raised the question as to how Arthur Vardanyan, accused of “seizing power by force” and involved in a criminal case, appeared at the NA sessions.[[29]](#footnote-29)

On May 27, the court ruled to dismiss the case on the grounds of settlement between the parties.

**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.[[30]](#footnote-30) The website, citing its own sources, stated that the Foundation's employees were engaged in the embezzlement.

On April 1, the Court of Appeal left the judgment of the first instance unchanged. On May 5, the respondent appealed to the Court of Cassation, on June 1, the complaint was returned and submitted again on the 15th of the same month. On June 22, the complaint was rejected to be accepted for proceedings.

**On January 17,** the lawsuit filed on December 30, 2021, by *Arthur Vardanyan, the leader of All-Armenian National Statehood Party* against *Hraparak Daily LLC* and Sevak Vardumyan, demanding refutation of the defamatory information and confiscation of a compensation, 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.[[31]](#footnote-31)
 A court hearing on the case was held on April 13, with no date appointed for the next hearing as of the end of the year.

 **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.

A court hearing on the case was held on May 27, with the next one scheduled for January 26, 2023.

**On January 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary hearing on the case of *businessman Khachatur Sukiasyan v. Editor of Yerkir.am news website Spartak Seyranyan*, demanding a public apology, publication of the court judgment, 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”,[[32]](#footnote-32) with a link to an unidentified Telegram channel.

Court hearings were held on March 7 and 24, and the case was dismissed on April 14. The parties reached an agreement as a result of which the respondent published the refutation text, initially agreed with the plaintiff, and the plaintiff dropped his claims, except for the compensation for court fees and asked to terminate the proceedings.

**On May 30,** the case of the same plaintiff against *Media Plus LLC*, the founder of *Yerevan.Today* website, with the same claim, was dismissed.[[33]](#footnote-33) An agreement was reached between the parties, as a result of which the defendant published a refutation text pre-agreedwith the plaintiff, and the plaintiff dropped the presented claims, except for court fees, and requested the termination of the case proceedings.

**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.[[34]](#footnote-34)

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.On April 4, the defendant appealed the judgment of the court of general jurisdiction. On July 29, the Court of Appeal decided to reject the defendant's appeal and leave the lower court's decision unchanged. On August 28, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation, however, no other developments were recorded as of the end of the year.

Khacahtur Sukiasyan’s **next lawsuit** on the same occasion is against *News AM LLC*, the founder of ***News.am*** website.[[35]](#footnote-35) Court hearings on the case were held on March 7 and April 15. On April 29, the claim was granted in relation to the parts on publishing a refutation and compensation for court costs. On July 25, the defendant applied to the Court of Appeal, appealing this judgment. On August 16, the appeal was accepted for proceedings, and on December 9, it was rejected.

**On April 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on Khacahtur Sukiasyan’s another lawsuit against ***Pastinfo******LLC****,* demanding public refutation of factual information considered defamatory and a compensation. We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on April 19, 2021, and was caused by an article, entitled: “Khachatur Sukiasyan Summoned Journalist Nairi Hokhikyan and Demanded not to Criticize Nikol Pashinyan” published on *Pastinfo.am* website on March 22.[[36]](#footnote-36) On April 26, the proceedings of the case were terminated, the plaintiff withdrew the lawsuit, because on March 30, the media published refutation.[[37]](#footnote-37)

**On January 27,** a regular court hearing was held on the case of *Mega Trade LLC, owned by Khachatur Sukiasyan v. Yerevan.today* website, caused by the same article published on on March 25, entitled: “Beware. Khachatur Sukiasyan's Petrolium Spoils Cars. Déjà vu” [[38]](#footnote-38), with a reference to an unidentifiable Telegram channel. Court hearings on the case was held on April 4, too, and on May 25, the judicial act was published, dismissing the case. The parties had reached an agreement as a result of which the respondent published the refutation text, as pre-agreed with the plaintiff, and the plaintiff dropped his claims, except for the compensation for court fees and asked to terminate the proceedings.

 On February 4, April 18, July 6 and November 22, Yerevan General Jurisdiction Court held a regular court hearingon the case brought by the same plaintiff against *News.am,* on the same occasion. According to the judgment passed on December 12, the claim was partially granted. The defendant was obliged to refute the information considered defamatory, pay 100,000 AMD as compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity of the company (the plaintiff had claimed for 2 million AMD), 6000 AMD as state fee and 100000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.

**On February 17**, Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction published the judgment in the case of Mega Trade LLC vs. **Armday.am** website, partially granting the claim. The media outlet was obliged to deny the information considered defamatory, to pay the plaintiff 100000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. The judicial act was not appealed and entered into force.

**On March 2** and May 13, the trial on the case of the same plaintiff vs. **Blog.168.am** website continued in Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction. The judicial act that was scheduled for publication on July 27 was not announced as of the end of the year.

 **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?”[[39]](#footnote-39) 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*.

Court hearings on the case took place on April 20, August 2, November 17, with the next one scheduled for January 26, 2023.

**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.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**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”[[41]](#footnote-41), 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.[[42]](#footnote-42) The amount of compensation mentioned in Sasun Khachatryan's claim is 2 million AMD.

Court hearings were also held on March 11, April 25, June 22, and on July 20 the claim was partially upheld. The court decided to confiscate 200,000 AMD in favour of the plaintiff as material compensation for defamation, and also oblige the media outlet to publish a refutation. On September 19, the defendant filed an appeal against the judgment to a higher court. On October 21, the complaint was returned and filed again on November 11. On the 14th of the same month, the judge was replaced, and on the 30th, the complaint was accepted for proceedings. As of the end of the year, no other developments were registered.

**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?”.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Court hearings were also held on March 30, September 26 and 28, November 23, with the next one scheduled for March 22, 2023.

**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.[[44]](#footnote-44) Nevertheless, the lawsuit was filed, but was withdrawn before being accepted for proceedings on February 9.

**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, vs. 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 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 reassigned 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.[[45]](#footnote-45) 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”.[[46]](#footnote-46) 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. On April 13, the court partially upheld Samvel Kharazyan’s claim, namely the defendant was obliged to publicly apologize to the plaintiff, pay 150,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee and 4000 AMD as a pre-paid state fee.

No appeal was filed against the decision. On September 29, the editorial office of the *Zhoghovurd* daily newspaper and ArmLur.am website published a statement, according to which his bank account was frozen due to non-payment of the amount specified by the judgment.

**On September 26,** Samvel Kharazyan filed a second lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the *Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office LLC* and its editor-in-chief Knar Manukyan, claiming compensation for the damage caused to honour and dignity. The lawsuit was caused by an article, published in the *Zhoghovurd* newspaper, owned by the LLC, and Armlur.am website on August 25 and entitled “The Corrupt System Persists even Today: New Disclosures by the State Supervision Service Head”[[47]](#footnote-47) which reminded that Samvel Kharazyan, together with a number of other officials, was involved in a criminal case and the editorial office would pursue the disclosure of the corrupt activity, related to the case.

On October 10, the claim was returned due to lack of and inaccuracies in the documents, it was filed again on November 18, and the proceedings were accepted on December 1. A court hearing was scheduled for January 30, 2023.

**On January 31,** the appeal of the defendant on the case of *the former NSS Intelligence Colonel Eduard Harutyunyan v. former NA MP Taron Sahakyan (with Meltex LLC, founder of A1plus.am website as the third party),*  with Meltex LLC – the founder of A1+ TV company – involved as the third party.

This lawsuit was filed on September 18, 2019, caused by a video released on *A1plus.am* on August 14 in which Taron Sahakyan talks about the former NSS official, in particular accusing him of “being related to drug supply”, “alienating strategic objects at the cost of a penny to his immediate surroundings”, “exporting cheap resources from Armenia and importing expensive ones.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

By the judgment dated 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 to the Civil Court of Appeal.

On April 14, 2022, the Court of Appeal rejected the complaint, after which on May 16, the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation, where the case was rejected for acceptance for proceedings on June 22.

**On January 31,** *Hraparak Daily LLC* applied to theCourt of Cassation, appealing the judgment 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.[[49]](#footnote-49) 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, and pay a compensation of 200,000 AMD. On March 27, the defendant appealed the judgment to a higher instance which 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 judgment. The defendant appealed it in the Civil Court of Appeal, but 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 judgments.

On April 8, 2022, the defendant’s cassation appeal was rejected and was not accepted for proceedings.

**On January 31**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal against the judgment 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. [[50]](#footnote-50)

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 rejected for acceptance for proceedings on May 25.

 **On Februar**y 1, the defendant on the case of NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) vs. 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 entitled “What innovation will Nikol Pashinyan implement in August”, 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 judgment, dated September 29, 2021, the court partially upheld the claim. Iravunk Media Ltd. was obliged to publicly refute the information considered defamatory and pay 200,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.
 On February 28, the Court of Appeal accepted the case for proceedings, and the judicial act that was published on April 29 granted the complaint, filed by the defendant, and the case was sent for retrial.

On July 1, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted the case for a new examination. Sessions were held here on August 19, October 10, and December 9, with the next one scheduled for February 15, 2023.

**On February 1,** *Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.* filed an appeal against the judgment 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”.[[51]](#footnote-51) By the court judgment 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 22, the LLC filed an appeal against this decision filing it with the Court of Cassation. The latter returned the appeal on April 27, and after being refiled, it was rejected on June 15, 2022.

**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”[[52]](#footnote-52)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.

On March 18, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the judgment in the Court of Appeal, where it was upheld on June 30. On October 4, the first instance court received the case for re-examination. A court hearing on the case was held on November 15, with the next one scheduled on Feburary 7, 2023.

**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”.[[53]](#footnote-53) 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, and after the rejection thereof, 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, and on April 11, this motion was rejected. Court hearings on the case were also held on May 24, July 12, October 12 and 21, and in the December 8 session, the court made a decision on distributing the burden of proof. The next hearing was scheduled for February 8, 2023.

 **On February 7,** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the defendant’s appeal against the judgment 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.[[54]](#footnote-54)

 On December 2 of the same year 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. The judgment was appealed by both the plaintiff and the defendant.

Hearings on the case were held in the Court of Appeal on March 17 and April 21, and on May 12, this instance granted the plaintiff's complaint, repealed the judgment and sent the case to the same court for a new examination. On September 8, the respondent filed an appeal with the Court of Cassation, but the decision of the appellate court entered into legal force. In the first instance court, a hearing within the new examination was held on December 27, with the next one scheduled for February 28, 2023.

**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) vs. 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.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Sessions on the case were also held on April 4, May 31 and July 4. The court published the judgment on July 25, where the claim was partially upheld. The defendant was obliged to publish a refutation. The judgment ruled for the confiscation of 4,000 AMD as a state fee and 200,000 AMD as a lawyer's fee. No appeal was filed against the decision.

**On February 7**, the General Jurisdiction Court of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the successors of the 9 victims of the March 1, 2008 events against Shark LLC - founder of Channel 5 TV company, and Narek Mantashyan, co-chairman of "Alternative" NGO. We should remind that the claim was filed on June 16, 2020, claiming compensation for damage to honor and dignity. The lawsuit was triggered by an interview with the participation of Mantashyan on the set of Channel 5, during which he uttered defamatory and insulting expressions about the successors of the victims of March 1 events.[[56]](#footnote-56) The plaintiffs claimed that the two defendants paid a compensation of 2 million AMD for defamation, and 1 million AMD for insult to each successor.

In 2022, court hearings were also held on April 28, July 14, and October 31. On November 11, the court published the judgment which upheld the defendant Shark LLC’s motion to apply the statute of limitations and rejected the claim. By the end of the year, no appeal had been filed against the ruling.

**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.[[57]](#footnote-57) 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.

On September 14, 2022, the case was accepted for new proceedings. On October 24, a court hearing was held, with the next one scheduled for March 6, 2023.

**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.[[58]](#footnote-58) (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2020-2022 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*).

Court hearings on the case were held on March 28 and October 3, 2022, and the next one was scheduled for January 30, 2023.

**On February 10,** unknown persons hacked two Facebook pages of *1in.am* news website. The editorial staff lost the control over them.[[59]](#footnote-59) 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 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held another hearing on the case of *Gegham Vardanyan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, v. Pastinfo LLC*, claiming to oblige the defendant to publicly refute defamatory information and payment of compensation. The claim was triggered by an article, published on the Pastinfo.am website on August 31, 2020, titled “The representative of the RA on the Eurasian Economic Commission is Suspected of Abuse.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

Court hearings on the case were also held on April 7, October 20, and on November 9, the court decided to resume the proceedings, considering it necessary to find out some important circumstances for the case. A court hearing was scheduled for April 26, 2023.

**On February 11,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the defendant’s appeal against the judgment 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, namely to oblige *168 Zham LLC* to publish a refutation on *168.am website*, confiscate 700,000 AMD from the defendant as 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 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.[[61]](#footnote-61)

On March 10, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation, which accepted the case for proceedings on June 26. No further developments were recorded as of the end of the year.

 **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.[[62]](#footnote-62) The *Hraparak* was offered to publish a refutation, which was not done.

Court hearings on the case were held on September 26 and October 7, and the judgment of October 28 also validated the settlement between the parties and obligated the website to publish the text therein. The proceedings of the case were dismissed.

 **On February 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued 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.[[63]](#footnote-63) 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.

Court hearings on the case were also held on March 25, May 16, September 5 and November 4, the next one is scheduled for January 10, 2023.

 **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.[[64]](#footnote-64) 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.[[65]](#footnote-65)

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 appeals of the plaintiff and the defendant were accepted for proceedings on April 13 and 21, respectively.

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 2022 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. In addition, the court decided to confiscate 12,000 AMD from Tehmine Yenokyan in favor of Lydian Armenia CJSC as a pre-paid state duty, and 100,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.

On July 22, 2022, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the defendant's complaint, and granted the plaintiff’s appeal, meaning that the judgment of the lower instance court was overturned and changed the judgment, obliging Tehmine Yenokyan to publicly refute the data considered as a defamation and confiscate in favor of Lydian Armenia 500,000 AMD for defamation, 500,000 AMD as compensation for insult, 24,000 AMD for the pre-paid state duty, 200,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee and 40,000 AMD for the state duty.

On August 29, the defendant appealed the decision of the Court of Appeal in the Court of Cassation, where the decision of the appellate instance was left unchanged.

On December 7, the respondent published a refutation on her Facebook page.[[66]](#footnote-66) She informed she had to pay the required amount, otherwise she her accounts would have been frozen.

**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, 2019-2022 on *www.khosq.am, Reports* section).

Court hearings were held on May 4, July 13, October 14, with the next one scheduled for January 12, 2023.

**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 vs. 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.[[67]](#footnote-67)

By the judgment 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. On May 6, 2022, the court upheld the lawsuit partially, obliging Gegham Simonyan to publicly refute the defamatory data on Alen Simonyan, pay a 500,000 AMD compensation for defamation, 300,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee and 14,000 AMD as a state duty. The court noted that the statements made did not correspond to reality, as the defendant had failed to submit any evidence.

On June 20, 2022, the defendant appealed the verdict. The appeal was accepted for proceedings on July 25, and was rejected on October 31. On December 7, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation.

**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”.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Court hearings was also held on March 2, June 9, July 19, and the judgment of September 28 partially upheld the claim, namely, the media outlet was obliged to publish a refutation, pay 350,000 AMD as compensation for defamation, 200,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

On November 16, the defendant appealed to the Court of Appeal, and on December 7, the court received the case.

**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 2019-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing was held on October 6, 2022, to be followed by the one on January 17, 2023.

**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 court examination.

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 newscast on the Public Television on January 30, which, 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.[[69]](#footnote-69)

On July 26, 2021, the Court decided to reject the lawsuit, deciding the judgments presented on TV as value judgments, to confiscate 100.000 AMD from Aram Orbelyan in favor of *Armenian Public TV* Company CJSC as the attorney’s fee. The court judgment 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 retrial.

Another hearing of the retrial in the court od general jurisdiction was held on April 8, 2022. On September 22, the court rejected the lawsuit again, once again establishing that the data submitted by the plaintiff did not contain any defamatory phrases within the context of the given publication and could not be evaluated as defamatory.

On October 19, the plaintiff when to the Civil Court of Appeal. The appeal was accepted for proceedings on December 23.

**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.”
 A court hearing on the case were held on May 16, 2022, and the judgment, dated June 6, completely rejected the lawsuit. The plaintiff did not prove the use of the statements by the defendant, considered as defamatory. The judgment was not appealed.

**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”. [[70]](#footnote-70)

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 April 18, the defendant filed an appeal with the Civil Court of Appeal where on June 22, the judgment was overturned due to insufficiency of evidence and facts and the case was sent for a new trial. The Court of General Jurisdication held hearings on November 3 and December 21, with the next one scheduled for April 11, 2023.

 **On February 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *citizen Siranush Abelyan vs. 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.

 Court hearings on the case were held on October 13 and December 6. The next hearing was scheduled for March 31, 2023.

 **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”[[71]](#footnote-71), 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.

Court hearings on the case were held on April 26 and June 22, 2022, and the lawsuit was rejected for acceptance on October 31. On December 2, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal, where the appeal was accepted for proceedings on the 23rd.

**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.[[72]](#footnote-72)

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.

Court hearings within retrial were held on April 6, June 6, September 9, 2022 (during last session, the court passed a decision on distributing the burden of proof), and in the December 5 hearing, the court rejected Garnik Isagulyan’s motion to suspend the proceedings and appeal to the Constitutional Court. The next court hearing was scheduled for February 20, 2023.

**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 defamation 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.[[73]](#footnote-73)

On June 2, 2022, decided to leave the case without trial, on the grounds of nonappearance to the notified plaintiff in 2subsequent sessions. On August 3, the plaintiff filed an appeal against this judgment to the Court of Appeal, which was accepted for proceedings on the 15th, and was granted on November 11. On December 23, the court of general jurisdiction received the case.

 **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.[[74]](#footnote-74) The article narrated that the club, owned by Eduard Aghajanyan, violated the Commandant’s decisions by organizing a night-club style party with the participation of several dozen people in a closed space, such as his club, which is an act prohibited during the state of emergency caused by COVID-19. Eduard Aghajanyan sent a refutation text to the editorial office, but the latter did not publish it due to disagreement with the presented arguments. (For details see the annual report of 2021, and the quarterly reports of CPFE of 2022 on *www.khosq.am, Reports* section).

Court hearings on the case were held on April 6 and 22, May 23, June 16, October 10, and November 23. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**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, vs. 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 on…”.[[75]](#footnote-75) The journalist, making reference to an unidentified source, has written that the neighbors have pissed on Styopa Safaryan for serving the Prime Minister.

Court hearings were held on April 19, June 3, December 9, with the next one scheduled for April 3, 2023.

 **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.[[76]](#footnote-76) 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 and 2022 quarterly reports 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 dismiss 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.[[77]](#footnote-77) 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 a settlement 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”)[[78]](#footnote-78) and on April 8 (“NSS Confirms It is Investigating a Criminal Case against MoESCS Officials”).[[79]](#footnote-79)

 As a result of the judgment, 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 vs. Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office LLC*, 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”.[[80]](#footnote-80) 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.

In 2022, court hearings were also held on May 18, September 19, November 30, and the judgment of December 21 granted the claim partially. The media outlet was obliged to refute the defamatory information published about Arusyak Mkrtchyan and pay 150,000 AMD as an attorney’s fee.

**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 an 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 ... .”

On March 16, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, refiled again on March 28, and accepted for proceedings on April 11. The court hearing was held on June 30, with the next one scheduled on January 9, 2023.

**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) vs. 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.[[81]](#footnote-81) 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 million AMD was to be confiscated from Ani Gevorgyan in favor of the plaintiff as compensation for slander.

In 2022, court hearings on the case were held on March 21, April 26, and on May 23, Alen Simonyan’s lawsuit was partially upheld. Ani Gevorgyan was obliged to publicly refute the data considered as defamatory, pay 150,000 AMD as compensation for the damage caused by defamation, 100,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee, and 7,000 AMD as a state duty.

The defendant filed an appeal on July 13, which was accepted for proceedings on August 12. By the judgment of November 15, the appeal was partially granted, namely the text for refutation was amended, and in relation to the rest, the judgment remained unchanged. On December 19, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation.

**On March 2,** the plaintiff in the case of *journalist Hasmik Arakelyan v. The Public Television of Armenia CJSC* appealed the first instance judgment in the Civil Court of Appeal.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed March 10, 2020, with the demand to repeal the orders No 90-A, No 106-A, and No 147-A of the TV company leadership on imposing a penalty.

On November 3, 2021, the court left the lawsuit without examination, as the plaintiff's representative, having been notified, neither appeared in two consecutive court hearings, nor filed a motion to postpone the hearing or resolve the case in his absence. The plaintiff’s appeal against this judgment was granted on April 14, 2022, the case was sent to the same court, to continue the proceedings. However, no court hearings were held by the end of the year.

 **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?”[[82]](#footnote-82)
 After filing the lawsuit, on March 15, the website published a refutation, apologizing to Khachatur Sukiasyan for the concern and the damage caused.[[83]](#footnote-83) 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.[[84]](#footnote-84) 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.[[85]](#footnote-85)

In 2022, a court hearing was held on May 2, and on the 30th, the court upheld the lawsuit, obliging the defendant to publish a refutation and confiscate 120,000 AMD in favor of the plaintiff as an attorney’s reasonable fee and 4,000 AMD as a state duty.

On July 27, the defendant filed an appeal against this judgment, which was granted on December 5. Hence, the defendant was released of the obligation to publish a refutation, and the plaintiff was obliged to pay 50,000 AMD as the defendant’s attorney’s fee.

On February 2, 2021, Hayk Terteryan’s son – **Mher Terteryan**, filed another lawsuit against Hraparak Daily LLC for the same reason and with the same claims. On August 24, 2022, the case was reassigned, on the grounds oof the termination of the judge’s powers. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**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.

In 2022, court hearings were held also on June 14, September 27, and December 15. The next hearing was scheduled for March 21, 2023.

 **On March 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the preliminary court hearing on the case of *Vanadzor office of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly NGO* filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the *Antifake.am* website, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: “How Much Money did the NGOs Operating in Armenia Receive for Supporting the Handover of Artsakh,” published on the website on December 29, 2020, where, among other organizations, the name of the plaintiff was mentioned.[[86]](#footnote-86)

On December 21, 2022, the court published a judgment, rejecting the lawsuit and mentioning that the impugned statements used in the article were abstract judgments, they were not facts and were not about the plaintiff. The judgment was not appealed as of the end of the year.

**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.[[87]](#footnote-87) 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 recorded 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 under Article 1087.1(6) of the RA Civil Code.

On April 29, the plaintiff appealed the judgment in the Court of Appeal. On September 6, the appeal was granted. The Court of Appeal overturned the judgment of the Court of General Jurisidction in relation to the claims of obliging the defendant to refute the information considered as defamatory, and the case was sent to the same court for a new trial in relation to this part. The court hearing was scheduled for January 11, 2023.

**On March 11**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal against the judgment of the Court of First Instance on the case of citizen *Emma Kirakosyan vs. A-TV Television LLC* *and other citizens*, and the judgment 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.[[88]](#footnote-88) 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. (For details see CPFE’s 2019 – 2022 annual and quarterly reports in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

On October 22, 2021, the lawsuit was rejected. The Court of General Jurisdiction again found that the TV company had acted in good faith, since the impugned expressions were made by the citizens in the vox-pop, and they were to be the ones to publish a refutation, should the claim be potentially granted. On November 25, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal.

On April 11, 2022, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation and returned on May 4. On June 7, the plaintiff refiled it, and on June 22, the appeal to the Court of Cassation rejected its acceptance for proceedings.

**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 October 7, 2022, the appeal was granted by the Court of Cassation, and on November 11, the case was accepted for new proceedings, and the preliminary court hearing was scheduled for February 16, 2023.

**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.

In 2022, court hearings on the case were held also on May 31, September 26, and November 22, with the next one scheduled for March 22, 2023.

**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.”[[89]](#footnote-89) 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.”[[90]](#footnote-90) 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.[[91]](#footnote-91)

In 2022, court hearings were held also on June 22 and November 8. The next one was scheduled for February 15, 2023.

**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) vs. 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”.[[92]](#footnote-92) The lawsuit was filed on June 17, 2021.

In 2022, court hearings were also held on April 29, June 29, and on July 21, the court upheld the claim, demanding a refutation of the data considered as defamatory, also obliging the defendant to pay 200,000 AMD as an attorney’s fee and 4,000 AMD as a state duty. No appeal on this judgment was filed, the judicial act entered into legal force. The website published a refutation on October 17.[[93]](#footnote-93)

**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.[[94]](#footnote-94) 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.

In 2022, court hearings on the case were also held on June 8 and October 13. The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for January 24, 2023.

**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[[95]](#footnote-95), then on the latter[[96]](#footnote-96) websites with a difference of a few minutes. The article particularly states: “Hakob Arshakyan has made the 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.” The lawsuit was returned on April 25 for corrections. On June 9, it was refiled and returned on June 22 again. On July 19, Hakob Arshakyan filed a lawsuit for the third time, this time claiming the refutation of the data considered as defamatory and the payment of 5 million AMD as compensation.

On July 28, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. No court hearing was scheduled as of the end of the year.

 **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[[97]](#footnote-97) and January 15, 2022,[[98]](#footnote-98) 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 which houses the office of the *Political Scientists Union of Armenia*.

The first lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on March 25, the second one on May 13. A court hearing on the first case was held on October 24, and the next one was scheduled for February 3, 2023. Court hearings on the third suit were held on August 24, October 5, with the next one scheduled for Feburary 7, 2023.

**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”.[[99]](#footnote-99) 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

On April 5, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the petition for applying a means to secure the claim was rejected. Court hearings were held on June 22 and 27, with the next one scheduled for March 29, 2023.

**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, according tot eh publication, is of dubious reputation and is sold in the supermarket chain belonging to businessman Samvel Aleksanyan. Its sale is prohibited in the European Union (except Sweden) and in the Russian Federation.

On May 31, 2022, the court dismissed the proceedings of the case on the grounds of a settlement between the parties. The media outlet was obligated to publish the refutation text, proposed by the plaintiff, and the plaintiff waivered the material claim.

 **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.[[100]](#footnote-100)

On July 13, 2022, the preliminary investigation of the case was completed, a trial was held on October 13, and on the 21st, it was decided to reject the claim. The court noted that no evidence was presented to support that the impugned statements tarnished the plaintiff's business reputation. The judgment was not appealed.

 **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.[[101]](#footnote-101) 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.

Court hearings on the case were held on June 14 and December 1, with the next one scheduled January 18, 2023.

 **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.[[102]](#footnote-102)

In 2022, court hearings on the case were also held on May 30, September 7, November 16, with the next one scheduled for February 22, 2023.

**On June 2**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the *same plaintiff v. Naira Terteryan (third party, Live News Media LLC)*, demanding refutation of the information considered defamatory.

The lawsuit was filed on the same occasion as in the previous case on September 3, 2021. A court hearing was held on October 19, 2022, with the next one scheduled for March 15, 2023.

 **On July 13**, the regular session on the case of attorney Lusine Avagyan v. Naira Terteryan (Live News Media LLC as third party), with claims of refuting information considered as defamatory and compensation of damage caused to the diginity, honour and business reputation continued at the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan.

The cause of the lawsuit filed on August 10, 2021 was caused by the allegations made by Naira Terteryan during the authorial *Ditaket* program on *Livenews.am* website that Lusine Avagyan who was her ex-husband Mher Terteryan’s lawyer, apart from fulfilling her professional activity, would also interfere in their private and family life.[[103]](#footnote-103)

The court session was held on December 8, 2022, with the next one scheduled for May 10.

On September 27, 2021, **Mher Terteryan** filed another lawsuit against Live News Media LLC on the same occasion and the same claims. In 2022, court sessions were held on July 20, and October 27 the motion of the defendant Live News Media LLC on the application of the statute of limitation was granted, and the lawsuit was rejected.

The judgment was not appealed.

**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!”[[104]](#footnote-104) 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․ Photo Report”, published on June 14, where it was stated that Edgar Janibekyan was one of those detained.[[105]](#footnote-105)

On April 28, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation, which returned the appeal on May 25 due to document inaccuracies. On July 4, an appeal was submitted for the second time. On July 13, the Court of Cassation decided to leave it without examination.

**On March 31**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the court hearing on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC vs. 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.[[106]](#footnote-106) Then the journalist concludes, “The state invests, the businessman puts the money in his pocket...”

A court hearing was also held on May 18, with the next one scheduled on January 17, 2023.

**On April 1,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of*FDA Laboratory* LLC v. the *Investigative Journalists* NGO, demanding to post the refutation of the published information, and the presented response.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: “Two of the Vitamin D Drugs Registered as Biologically Active Supplements” published in *Hetq.am* belonging to the NGO, which states that in order to avoid a costly and time-consuming process, medical vitamins are often registered in violation as a supplement, food.[[107]](#footnote-107) A court hearing on the case was also held on June 13, with the next one scheduled for February 24, 2023.

**On April 1**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, on the grounds of the plaintiff’s withdrawal of the lawsuit, terminated the two lawsuits filed by Arayik Arakelyan, the former Head of the Shirak Regional Department of the Cadastre, against *168 Zham* LLC.

We should remind that the lawsuits were filed on June 18, 2021, demanding compensation for damages caused to honor and dignity, and public refutation of the information considered defamatory. The first lawsuit was caused by the article published on the website *168.am* belonging to the LLC on April 14, entitled: “The Mysterious Person Wearing a Cap and Glasses. Who is Behind the Next Staff Mess in Shirak Marz?”[[108]](#footnote-108), which states in particular, that Arayik Arakelyan, known for corruption scandals, is being tried for a post, while he is involved in several criminal cases. The second lawsuit is based on an article on the same topic, entitled: “Is Karen Sarukhanyan from My Step, the “Godfather” of the Former Head of the Cadastre Involved in a Corruption Case?”, published on April 24, which mentions that Arayik Arakelyan was involved in a scandal, by the way, together with his family.[[109]](#footnote-109)

 **On April 4, the Director of Alaverdi Medical Center CJSC Stepan Mosinyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Marz (Alaverdi residence) against journalist Larisa Paremuzyan and *CivilNet* online television (later *Civilitas* Foundation was recognized as the proper defendant), demanding public refutation of defamatory information and compensation for damages caused to honor and dignity.**

**The lawsuit, filed on April 4, was caused by an article entitled: “Alaverdi: Medical Center Surgeon's Negligence and Director's Business Interests”[[110]](#footnote-110) published on the *Civilnet.am* news website on Januray 19, which specifically describes the unhealthy atmosphere in Alaverdi Medical Center, as well as the article “The Director of Alaverdi MC - the Monopolist of the “Death” Business”, published on the same website on March 14, which stated: “...Mosinyan uses the Patho-Anatomical Department of the Medical Center as a source of enrichment.”[[111]](#footnote-111)**

**On April 7, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, the plaintiff's motion to apply injunction to put a freezing order in the amount of 3 million AMD on the property belonging to the defendants was rejected. Court hearings were also held on May 27 and 30, as well as June 16. On the basis of biased attitude, the defendant's motion for the judge's recusal was rejected. Court hearings continued on July 11, 28, September 8, and according to the court's decision of September 20, the lawsuit regarding the publication of January 19 was rejected on the grounds of statute of limitations, and the case regarding the article of March 14 was separated, and a new case was accepted for proceedings on September 26. Court sessions were held on October 28, November 28, and the next one was scheduled for January 10, 2023.**

 **On April 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the new trial on the case of *Mher Derdzyan vs. Zhoghovurd Newspaper Ltd.*

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on April 15, 2019, was caused by the newspaper’s concerns that Mher Derdzyan’s construction program could be a deliberate hoax.[[112]](#footnote-112) The plaintiff demands a public apology and 1,5 million AMD compensation for insult and slander. (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2019-2022 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*). The Court of General Jurisdiction rejected the lawsuit, after which the appeal was upheld at the Court of Appeal, the judgment was overturned and the case was sent for a retrial. The Court of Appeal found that the evidence in the case was not sufficient to justify that measures were taken by the defendant to verify the accuracy of the information.

On April 19, the Court of First Instance partially upheld the claim, obliging the defendant to apologize, publish a refutation, pay 300.000 AMD for insult, 500.000 AMD as compensation for defamation, as well as 500.000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee and 68.000 AMD as pre-paid state duty.

The defendant appealed this judgment at the Court of Appeal. After the replacement of the judge, the appeal was rejected twice, due to deficiencies in the documents. On September 29, the defendant went to the Court of Cassation where the appeal was received on December 16.

 **On April 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Marz (Vanadzor residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *teacher* *Susanna Sargsyan v. Shushanna Grigoryan*, *the correspondent of Hraparak.am website*.

We should remind that the case is being re-examined in the Court of First Instance. The lawsuit, filed on June 6, 2014, was caused by articles, entitled: “The Headmaster of Vanadzor School N8 was Fired”[[113]](#footnote-113) and “A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time”[[114]](#footnote-114) which were published on the aforementioned website on October 4 and December 5, 2013. (For details see the annual reports of CPFE for 2016-2021 in the *Reports* *section on khosq.am website*).

 On April 7, the court rejected Susanna Sargsyan's motion for the judge's recusal on the grounds of biased attitude, however, the judge was replaced due to the expiration of the secondment. A hearing on the case was also held on May 31. After the change of judge on July 7, the case was accepted for new proceedings, and sessions were also held on August 24, September 29, October 26, and December 14. The next hearing was scheduled for January 19, 2023.

**On April 7**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held the court hearing on the case of *Olymp Construction Ltd. v. Hetq Ltd.* (the founder of Hetq.am website), demanding refutation of defamatory information and a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 29, 2020 and was caused by an article, entitled: “The Construction Company Developing a New Building Refuses to Hand Over the Pumping Station to the Water Committee: Residents are Complaining” and published on *Hetq.am* website*.*[[115]](#footnote-115) Although the author of the article incorporated a comment from the representative of the construction company, too, the plaintiff did not agree to the residents’ complaint.

Court hearings on the case were also held on June 20 and September 30. The next one was scheduled for February 1, 2023.

**On April 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Narine Abrahamyan v. journalist Kristine Aghalaryan*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and payment of a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on June 2, 2017, was caused by the article entitled: “Meghri Medical Center vs. SRS” published on *Lurer.com* website, in which reference was made to Narine Abrahamyan appearing in the hot spot of a number of scandals during her professional activity.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Court hearings were also held on June 7 and August 12. No further developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On April 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to leave without trial the case of *Artak Mkhitaryan, Deputy Director for Protection of Khosrov Forest State Reserve SNCO, v. journalist Narine Kirakosyan*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity through insult and slander, and publication of refutation, and to consider the issue of court costs solved. The ruling was based on the fact that the plaintiff, being duly notified, had failed to attend two successive court hearings.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 5, 2021, and was caused by the journalist's Facebook post that some officials, including Artak Mkhitaryan, carried out illegal hunting in Syunik. After filing the lawsuit, the post was removed from Facebook.
 On April 20, 2022, the defendant appealed the decision to a higher instance court, and on May 19, the appeal was accepted for proceedings. On June 30, the Civil Court of Appeal decided to partially uphold the appeal, confiscate 100,000 AMD from the plaintiff Artak Mkhitaryan in favor of the defendant Narine Kirakosyan as an attorney's reasonable fee, and consider the issue of the rest of the court costs resolved. The judicial act was not appealed and entered into force.

**On April 12**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Medisar LLC v. News AM LLC*, *the founder of News.am news website*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation.

The lawsuit, filed on July 2, 2021, was caused by an article published on May 29 on the above-mentioned website, entitled: “Did They Get Super Profit by Purchasing a DNA Identification Device for War Victims? New Facts from a Suspicious Deal”. The website particularly stated that as a result of the tender conducted by the Scientific and Practical Center of Forensic Medicine SNCO of the RA Ministry of Justice, a contract worth 295.8 million AMD was signed with *Medisar LLC*, engaged in the supply and import of laboratory equipment and chemicals, which received a profit of at least 111 million AMD ($ 212,237) as a result of the procurement process.

Court hearings on the case were also held on June 15, July 26, and September 12. No further developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On April 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz (Artik residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *Artak Gevorgyan, Chief of Ani Community, vs. Andranik Gevorgyan, a resident of Maralik Town in the same community*, demanding refutation of the slander and compensation. The third party to the case was declared *Zhoghovurd Newspaper Edition LLC* (founder of *Armlur.am* news website).

The lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2019 and was caused by the phrase “ate it up, robbed it all” in the video and the accompanying text posted on the website on August 10: “The former chief robbed the village college and fled. What do the people of Maralik tell us?”[[117]](#footnote-117) The plaintiff demands 2 million AMD from the defendant in compensation.
 On April 21, the defendant filed a motion to leave the lawsuit without trial, based on the grounds of the plaintiff's failure to appear at the hearings. However, the Court, having verified the factual circumstances, rejected the motion by its decision of June 21. The lawsuit was rejected by the September 26 judgment of the court, and on November 24, the plaintiff appealed the judgment in a higher instance court. On December 21 the appeal was returned.

**On April 13**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Hraparak Daily* LLC *v.* *Media Initiatives Center* *NGO*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and a compensation.

The lawsuit was filed on July 19, 2021, caused by the joint program initiated by factcheck.ge website and the NGO, which reveals fake news and disinformation materials, and Facebook and Instagram block them. The media outlet thinks that selections are not objective, and in general the initiative puts pressure on the press.

A court hearing was also held on June 21. On July 6, the court partially upheld the claim, obliging Media Initiatives Center to post a note refuting its publications on the factcheck.ge website, confiscate 500,000 AMD in favor of *Hraparak daily* LLC as compensation for damage to honor, dignity and good reputation, as well as 44,000 AMD as a pre-paid state duty for the application.

On August 5, the defendant filed an appeal against this decision, which was partially granted on December 8: the judgment of the court of general jurisdiction was overturned, and the case was sent to the same court for a full new trial.

**On April 13**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Sonya Budaghyan, Head of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of Armavir Regional Administration, vs. Hzham.am and its founder, Anna Gevorgyan Private Entrepreneur*, demanding refutation of information, discrediting the honor, dignity and business reputation, and compensation. The lawsuit, filed on December 21, 2020, was caused by an article, published on above-mentioned website on Dcember 19, entitled: “Scandal! A Bribe in Exchange for a Position”.[[118]](#footnote-118) According to the article, Sonya Budaghyan took a bribe from a citizen for an appointment in the position of a school principal.

On May 30, 2022, the claim was partially granted: the media was obliged to publicly deny the information defaming Sonya Budaghyan's honor, dignity and business reputation, apologize, pay 1 million AMD for defamation, and 500,000 AMD for insult. No appeal was filed against the judgment.

**On April 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the new trial on the case of *Van-Charter LLC vs. Armenia TV CJSC*, demanding refutation of the defamation and a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 12, 2020, and was caused by an opinion about the company in relation to the wrong declarations and insufficient quality of alcohol-based sanitizer production, expressed during the *Acute Angle* program on the TV channel on April.[[119]](#footnote-119) On January 29, 2021, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the claim, finding that the defendant did not seek to discredit the plaintiff's business reputation with its publication, therefore, the disputed expressions were qualified as a value judgment. On March 5, the plaintiff appealed to the Civil Court of Appeal, where it was upheld, and the case was sent for a retrial.

In 2022, a court hearing was also held on November 29, with the next one scheduled for March 14, 2023.

**On April 18**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected citizen Emma Kirakosyan’s lawsuit against the *Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC*, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to her honor and dignity and refutation of defamation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on January 10, 2019, was caused by *The Single Window* program broadcast on *Public TV* on December 10, 2018.[[120]](#footnote-120) The plaintiff finds that the program contained “false information” about her. (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2019-2021 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*).

 The Court justified the rejection of the claim by the fact that the disputed expressions were value judgments based on certain facts. On May 23, 2022, the plaintiff appealed the judgment to a higher instance court, where on June 17, the appeal was accepted for proceedings. On September 19 the case was reassigned, and on October 10, it was again accepted for proceedings. No further developments on the case were recorded by the end of the year.

**On April 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC* *v. journalist Oleg Safonov and* *168 Hours Ltd.*, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation and pecuniary compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on January 25, 2021, was caused by the article published by Oleg Safonov on *168.am* website on December 31, 2020, entitled: “On Expected Sharp Increase in Electricity Tariffs in 2022 and Corruption Risks in the Development of Solar Electricity․ Why is Everyone Silent?”.[[121]](#footnote-121) The author of the article described the activity of the plaintiff company as suspicious, accusing it of entering into a corrupt deal with the RA Government through the mediation of the RA President.

On May 12, the court decided to reject the claim and confiscate 200,000 AMD in favor of the defendant as the attorney’s fee. On October 11, the plaintiff submitted a complaint to the Court of Appeal, which was returned on November 8. On November 16, it was submitted again and accepted for proceedings on December 8.

**On April 29,** publicist Vahram Tokmajyan personally insulted journalist Mher Arshakyan and his family on Facebook. The reason is the journalist's professional activity: in particular, the latter's article about the fact that the procession of the RA Prime Minister fatally struck a pregnant woman in Yerevan. The author of the post accuses the journalist of writing an article on blood and thereby discrediting the authorities.[[122]](#footnote-122) Later, Vahram Tokmajyan apologized to the journalist, whose text was available only for a few hours. The CPFE submitted a report about this incident to the RA Prosecutor's Office. The latter forwarded the Facebook post to the prosecutor's office of Malatia-Sebastia administrative district. On May 13, the criminal case initiated under Article 137.1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia regarding grave insult was dismissed on October 28, after the decriminalization of the same Article, on the grounds of the absence of corpus delicti.

**On April 29,** Ruben Khachatryan, the former Director of the Yerevan Zoo, filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against citizen Manuk Manukyan and Iravunk Media Ltd., demanding refutation of defamatory information and monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The lawsuit was caused by the points voiced by Manuk Manukyan on the air of *Iravunk TV* on April 1, according to which the Zoo was standing on the edge of the abyss, because for years, in particular, during the ownership of Ruben Khachatryan, a corruption scheme was operating: public funds were embezzled, and animals were neglected.[[123]](#footnote-123)

The lawsuit was returned on May 10 because of deficiencies, refiled on the 19th and accepted for proceedings on June 3. Hearings on the case were also held on September 2, November 28, December 12, with the next one scheduled for April 4, 2023.

 **On May 4,** the proceedings on the case of *former MP Nikolay Baghdasaryan vs.* *Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office LLC*, were dismissed on the grounds of the plaintiff’s withdrawal of the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on September 16, 2021, demanding a public apology and a compensation in the amount of 500,000 AMD for the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the article, published in the *Zhoghovurd newspaper* and on Armlur.am website belonging to the same company, entitled: “The Chamber of Advocates is Targeted. The Government is Looking for a Candidate for the Post of Chairman of the Chamber of Advocates”, which particularly stated “Back in April 2014, Ara Zohrabyan fired Nikolay Baghdasaryan from the post of the Chairman of the Chamber of Advocates, after which Baghdasaryan took every dirty step against Zohrabyan.”[[124]](#footnote-124)

 **On May 4,** the Director of the National Center of Aesthetics Vahan Badalyan, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Anzhela Tovmasyan, editor-in-chief of the Hayeli.am news website, demanding the confiscation of 1 million AMD for the damage caused to her honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the thoughts expressed by the defendant during the press conference on November 21, 2021, that there is an unhealthy atmosphere in the National Center of Aesthetics. According to Artur Atoyan, the defender of interests of the center, they tried to solve the issues out of court, but the editor did not get in touch, so they had to go to court. By the way, the press conference was not saved in the archive of the website.

On May 16, the lawsuit was returned due to the omissions in the documents. As of December 30, a new lawsuit was not filed.

**On May 10,** *Global Gold Mining LLC* filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against *Yerkir Editorial Office LLC* (the founder of the *Yerkir.am* news website), demanding refutation of the defamatory information in the published article. On April 6, *Yerkir.am* wrote that 140 employees of the bankrupt *Global Gold Mining* have not received salaries for 10 years,[[125]](#footnote-125) and then on April 11, published the LLC’s refutation in regard to the previously made statement.[[126]](#footnote-126) On April 12, the publication entitled “Global Gold Mining's Claims Are Clearly False: Unpaid Employees Deny GGM's Refutation” followed [[127]](#footnote-127), which became the cause of the lawsuit. On May 23, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, on June 10, it was refiled, and on the 23rd, was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing on the case was held on October 12, with the next one scheduled for January 18, 2023.

 **On May 16,** Ruben Melikyan, former Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, representative of the opposition forces, urged on Facebook to “unlike” the page of *Radio Liberty* and joined the campaign to publicly condemn the media. According to him, “that propaganda tool was, first of all, the number one “informational sponsor” of the conspiratorial power grab in 2018, and today it has openly engaged in the propaganda of Turkification of Armenia.”[[128]](#footnote-128)

**On May 25**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a reassignment on the case of *citizen Larisa Harutyunyan vs. Shark LLC (the legal entity representing Channel 5 TV) on the grounds of the change of the judge*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 26, 2021, demanding publication of refutation. It was caused by the report spread through the *Haylur* news program of *Channel* *5 TV*, entitled: “She Forces Me to Grieve; the Neighbor doesn’t Allow to Insert a Khachkar in Tribute to Heroes”.[[129]](#footnote-129) The plaintiff suggested the media outlet that they publish refutation since the disagreement among fellow villagers has nothing to do with khachkar, but a routine argument, and the assertion in the title does not correspond to the reality. According to the lawsuit, the media admitted that there had been an imprecision, but refused to publish appropriate refutation.

A court hearing was held on July 8, 2022, with the next one scheduled for January 17, 2023.

 **On May 30,** Hayk Khanumyan, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Artsakh, filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak daily, demanding refutation of the defamation and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the articles published in the newspaper that Hayk Khanumyan is facing several criminal cases related to corruption and abuse of powers, and the RA authorities support Khanumyan and do everything to exonerate him from liability.[[130]](#footnote-130)
 On June 13, the lawsuit was returned for corrections and was refiled on the 28th of the same month. On July 11, it was again accepted for proceedings. On September 5, the court defined the burden of proof for the parties. The next hearing was scheduled for January 24, 2023.

 **On May 31,** Ruben Arakelyan, the former Director of *the Center for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise SNCO*, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the *Power of Speech NGO* (*4rd.am* website), demanding public refutation of the factual information considered defamatory. The lawsuit was caused by the article entitled: “Reform According to Nikol Pashinyan” published on the website on April 20, about the numerous violations recorded during the internal audit in the SNCO, as a result of which the culprits were fired, and the initiated criminal case related to the violations was archived. The publication also mentioned that the Director of the organization Ruben Arakelyan, together with his relative - the Head of the Training Center of the SNCO Grigor Basentsyan, extorted the money allocated for the SNCO.[[131]](#footnote-131)

On May 9, the website published the plaintiff's letter demanding refutation of defamatory information about the above-mentioned 2 officials.[[132]](#footnote-132) Nevertheless, Ruben Arakelyan filed a lawsuit with the Court. On June 14, the lawsuit was returned for corrections. On July 15, a new lawsuit was filed which was accepted for proceedings on the 27th. A court hearing was held on November 25, with the next one scheduled for April 25, 2023.

 **On June 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to distribute the burden of proof on the case of *citizen Ashot Parazyan v. Tert AM LLC , the founder of Tert.am news website*.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed by Ashot Parazyan on August 16, 2019, was caused by an article, entitled: “Vahe Parazyan, Who Reported Against Samvel Karapetyan’s Nephew, Has a Criminal Backgound”, and published on the website on July 16 of the same year.[[133]](#footnote-133) On January 21,2021, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the lawsuit, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The court based its decision on the assertion that the impugned expressions were value judgments.

The plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal, which upheld the appeal, finding that the Court of First Instance had not conducted a comprehensive, objective investigation of the evidence in the case. On October 13, 2021, the case was reaccepted by the Court of General Jurisdiction for a retrial.

 A court hearing was held on December 1, 2022, and the next one was scheduled for April 28, 2023.

**On June 10,** Bagrat Yesayan, Director of *Yerkir Media TV Company*, was detained and arrested by National Security Service officers. He was charged with participating in mass riots, as well as with the articles of obstructing the lawful professional activity of a journalist. That charge is related to the attack on the Yerevan office of *Radio Liberty* station on the night of November 10, 2020: the video footage shows that Bagrat Yesayan was among the people who broke into the office. Later, the motion for detention was rejected, Yesayan was released.

The General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia informed the CPFE that the part separated from the criminal case in 2020 was sent to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan with the indictment approved on June 30 of this year. The preliminary investigation of the arrest continues.

**On June 14,** citizen Arsen Ghukasyan filed a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against *Media News LLC* (the founder of the *Medianews.am* website), demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation for damage. The lawsuit was caused by the news published on the website on May 26, according to which the relatives of the victims of the 44-day war, including the plaintiff, are politicizing the ongoing court hearings on charges of treason and using them against the current authorities.

On June 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. Court hearings were held on October 31 and December 14, with the next one scheduled for April 4, 2023.

 **On June 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to leave without trial the case of *Bari Samaratsi Ltd. v. journalist Teresa Asatryan (third party: Bats TV Ltd.)*, demanding a refutation and a compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation.

The lawsuit was filed on February 24, 2020, and was caused by Teresa Asatryan's statement about Bari Samaratsi’s production, voiced during *Bats Or* program, according to which this meat product was inedible, even though it was told to be a leader on the market, because its owner was in close relations with Serzh Sargsyan. The plaintiff also demanded 2 million AMD in compensation.

The court’s decision was based on the fact that the notified plaintiff failed to appear at two successive court hearings, nor did he file a motion to postpone the trial or settle the case in absentia, and the defendant did not file a motion to continue the trial.

**On June 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Arthur Vanetsyan, former Head of the NSS and leader of the I Have Honor Alliance of the National Assembly, v. Gurgen (Gagik) Melkonyan, a member of the Civil Contract faction of the National Assembly (third party:* *Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC*), demanding refutation of the defamatory information, publication of the refutation text, and compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity.

The lawsuit, filed on August 19, 2021, was caused by Melkonyan's thoughts on Arthur Vanetsyan' s activities during the Artsakh 44-day war on July 20 expressed during an interview with Petros Ghazaryan on *Public TV*. The defendant particularly said: “Vanetsyan went and ran away. He went and came back in the blink of an eye. They went and got there, collected the weapons, knew that there were a lot of weapons dumped there, collected them and brought them to Armenia. Their goal was to bring weapons”.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Court hearings on the case were held on August 4, November 17 and December 27. The next court hearing was scheduled for March 15, 2023.

**On June 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan vs. the Irates social-political newspaper and eponymous electronic website*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to the honor and dignity through slander and insult.

The lawsuit was filed on October 1, 2019 and was caused by the article published in the September 6 issue of the newspaper, entitled: “You Only Used to Hold the Water Bottle for Nikol: Anna Hakobyan”.

Court hearings on the case were also held on September 29, December 7 and 26. The next court hearing was scheduled for March 6, 2023.

**On July 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of Aram Mamikonyan, a lawyer and former employee of the Control Chamber against Karmen Davtyan (third party: *Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office LLC*), claiming an obligation of a compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, refuting the information considered as defamation and making an apology. The plaintiff also demands compensation of 2 million drams.

The lawsuit was caused by Karmen Davtyan's article published on July 30 on *Armlur.am* website, entitled: “Immorality also has a limit”.[[135]](#footnote-135) The author accused the plaintiff of corruption and bribery. By the way, at the end of the article, the editorial office stated that it was not responsible for the author's opinion.

On July 22, 2022, the court decided to dismiss the proceedings of the case on the ground that Karmen Davtyan passed away on August 28, 2021.

 **On July 8,** Satik Seyranyan, the founder of *168.am* website, informed that Kristine Grigoryan, the Human Rights Defender, targeted media outlets, organizaing a campaign that slandered and incited hatred towards non-progovernmental media.[[136]](#footnote-136) In particular, the Human Rights Defender accused *168.am* in disseminating false information. However, it turned out that the piece of news that the Human Rights Defender disagreed with was not authored by *168.am*. The latter, making reference to the original source website, re-published the article, citing a citizen’s words about the work of the HRD.

**On July 11, after reassignment at Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction, the lawsuit filed by *Spayka LLC v. Zhamanak daily LLC and First Armenian News Platform (1in.am website)* was accepted for proceedings,** demanding refutation of defamation, discrediting business reputation and publication of its reply, public apology and confiscation of compensation for the damage caused.

The lawsuit was filed on April 15, 2021, caused by the article published in the *Zhamanak* daily and *1in.am* website on March 11, entitled: “Slavery at Spayka: Employees work also on Sundays without pay”.

On October 26, 2022, the court defined the burden of proof, and the next session was scheduled for March 22, 2023.

 **On July 12**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund* CJSC vs. *Hraparak Daily* LLC and Hrant Bagratyan, former Prime Minister of the RA, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation and monetary compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on October 20, 2021, was caused by the opinion of Hrant Bagratyan, published on *Hraparak.am* on September 28, which once more reestablishes the media’s standpoint that the deal concluded by the above-noted Fund on July 14, in line with which the Arabic company *Air Arabia* was granted the status of national airline, is not transparent for the public and contains many corruption risks.[[137]](#footnote-137)

On October 27, 2022, a court hearing was held on the case with the next one scheduled for February 1, 2023.

 **On July 12,** the Court ofGeneral Jurisidction of Yerevan held the pre-trial session on the case of *Arman Martirosyan vs.* *Exclusive Media Holding* LLC (founder of *Exclusive.am* news page), demanding refutation of slander, apology for insult, compensation, publication of the conclusive part of the court judgment.

The lawsuit, filed on October 22, 2021, was caused by an article, published on September 29, entitled: “Arayik Harutyunyan Rewarded the Owner of Entertainment Clubs with a Weapon: for What Act of Heroism? For running the clubs during the war?”[[138]](#footnote-138)

A court hearing was also held on November 7, 2022, with the next one scheduled for March 10, 2023.

**On July 12,** journalist Tehime Yenokyan reported a crime on her Faceboook page: again her window was shot at from an unknown weapon which broke the glass and the round landed in the living-room of her apartment.[[139]](#footnote-139) The reporter informed that earlier, on June 29, there was a similar incident, too, and on March 9, unidentified individuals committed an act of arson at the enterance door to her apartment.

 In response to the inquiry by CPFE, the RA Prosecutor’s Office informed that criminal proceedings had been initiated in relation to all the three above-mentioned cases which were later consolidated. On July 13, someone was arrested in relation to this case and was charged later.

 **On July 29,** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted the appeal of the plaintiff on the case of citizen *Erik Yeghinyan vs. CMG LLC (*the founder of *Factinfo* news website) after the Court of Cassation granted the Yeghinyan’s claim on June 17 and repealed the decision of the Court of Appeal, dated November 26, 2021, on returning the appeal challenging the judgment of the first instance court to reject the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on February 14, 2019, was caused by the September 10, 2018 publication on the website, entitled: “The Prisoner Attempted a Suicide Because He Was Not Taken to the Dentist”.[[140]](#footnote-140) (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2019-2022 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*). The plaintiff claimed the confiscation of 1 million AMD as compensation for insult and defamation, obliging the defendant to apologize in writing and publish a refutation.

On October 31, 2022, the appeal was partially granted. the judgment of the first instance court, dated May 4, 2021, was overturned, and the case was sent to the court of first instance for a new examination at full scale. The case was accepted here on December 30.

**On August 2,** Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC filed a lawsuit against Pastinfo LLC, claiming a refutation of the information defaming the business reputation and a payment of monetary compensation. The cause of the lawsuit was an article, published on PastInfo.am website owned by the LLC on June 25. The article stated, that in violation of the RA Law on Freedom of Information, the Fund failed to disclose the contact information of foreign members of the Board of Directors, and the inquiries made by the editors sent to the Fund office did not reach the right addresses.[[141]](#footnote-141) On August 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. On the same day, the plaintiff filed a motion to place a lien on the property and funds belonging to Pastinfo LLC in the amount of 5 million AMD, which was rejected by the court's ruling of August 17. On September 8, the plaintiff filed an appeal against that ruling, the appeal was accepted for proceedings on September 27, and on October 11 it was rejected. A court hearing on the case in the first instance court was also held on November 22, with the next one scheduled for March 21, 2023.

 **On August 4,** the Russian peacekeepers prohibited Zhirayr Voskanyan, the correspondent of 1in.am news website and cameraman Khachatur Yesayan from entering Artsakh. The peacekeepers behaved rudely, holding machine guns at the media representatives and saying: “If you want problems, we will easily create them. We are the ones to solve problems here, we are ones to decide.”[[142]](#footnote-142) Then, the journalist and the cameraman were forced to sit in a military armored vehicle and were taken to other peacekeepers who were wearing masks. Hours later, Zhirayr Voskanyan and Khachatur Yesayan returned to Armenia.

 **On August 8,** the Russian peacekeepers prohibited Ani Gevorgyan, the correspondent of MediaHub.am news website, from entering Artsakh.[[143]](#footnote-143) The reporter turned to the Foreign Affairs Minister of Artsakh David Babayan on the matter, who answered that there were security related issues and she should try to come some other rime. The reporter could not receive any clarification from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

 **On August 12,** NA MP Khachatur Sukiasyan filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Vazgen Sagahatelyan, the Press Secretary of the Reviving Armenia party (third party: NewsAM LLC), with claims of public apology, refutation of information considered as defamatory as well as payment of a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by the ideas expressed by Saghatelyan during the July 29 demonstration of the opposition in Yerevan according which an MP was involved in the business of licensing the gas cylinders in cars and was benefitting from the relevant decree of the Government. The speech under question was published by News.am website, belonging to NewsAM LLC, involved in the case as third party. On August 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the plaintiff’s motion of placing a lien on the property, as well as the monetary assets of the defendant in an amount equal to the claim, was rejected.

 Court hearings on the case were also held on October 31, December 7, and the next one was scheduled for April 20, 2023.

 **On August 19,** Arayik Harutyunyan, the Chief of Staff of the RA Prime Minister filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak Daily LLC with claims of refuting the information considered as defamatory and payment of compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article, published on Hraparak.am website, owned by the LLC, on July 31, with the heading “Hrach is inside, Avinyan is outside: there will be no clashes” which stated that Arayik Harutyunyan and his brother, too, who had a private business and was taking over all well-funded projects would play an active role in city management.[[144]](#footnote-144) On August 30, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

 Court hearings were held on November 28, the next one was scheduled on February 13, 2023.

 **On August 23,** citizen Mariam Hovsepyan filed a lawsuit against International Media Holding LLC (the founder of Lurer.com news website) with claims of public apology, refutation of defamation and payment of compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article with the heading: “The court fined citizen Mariam Hovsepyan for an insulting conduct on social media and forced to apologize in writing”, published in Lurer.com on July 7 which stated that citizen Hovsepyan was notorious for her insulting, provocatory and unilateral statements about public institutions, political figures, journalists and business people and was fined at the amount of 200,000 AMD by a court ruling for the insults she made on Facebook.[[145]](#footnote-145) On August 31, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. No developments were recorded by the end of the year.

 **On August 23,** Mariam Hovsepyan filed a lawsuit against Slaq Media LLC (the founder of Slaq.am news website) for the same reason and with the same claims.[[146]](#footnote-146) It was returned because of the deficiencies in the application. On September 30, Mariam Hovsepyan filed a new lawsuit against Slaq Media LLC which was accepted for proceedings on October 12. A court hearing was scheduled for January 12, 2023.

 **On September 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled not to try the case of *businessman Ashot Grigoryan v. 24News LLC*, and Tigran Seyranyan, the RA Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, claiming compensation of damage to the honor, dignity and business reputation. The Court substantiated this judgment on the ground that the notified plaintiff failed to appea in two successive court hearings, failed to submit a motion for postponing the trial or resolving the case in his absence, and the defendants failed to motion for the continuation of the trial of the case.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 27, 2018, was caused by a video, entitled: “Chance Comer in Yerevan: Who is the Big Schemer, Initiating the Restart of Nairit?” that was published on the YouTube channel of the website.[[147]](#footnote-147) (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2018-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

 **On September 13,** NewsAM LLC filed a lawsuit with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan vs. Hraparak Daily LLC with claims to oblige to refute the information considered as defamatory, make a public apology for the insult and compensate the damage caused to the business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by an article, published on Hraparak.am website on August 10, [[148]](#footnote-148) which stated that upon a request from the Ministry of Defence News.am refuted a news story on an unpleasant event, featuring the Minister.[[149]](#footnote-149)

 On September 26, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for February 21, 2023.

 **On September 14, the former Mayor of Yerevan Hayk Marutyan filed a lawsuite with Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the public figure Hovhannes Shahinyan (with Hayeli Club NGO as the third party), claiming a compensation of 2 million AMD for the damage caused to honour and dignity.**

 **The lawsuit was caused by an interview, published on** Hayeli.am website that is owned by the NGO and entitled “Hayko Marutyan is a Failed Clown: Hovhannes Shahinyan”. The interview was held live on the youtube channel of the website, where Shahinyan in particular stated that there was widespread embezzlement in the municipaty during Marutyan’s tenure.[[150]](#footnote-150)
 On September 29, the lawsuit was returned because of deficiencies in the documents, it was refiled on October 17 and was returned on the 21st, upon the plaintiff’s request. The latter withdrew the lawsuit.

 **On September 14,** the Azerbaijani forces tareted reporters, fulfilling their professional duties, in the Sotk village of Gegharkunik marz, RA, shooting from the artillery in their direction twice.[[151]](#footnote-151) Vahe Ksotandyan from Public TV, cameraman Seyran Antonyan, the correspondent of ArmenPress News Agency Karen Khachatryan, photographer Hayk Manukyan, cameraman Hovhannes Mkrtchyan, the correspondent of Radar Armenia news website Hayk Magoyan were in the journalists’ group. The reporters were not wounded or injured in any other way.

 **On September 15,** a conflict emerged in the National Assembly between the MPs of the ruling party and the representatives of a number of media representatives, accredited in the Parliament. Thus, Ani Gevorgyan, a correspondent from MediaHub.am news website, and Kristine Poghosyan, an MP from the Civil Contract faction got into an argument. In particular, the latter threatened she would strike with the phone, and Ani Gevorgyan responded that the MP belonged in the street.[[152]](#footnote-152) A tension built up in the interactions between Syuzi Badoyan, the correspondent of Yerevan.Today news website and some MPs.

 **On the same day** the Speaker of the NA Alen Simonyan, making a decision on his sole discretion, instructed the law-enforcement officers to remove Syuzi Badoyan and Ani Gevorgyan from the NA building, for disrputing the normal operations of the NA. 11 journalistic organizations made a joint statement on this occasion, condemning the pressure against media representatives.

 As in the case of physical violence related to the same case, which we presented in the previous section, in this case, too, no criminal proceedings were initiated, because the report did not document such an event, action or inaction that could reasonably be given a preliminary legal assessment of compliance with any act provided for by the RA Criminal Code. This information was provided by the RA Prosecutor's Office in response to the CPFE’s inquiry.

**On September 27,** the Galatv.am website was hacked by Azerbaijanis. As a result, the operations of the website were disrupted, and a number of materials were deleted. The Azerbaijanis uploaded the photos of their fallen on the Home page of the website and left a note that they would never forget September 27. Later, the normal operation of the website was restored by specialists.

**On October 7**, the Factor.am news website received an official letter from the Russia’s Federal Service of Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Media. This entity, referring to the decision of the General Prosecutor's Office of Russia, demanded that the media outlet removed the information disseminated in violation of the Russian law. [[153]](#footnote-153) The matter was about a publication of April 4, which contained the assessment of the European Union regarding the bloody atrosities by the Russian troops in the Ukrainian settlement of Bucha. The media outlet did not comply with the request of "Roskomnadzor", as a result of which the website was blocked in the territory of the Russian Federation.

 **On October 10**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of businessman Levon Marcos against 24News Ltd., seeking refutation of the information that damages his honor, dignity and business reputation.

 The lawsuit was caused by the article published on 24news.am website on May 21, titled "Fraud of 300 million dollars. How was the biggest financial fraud attempt in the country prevented?”[[154]](#footnote-154) The article, in particular, refers to the criminal case initiated against Marcos in Armenia, and states the certificate issued by the World Bank helped to reveal that Levon Marcos had issued $ 300 million counterfeit bonds, thus trying to fulfill the biggest financial fraud in the history of Armenia.

On November 7, 2022, the Court ruled to endorse the settlement, signed between the parties on October 6.

 **On October 17**, businessman Ashot Khlghatyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of Common Jurisdiction of Yerevan against lawyer Lernik Hovhannisyan with claims to publicly deny the defamatory information and pay a compensation. Investigating Journalists NGO was recognized as the third party in the case, and the reason for the lawsuit was the open letter addressed to the RA Prime Minister and published on September 8 on Hetq.am website that belongs to the NGO.[[155]](#footnote-155) According to this piece, the gas station belonging to the lawyer's client was illegally operated by the plaintiff Ashot Khlghatyan. A criminal case was initiated, but the return of the property was delayed because, according to the defendant, the relevant officials, pursuing a common interest with the offender manifested corrupt behavior and openly did everything to benefit from the fruits of the illegal operation of the gas station. On November 2, the lawsuit was returned for corrections and was submitted on the 18th. It was accepted for proceedings on December 1.

**On November 2,** lawyer Tigran Yegoryan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan *against Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Board LLC and Union of Journalists of Armenia NGO*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The reason for the lawsuit was the statement, made by the Union of Journalists of Armenia on October 3 in defense of the *Zhoghovurd* daily newspaper after an incident, when the former official Samvel Kharazyan, as Tigran Yegoryan's client, filed a second lawsuit against the media outlet.[[156]](#footnote-156) In particular, the statement said that the editorial office had reasonable suspicion that the plaintiff and especially lawyer Yegoryan were pursuing the goal of harming the newspaper: “The editorial staff of the media outlet does not rule out that Nikol Pashinyan’s government personally instructed the lawyer Yegoryan, favored by the Cabinet, to persecute this media outlet.”

On November 11, the claim was returned because of the deficiencies in the documents, as well as the lack of clarity in the presented claims. As of December 30, no new claim was submitted.

**On November 3**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a hearing on the case of Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, Acting Rector of YSU (currently, rector), filed a lawsuit to against *Media Plus LLC* and *Platform of Free News* news and non-governmental organization, founders of *Yerevan.today* and *Politik.am,* demanding refutation of defamatory data, apology for the inflicted insult and compensation for slander and humiliation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was caused by the article, published on *Yerevan.today* on August 18, entitled: “When are You Going to Name YSU after Soros?”[[157]](#footnote-157), which states if Hovhannes Hovhannisyan is ultimately appointed in the capacity of the Rector, “one step will remain, which is to name YSU after Soros…”. In the same lawsuit Hovhannisyan argues nickname, ascribed to him “Sorosian” in the feature, published on *Politik.am* on August 4, entitled: “Sorosian Hovhannes Hovhannisyan will be appointed as the Acting Rector of YSU”.[[158]](#footnote-158)

The next court hearing was scheduled for January 24, 2024.

 **On November 7**, Khachatur Sukiasyan, an MP from the National Assembly Civil Contract faction, shouted at Arpi Sukiasyan, the reporter of Channel 5 TV, during a briefing with journalists. In particular, the MP did not allow the journalist to finish the question, then referred to the media's political patronage, linking it to the second president of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, and called the latter a thief, a bandit, who engaged in embezzlement. “You should join your owner and bring the billions back, you have no right to be called a media outlet...”[[159]](#footnote-159) Channel 5 TV announced that it will take legal action against Sukiasyan's defamatory and false statements. On November 25, the media outlet filed a lawsuit with the court. For details, see *Other Events* section of the report.

**On November 14,** journalists asked questions to RA Defense Minister Suren Papikyan at the National Assembly, to which Andranik Kocharyan, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Defense and Security Affairs of the National Assembly, said: “It would be very nice if you served on the front line as diligently as now.”[[160]](#footnote-160) On the next day, speaking from the NA podium, Andranik Kocharyan said that the day before the journalists had stood as a Chinese wall in front of Suren Papikyan, and if they had participated in the 25-day conscription, those Chinese walls would have disappeared.[[161]](#footnote-161)

**On November 14**, the former deputy prosecutor of Shirak marz Hovhannes Poghosyan filed a lawsuit against 168 Zham LLC and journalist Gohar Savzyan in the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction with demands to refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article “Who is the candidate for the position of the prosecutor of Shirak region?” published on the 168.am website, owned by LLC on October 15, where the author attributed a number of actions to Hovhannes Poghosyan.[[162]](#footnote-162) In particular, “someone who, during the days of the 44-day war, organized a party with alcoholic beverages and music in one of Gyumri's saunas, claims to be the prosecutor of Shirak region... on the day when they were burying the policemen from Shirak who fell in the House of Culture in Shushi and when the Azerbaijanis had already occupied Jrakan and Hadrut.”

Later, on November 9, the website wrote that Deputy Prosecutor of Shirak Marz Hovhannes Poghosyan did not pass the prosecutors’ attestation exam and was dismissed from his post.[[163]](#footnote-163)

On November 28, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, but a new one was not submitted.

**On December 13,** the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan rule to leave the case of David Galstyan, advisor to the RA former Minister of Defense, against *Radio Liberty and its director Hrayr Tamrazyan*, without examination, with the former demanding compensation for the damage caused to his honor and dignity, as well as public refutation of defamatory information. The ruling was based on the fact that the notified plaintiff had not participated in two successive court hearings, nor did he file a motion to postpone the hearing of the case or settle the case in his absence, and the defendants did not motion to continue the hearing of the case.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on March 9, 2021, caused by the publications on the media outlet about the official duties of Davit Galstyan, particularly the trade of weapons and various deals.

**On December 14**, the journalist of Oragir.news news website Gevorg Emin-Teryan published a Facebook post: “As a sign of protest, the Christmas tree in the main square should be put to fire”, [[164]](#footnote-164) after which he was invited to the police for questioning. He was charged with an act provided for in Article 329.2(3) of the RA Criminal Code, that is, " Public speech instigating or propagating hatred, discrimination, intolerance or hostility towards a person or a group of persons based on racial, national, ethnic or social origin, religion, political or other views, or other personal and social circumstances, as well as disseminating material or object for that purpose with the use of publicly displayed creative works, media or information or communication technologies.”

In response to an inquiry sent by the CPFE, the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Armenia stated that it had sent the post for forensic verification. On December 14, criminal proceedings were initiated and a public prosecution was initiated against the journalist. The investigation is ongoing.

**On December 20**, Pretty Way LLC, which is the owner of Vesta electrical appliances store chain, submitted a lawsuit to the Court of General Jurisdiction in Yerevan against Murk LLC, the founder of Mitk.am website, and journalist Simon Sargsyan, claiming to oblige them to apologize and refute the defamatory information detrimental to their business reputation and pay monetary compensation. The cause of the lawsuit is the article “Stay away from the Վեստա-Vesta furniture store, they are inhumane” published on the website on December 8, where the author, describing his own experience, told how impolite, deceitful and inhumane the menioned store was.[[165]](#footnote-165)

As of the end of the year, the claim was not accepted for proceedings.

**On December 20**, Hayk Hovhannisyan, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Yerevan Metro, filed a lawsuit in the Shirak Marz Court of General Jurisdiction against Paylak Fahradian, the editor of Irakanum.am website, with claims to oblige him to refute the information defaming his honor, dignity and business reputation and pay a monetary compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was an article, under the heading “Sargsyan’s Close Friend in the Spotlight of Law Enforcement” published on the website on November 18.[[166]](#footnote-166) It stated that Hovhannisyan enjoyed the patronage of the Mayor of Yerevan. In particular, the article stated that Hayk Hovhannisyan appointed his acquaintances and relatives to positions, and violations of law were found in the company he managed.

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on December 29.

**On December 22**, the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against V.I.V. Today and Tomorrow LLC, the founder of Ankakh.com news websitesite, claiming compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. The lawsuit was caused by an article published on December 9 under the heading, “Are Alen Simonyan and Vahagn Khachaturyan Making Purchases with State Funds?”[[167]](#footnote-167) The site specifically noted that the President of the RA and the Speaker of the National Assembly documented the purchase of their clothes as state procurement, namely under representative expenses, but the purchased goods were added to their personal wardrobe. In addition, according to the website, these purchases were made from the Gritti LLC chain of stores owned by Sedrak Kocharyan, the eldest son of the 2nd President of the Republic of Armenia Robert Kocharyan, and hereby the political differences were ignored. The lawsuit was not accepted for proceedings as of the end of the year.

**On December 27**, 11 journalistic organizations issued a statement warning that the media and specialized organizations were forbidden to reach the part of Lachin region where a large group of Azerbaijanis, whom the official Baku presents as “environmentalists and activists”, blocked the only life road, connecting Artsakh to Armenia and the outside world. The list of the media organizations, deprived of the right to receive information due to the unjustified ban of RA police and National Security Service employees, as well as Russian peacekeepers, included Radio Liberty, Factor.am and Civilnet news websites, Journalists’ Club Asparez, etc.

**On December 29**, journalist Tatul Hakobyan reported in a Facebook post that in one of the interviews on Civilnet.am website, former commander of the Artsakh Defense Army Samvel Babayan urged to kill him in one of his statement, saying that in 1998 those responsible for the coup carried out in Armenia, including Babayan, did not allow a dignified peace to be established.[[168]](#footnote-168) In his post, Tatul Hakobyan accepted Babayan’s statement as a call for violence against him, stating that he would go to court, filing a lawsuit against the media outlet and Samvel Babayan, too. However, later, when CivilNet removed the problematic part of the interview from the broadcasted material, Tatul Hakobyan gave up the idea of going to court, considering it a waste of time.[[169]](#footnote-169)

The case was also addressed by the RA HRD, considering the targeting of the journalist as unacceptable.[[170]](#footnote-170)

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

*In 2022, the CPFE recorded* ***115*** *facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. In only* ***6*** *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. The lawsuit was filed on December 27, 2021. In 2022, court hearings on the case were held on April 20, August 8, October 3, and on the 18th, the lawsuit was rejected by the court's decision. On November 1, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal. The appeal was returned on November 9 and was refiled on the 29th, and the proceedings were accepted on December 12. A court hearing was scheduled for May 25.

**On January 5,** *Transparency International Anticorruption Center NGO* and *Civilitas Foundation* (the founder of Civilnet.am news website) 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 supports 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 and accepted for proceedings on May 30. Court hearings on the case were held on August 2, September 15 and 30, and November 1. On November 22, the lawsuit was rejected by the court’s decision. The judicial act was not appealed.

 **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 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.[[171]](#footnote-171) By the inquiry, the website asked to indicate how many were killed by the enemy, how many were killed because of tense interpersonal relations 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.[[172]](#footnote-172) The website writes that all the terms prescribed by law have expired, but the agency has not responded in any way.

 **On January 26,** the Center for Freedom of Information sent inquiries to a number of public administration and local self-government bodies, asking them to share the procedure for receiving information requests (a copy of that document), as well as inform about the procedure for registering inquires for information received through social media channels. For various reasons, 6 responses from the following entities were evaluated as incomplete: Ministry of Defense, Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body, Statistical Committee, Urban Planning, Technical and Fire Safety Inspectorate, RA Police, National Security Service. The surveys were left unanswered by 3 agencies: the municipalities of Gyumri and Vanadzor, the Health and Labor Inspection Body.

 **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 judgment 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 those persons, etc.[[173]](#footnote-173)

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 noted that ARF members discriminated against journalists when providing information.[[174]](#footnote-174)

**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.[[175]](#footnote-175)

**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.[[176]](#footnote-176)

**On February 15**, the Administrative Court held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Freedom of Information Center of Armenia vs. 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on May 19, 2022, and the June 9th judgment of the court granted the claim, namely the defendant was obligated to provide the requested information.

On July 15, the defendant appealed the judgment, and on September 6, the Court of Appeal returned the appeal, due to the multiple content-related deficiencies therein. No new appeal was filed.

**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.?[[177]](#footnote-177) 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 rejections 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,” the website stated.[[178]](#footnote-178)

 **On March 2,** the *Zhoghovurd Daily*sent an inquiry, following up 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,” in order to find out what kind of detections were made by the law enforcement agency in the course of about 4 years. In response to the inquiry, the agency noted that their detection and prevention were carried out exclusively within the framework of operative intelligence collection and investigative activities, the results of which were classified.[[179]](#footnote-179)

 The media outlet considers that this avoidance from answering under the guise of state secret is unfounded.

**On March 4,** the *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.[[180]](#footnote-180)

**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.[[181]](#footnote-181) 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 figure out the true amount of the 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.[[182]](#footnote-182) 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 3.1(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.[[183]](#footnote-183) 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.

**On April 7,** *Union of Informed Citizens NGO*, the founder of *Fip.am* website, applied to the National Security Service, requesting information about the vehicles with “Nissan x-trail” brand (variator) gearboxes in the State Guard Service of the RA National Security Service: particularly, what was the year of their production; what was their mileage; whether there had been any problems with the transmission; if so, how much it cost to fix the problems. On April 13, the NSS refused to provide information, which is why the NGO filed a lawsuit against the NSS in the Administrative Court on May 12, with the demand to obligate it to provide information. On May 18, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was held on October 13, and on November 3 the lawsuit was rejected. The Court considered it proven that the requested information contained state and service secrets, hence, the plaintiff did not have any legal grounds and rights to request that information.

**On April 21,** *PastInfo.am* sent a written inquiry to the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia to find out why Government Board No.1 was not being used, whether it had malfunctions; when it was last inspected and at what cost; whether Nikol Pashinyan left for Moscow on a chartered plane, and if so, how much the flight cost. However, the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia did not respond in any way.[[184]](#footnote-184)

After a publication on this topic on May 12, the Prime Minister's Office provided answers to some of the questions. For example, the questions such as how much money was provided for the technical inspection and what problems were identified therein were ignored. The Prime Minister's Office considered all this a state secret.

 **On May 2,** Narek Kirakosyan, the correspondent of the *Factor.am* news website, wrote to the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, requesting to provide information about the composition of the joint commission on the demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. The Office informed within the prescribed period that the inquiry was forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from which, however, the journalist never received an answer. Later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published information about the inquiry on the agency’s official website.

**On May 23**, the RA Administrative Court held the court hearing on the case of *Civilitas Foundation, the founder of CivilNet.am and Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center v. the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia*, demanding provision of a copy of the share donation agreement of of Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine. We should remind that on October 4 and November 23, 2021, Mkrtich Karapetyan, a correspondent of *CivilNet.am*, sent inquiries to the RA Government, requesting to provide that document. The Government, considering that the agreement contained a trade secret, refused the request. On December 16, 2021, *Civilitas* and *Transparency International* filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court.

Court hearings on the case were also held on June 16, July 19, October 12, and on November 2 the Court ruled to uphold the lawsuit: the staff of the RA Prime Minister was obligated to provide the requested information and confiscate 10,000 AMD as the sum for the state duty.

**On May 5,** the *Fip.am* fact-checking platform contacted the RA Police anticipating to find out the real reason for the death of a citizen during an opposition rally at France Square in Yerevan. Taking into account the fact that the requested information could contain a pre-investigation or medical secret, the website requested to provide the information without disclosing the identity of the person.

On the day after the person’s death, the *Armlur.am* news website published a document stating that the citizen died not of an overdose, as was rumored, but of acute heart failure. However, according to *Fip.am*, the published document was not based on the response from the forensic examination, and the website contacted the police by phone on May 10 to get clarification on the topic. The police reported that the results of the forensic examination were not available, but about two hours later, the police issued a statement, essentially confirming that the cause of the citizen's death was a drug overdose. And the next day, on May 11, the police, in response to the written inquiry dated May 5, refused to provide the requested information, reasoning that it violates the privacy of personal and family life.

 **On May 13,** the camera of *Yerevan.today* news website captured how the policemen were transporting large amounts of food, cigarettes and other items from the building of the *HayPost* company located in the Republic Square, Yerevan. In the video, it can be seen that the sweets in particular come in boxes from the *Grand Candy* company. In this regard, the website sent questions to the police: particularly, why are the police officers on duty dealing with such issues; for whom is this product intended and by what means was it purchased, what does the *Grand Candy* company have to do with this process?[[185]](#footnote-185)

According to the website, after two unclear answers, the RA Police refused to provide information for the third time, reasoning that they are “encrypted and not subject to publication”. It is unclear to the website what secret the connection between the police and the *Grand Candy* company contains.

 **On June 1,** the RA Administrative Court held a trial on the case of *Investigative Journalists NGO (founder of the Hetq.am news website) v. the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan (the third party: the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Armenia)*, with a claim of providing information.

The lawsuit was filed on December 14, 2021. It refers to receiving answers to the following questions requested in writing on November 15: who is served by each of the 43 vehicles of the National Assembly, and how much is the expense of each of them?

A hearing on the case was also held on June 16, and on the 30th of the same month, according to the Court verdict, Alen Simonyan was obliged to provide the requested information. In addition, it was decided to charge him 80,000 AMD as an attorney's fee and 8,000 AMD as a state duty.

The plaintiff appealed the judgment in the Court of Appeal on August 5, and on September 5, the appeal was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for November 30, 2023.

 **On June 6,** Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, appealed to the Administrative Court against the RA Police, claiming to oblige them to provide exhaustive information. According to the request sent on May 27, the website asked to provide the names, surnames of the chiefs and deputy chiefs as well as working phone numbers of all regional police departments, divisions and units.

On June 13, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was held on October 5, the next one was scheduled for April 17, 2023.

**On June 15,** the *Infocom.am* news website wrote that since January, it has addressed all RA ministries with a written inquiry, requesting them to provide information on the monthly salaries, bonuses and additional fees received by the persons holding the position of minister during 2021. 10 out of 12 ministries (except for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Environment) refused to provide information.[[186]](#footnote-186) In addition, 2 of those 10 ministries, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance, refused to provide information, claiming those were personal data, hence the website applied to the Personal Data Protection Agency. On May 18, the Agency informed that it had initiated proceedings on the occasion of the letter, according to which “in the case of the need to limit the access of third parties to the personal data under the management of the state body or the public accessibility of such data, personal data or documents containing personal data should be classified as a secret”, and in this case there is no question of secrecy. On June 9, the Ministry of Finance filed a judicial appeal against the Agency's decision regarding it. On June 16, the Administrative Court accepted the lawsuit of the Ministry against the Agency for proceedings, and on November 28, the case was accepted for new proceedings with a different Judge presiding. A court hearing was scheduled on May 23, 2023.

**On June 23,** the *Oragir.news* website wrote that it had sent an inquiry to the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, requesting an answer to the following questions: what criteria are used to determine which of the Facebook users can comment on the Minister's Facebook posts and who cannot, considering the fact that the section for the comments to the posts is closed to a number of citizens? In addition, is it not a restriction of the citizen's freedom of speech? For what purpose does the Minister deprive the citizens of the opportunity to express their opinion, complaint, criticism, especially if we consider that he is financed by the taxes paid by the citizens?[[187]](#footnote-187) The Minister did not answer these questions, reasoning that “the inquiry is not about information in the sense of the Law on Freedom of Information”.

**On June 24,** the *Panorama.am* news website sent an inquiry to the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia regarding the activities of the biological laboratories operating in Armenia and their safety. In a reply letter from the Office, they informed that the addressee of the question is the RA Ministry of Health, but the inquiry was not forwarded to that Ministry in a manner prescribed by the law.[[188]](#footnote-188)

*Panorama.am* sent the same inquiry to the RA Ministry of Health, from which, however, it did not receive complete information about the problem.

**On June 24,** the *168.am* news website wrote that, according to the news, Tigran Avinyan, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC*, currently not holding any public office, is going abroad with a diplomatic passport.[[189]](#footnote-189) In this regard, the website sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to find out whether RA citizen, former Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan had a diplomatic passport, and if so, on what grounds. According to the reply received from the MFA, the requested information was a state secret.

 **On June 24,** *Hetq.am* online periodical wrote that on March 31, it applied to Yerevan Municipality for questions regarding the activities of the Nork-Marash Medical Center, in particular, purchases, but did not receive a response, and after verbal inquiries, the false information presented by the medical center was provided (falseness was confirmed by media investigation).[[190]](#footnote-190) On May 17, the media sent the second inquiry about the activities and development plans of the medical center to the municipality. On June 3, inaccurate and incomplete information was received from the municipality.

 **On June 25,** the *Pastinfo.am* news website wrote that the *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC*, in violation of the RA Law on Freedom of Information, keeps the contact information of foreign members of the Board of Directors confidential,[[191]](#footnote-191) and their inquiries, addressed to the Fund's office, do not reach the addressees. The website's inquiries mainly related to the management of the Zangezur Copper and Molybdenum Combine and decision-making related to shares. After this publication, the CJSC filed a lawsuit against the media outlet, claiming a refutation of information, discrediting business reputation and payment of a monetary compensation, as described in the *Pressure* section of the report.

 **On July 1,** Armlur.am news website wrote that the Editorial office inquired from the RA NSS Head Armen Abazyan what illegalities were disclosed in relation to the suspicious sale of former NA Speaker Hovik Abrahamyan’s mansion, built in the vicinity of the Victory park in the capital and the status of the criminal case. In response to this inquiry, the NSS investigative department informed: “In relation to the criminal case, as stated in your inquiry, Narek Nalbandyan was invited to the investigative department of the NSS and was interrogated.” The questions raised by the editorial office were not answered in essence. By the way, the secrecy of the inquiry stage was not invoked either, which could lead to a conclusion that the inquiry made by the media outlet was legit, and that the information was supposed to be provided.

 **On July 5,** Yerkir.am news website wrote that the editorial office sent an inquiry to the RA Minister of Healthcare to find out why Narek Grigoryan, an MP from the NA Civil Contract faction had not been summoned by the psychiatric ward since 2018, what grounds were presented in this regard, whether his mental health allowed him to mobilize a squad, get armed and take people to participate in military action. The information received by the media outlet that before 2018 Grigoryan would regularly visit Sevan phychiatric ward and stopped doing so only after Pashinyan came to power triggered this inquiry. The website wrote that Minister Anahit Avanesyan avoided a concrete answer, considering the requested information as a medical secret. However, it is known that information on the health of top officials is of public interest and cannot be a secret.

 The website sent another inquiry to the Ministry of Defense to find out the grounds for letting Narek Grigoryan bear arms and mobilize a squad in the days of war. No answer was received.

 **On July 7,** the Administrative Court partially upheld the joint lawsuit filed by Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center, Law Development and Protection Foundation and Civilitas Foundation (Civilnet.am news website founder) against the Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body of the RA. The lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2021, demanding to oblige to provide the information and documents requested on July 12, 2021 which had to do with the results of the inspections, conducted in the mining sector in the concrete timeframe.

 The court ruled that the defendant was obliged to provide the requested information and consider the issue of court fees distribution resolved. On August 8, the defendant appealed the judgment, on September 9, the Court of Appeal accepted the appeal for proceedings, on November 9, the judge was replaced. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

 **On July 11,** theHetq online periodical sent an inquiry to Syunik Governor’s Office on the operation of Kapan airport, particularly asking of the functions it fulfilled currently, since it had been commissioned since November 18, 2020, but was in factual forced idle time. The answer did not provide any substance, reading as follows: “Syunik Airport LLC received an airport commissioning certificate by the Civil Aviation Committee on November 18, 2020, which served as a ground for the airport to fulfil all those functions which are envisaged by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and in the manner, defined by the RA Aviation authorities.” The next question on the number of positions and vacancies at the airport was answered that due to security consideration, they found it inexpedient to publish information on the payroll.

**On July 11,** 168.am news website wrote that on June 27 the editorial office sent in an inquiry to the staff of Kristine Grigoryan, the Human Rights Defender, requesting full information about the bonuses paid during her tenure, however, the answer was rated as incomplete. The website wrote: “Even though we had asked to answer how much reward was paid per position, but the staff of the HRD preferred to stay away from problems and provided us with general numbers, hoping that we would not figure out what happened and why.”

 **On August 11,** Infocom.am news website requested from the Ministry of Economy the total number of tourists who arrived in Armenia through various border crossing points, as well as the break down of this information per border crossing point. After receiving the answer, it became clear that the information was inaccurate: the total sum of persons who arrived in the country through various crossing points was smaller than the sum total provided by the Ministry. First, the editorial office made a call to inform them about the issue, and then sent a new inquiry which was answered to with only general information on the maintained statistics, but the answer to the inquiry was not provided.

**On August 15**, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit against the RA National Security Service with the demand to oblige the latter to provide exhaustive information to the inquiry, sent in on July 6, which requested to provide the number of NSS and border guard troops who were subject to disciplinary action in 2012-2022. On August 23, the claim was returned for corrections, on September 6 it was submitted again, and on September 9, it was accepted for proceedings. The trial was scheduled for March 14, 2023.

**On September 6,** Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking to provide information on whether the RA MFA was going to take part in the Information and Democracy Forum, to be held in the USA on September 22, 2022. If yes, at what level. The Ministry gave a vague answer, that did not contain the information requested by the inquiry.

**On September 8,** Milena Khachikyan, acorrespondentof Infocom.am news website, wrote that a month before they had sent in a written inquiry to the Investgative Department of the RA State Revenue Committee, in order to clarify the news about the termination of the investigation against the former ambassador of RA to the Vatican, Mikael Minasyan. In particular, whether Minasyan was ever internationally wanted, whether this search for him was terminated, and if yes, when, at whose initiative and on what ground, and if any country had terminated the search for him, whether the RA had requested and received clarification on the matter.

In response to this, the Investigative Department of the SRC, inter alia, informed that the search for Minasyan had not been stopped to date, and it was not appropriate to provide more detailed information at the given stage of the inquiry. Taking into account that the question referred to the specific international search of an individual, and not to search in general, the journalist made an additional call trying to verify whether the provided information also referred to the international search. In response, the press department of the SRC urged them to contact the RA police on this matter.

The police refused the reporter, too, with a justification that the requested information as a service secret could not be published. However, there were cases when such information was officially published.

Milena Khachikyan wrote to the Prosecutor General’s office, asking whether any country had stopped the search for Minasyan and/or rejected Armenia’s application for his extradition and whether the Procedutor’s Office had received a clarification on this matter. However, the Procutor’s office redirected the letter to the Investigative Department of SRC with the justification that the prosecuting body is the SRC, and this entity sent the same answer to the reporter with the same old date. After all of this, about a month later, the Prosecutor’s Office officially announced that, based on the publications in the media outlets, it had rapidly undertaken respective measures, to verify the authenticity of the information contained in them regarding the termination of the international search for Minasyan by Interpol, given that they had not received previously any official information or notification on the matter. It was not clear to the journalist what hindered the Prosecutor’s office to undertake measures in the same rapid manner to find out and present that information based on the reporter’s inquiry.

**On September 12,** MediaHub.am news website wrote that the multiple inquiries sent to the Syunik Governer’s Office, and then various departments of the National Security Service and Ministry of Defense on the potential military activities remained unanswered.[[192]](#footnote-192) The agencies put the responsibility of commenting on the accumulation of the adversary’s military forces at the border, the statements made by Azerbaijan and disseminated information on one another.

 **On September 14,** Infocom.am news website sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport on the steps, taken for organizing the education of pupils and students who arrived in Armenia from Ukraine.[[193]](#footnote-193) In the written answer, the Ministry only reflected the effective legislative regulartions which, according to the media outlet, was a generic answer without any specificities.

 **On September 15,** the*Chorrord Ishkhanutyun* newspaper sent a letter to the RA Cadastre Committee of the RA on receiving information on 17 units of real estate in a number of settlements in Kotayk marz and in Yerevan. However, they received an “answer” from the Deputy of the Cadastre Committee Head Arman Petrosyan that they could provide the newspaper with information only if they submitted a receipt of a payment of 1000 AMD per unit in their inquiry, in the given case, a receipt for a total of 17.000AMD.

 **On September 15,** Vahe Sarukhanyan, the correspondent of the Hetq online periodical, sent inquiries to Suren Papikyan, the Minister of Defense, requesting information on the loss of military posts, the threats to the Sisian – Goris and Kapan – Chakaten – Tsav road communication, as well as information on the toll, wounded and PoWs of the Armenian side as a result of the offensive by the adversary on September 13. Hamlet Batikyan, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defense, gave a generic and vague answer to all the questions, avaoiding any concrete commentary: “At the moment, we are working to check, juxtapose and analyse information as a result of which the Ministry of Defense would regularly make official statements on the relevant information and the situation, too.”

 **On September 26,** Araks Mamulyan, the correspondent of Hetq online periodical, wrote that she had sent an inquiry to Yerevan Mayor Hrachya Sargsyan a month before on the potential violation of the construction permit package of Norashen 2 distrtict in the capital. All the deadlines set by the law were broken, and yet the journalist had not received any answer.

 **On September 27,** *Infocom.am* news website wrote that the RA General Prosecutor’s Office and the RA Investigative Committee, violating the requirement set by the Law on the Freedom of Information, did not respond to the written inquiry of the editorial office in relation to the criminal cases on the 44-day war and the course of the investigations. However, both entities spoke on this matter many times before.[[194]](#footnote-194)

 **On September 30,** Armlur.am news website wrote that the *Zhoghovurd* daily sent inquiries to the RA Ministry of Defense and the National Security Service to learn about the fate of the 2 groups of the adversary who penetrated into the territory of Armenia in the course of the September offensive, whether they were found and neutralized. The editorial office did not hear from either entity.

 **On October 3,** the Ministry of Defense requested more time to respond to the request received from the Freedom of Information Center on September 29. The organization requested to provide information about the combat positions lost as a result of Azerbaijan’s recent military aggression against Armenia and the list of service officers and civilians killed as a result of that aggression. On October 19, the Ministry of Defense refused to answer the request.

**On October 5**, the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to a number of local self-government bodies as to why the requirement, defined by the June 22 court act, which obliged Ashtarak, Armavir, Gavar, Hrazdan, Kapan, Yeghegnadzor and Ijevan municipalities to publish 13 sets of data as defined by Article 7.3 of the RA Law on Freedom of Information on their websites.

The answers provided by the mayors of Armavir, Ashtarak, Hrazdan communities, as well as that received from Ijevan municipality were incomplete.

**On October 5,** the reporter of Hetq.am website Tirayr Muradyan received a reply letter from the Deputy Minister of Environment to his September 28 inquiry, which, in fact, did not contain an answer to the question he was interested in. The journalist asked to provide information about the water intake carried out through deep wells in the administrative area of Hayanist settlement. The Deputy Minister offered to familiarize themselves with the data on water use, published on the website of the Ministry, but the requested information was not there.

**On October 6**, Tirayr Muradyan submitted another inquiry, trying to receive answers to the above-stated questions again. On the 17th of the same month, the Deputy Minister of Environment refused to provide the requested information, stating that it contained personal data, “forgetting” that the latter could be concealed.

**On October 7**, the Freedom of Information Center sent 2 letters to Shirak Governor's Office, requesting information about the amount of money paid from the state or regional budget for the audit conducted at Gyumri School No. 32 in 2018 by order of the governor, as well as provide the act of the audit results and the professional conclusion. The first answer was irrelevant and did not address the essence of the question. The Governor’s Office refused to provide the answer to the second question, citing the grounds of confidentiality, which was assessed as an unreasonable refusal.

**By the way, on October 31**, a second inquiry was submitted regarding the first question and again an irrelevant answer was received.

**On October 11**, Karine Simonyan, correspondent of Radio Liberty from Lori region, warned that a letter restricting the work of journalists was sent from the Lori regional administration to Alaverdi municipality. The letter was signed by the deputy governor.[[195]](#footnote-195) The letter stated that the sessions could be covered only by those media outlet representatives who are preliminarily registered with the staff, by submitting the relevant applications at least 24 hours before the session. By the way, these regulations were drawn up and sent to the regional administration by the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Meanwhile, the law does not provide for the accreditation or registration of journalists at local self-government bodies. The unjustified restrictions were removed after the alert.

**On October 14**, Anna Sahakyan, a reporter for Infocom.am website, sent an inquiry to the Corruption Prevention Commission, asking for information about the vehicles purchased by that agency. Even after followup calls, they did not respond to the inquiry.

 **On October 17**, the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Justice Department, asking to provide information on the number of telephone wiretapping and recording warrants, issued by RA courts in 2021. The center qualified the response as unjustified refusal to provide information.

On the same day, the NGO sent the same inquiry to the NSS. The latter informed that the did not maintain such statistics and the recordings got deleted. FOICA assessed this answer as unjustified refusal to provide information.

**On October 19**, Anna Sahakyan, a reporter at Infocom.am website, sent a request to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, regarding a scientific and technical research event held in 2022 (at the expense of 2.5 billion AMD), which was supposed to be financed by the EU.[[196]](#footnote-196) The answer was received from the Science Committee of MoESCS, stating that they did not avail of the relevant data.

On November 22, the website sent in this inquiry to the staff of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan which was later forwarded to the Ministry of Finance. The latter did not specify details in their answer and proposed to contact the office of Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan. Another inquiry was sent to the Deputy Prime Minister's office on December 13 and was forwarded further to the MoESCS, “given that the mentioned event was within the competence of the ministry and curated by it.”

**On October 21,** the reporter of Factor.am news website, Roza Vardanyan, sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, asking to confirm or deny the statements about the situation in the border area of Jermuk and provide information about the changes of the line of contact after the Azerbaijani attack on September 13, specifying how much of the sovereign territory of RA was under Azerbaijani control at the moment.[[197]](#footnote-197)

5 days later the agency asked for additional time to respond to the inquiry, and the response provided on the 12th day after the inquiry did not cover all the questions. In particular, the Ministry of Defense considered that the questions about the border line fortifications, as well as the area of the sovereign territory of the RA that passed under the control of the enemy were about state secrets. Meanwhile, one day before the inquiry, the Chief of the General Headquarters of the RA Armed Forces, Edward Asryan, addressed the journalists’ questions on that topic in a briefing and presented noteworthy answers regarding what the Ministry of Defense had considered a secret.

**On November 7**, the reporter of Infocom.am website, Milena Khachikyan, sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, asking for information about how deep the units of the Azerbaijani armed forces had incursed into the RA territory in the direction of Jermuk.[[198]](#footnote-198) The response was incomplete on the grounds of confidentiality, but the website cited the Law on Freedom of Information, stating that provision of information could not be refused if it concerned emergency cases threatening the safety and health of citizens. In addition, in the relevant Government Decree, which defines the list of data considered to be as RA state secrets, it is stated that, inter alia, information about the strategic development of the Armed Forces is a state secret, while the question put forward by the website was about the deployment of Azerbaijani armed forces, not the RA forces.

**On November 9**, Fip.am website sent an inquiry to the RA Prime Minister’s Staff, asking as follows: “Article 4.4 of the Agreement on the Status of Russian Border Guard Troops on the territory of the Republic of Armenia and the Conditions of Their Living, signed between the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation, implies that over time, the sections of the state border with Turkey and Iran should be successively under the protection of the Republic of Armenia. It hasn’t happened yet, in 30 years, why?” The inquiry remained unanswered.

The **November 11** inquiry sent to the staff, which the website asked to share Decree N-440, dated 1994, remained unanswered, too.

On **November 14**, Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of Fip.am website, submitted a lawsuit to the Administrative Court against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claiming to oblige the latter to provide the information requested on October 20. The inquiry was about the assistance, expected from the CSTO for the purpose of protecting the RA borders on September 13, 2022. On November 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was scheduled for July 26, 2023.

**On November 17**, Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the NSS, with a demand to oblige the plaintiff to provide exhaustive information in response to the October 28 inquiry. In the inquiry, the NGO made an inquiry, requesting information about considering Russian citizens, in particular, Margarita Simonyan, Konstantin Zatulin, Andranik Mihranyan, as undesirable persons in Armenia since January 2021. On November 24, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was scheduled for March 29, 2023.

On **November 18**, Fip.am website sent a written inquiry to the RA Police about the positions held by Police Chief Vahe Ghazaryan before his appointment. No response was provided.

On **November 30**, Fip.am website sent another inquiry to the RA Police, asking on the grounds of awarding a patrol policeman a higher rank of an officer and what the standard of conscientious work was. No response was provided again.

On **December 15**, Fip.am website requested the Urban Planning Committee to provide a copy of the contract on the purchase of standard buildings signed with NOM Project LLC. This request remained unanswered.

On **December 19**, Infocom.am website reporter Anna Sahakyan asked the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a comment on the possibility of delivering food to besieged Artsakh. They had neither answered the inquiry, nor asked for a 30-day period, violating the law.[[199]](#footnote-199)

On **December 22**, Fip.am website sent an inquiry to the RA Police about the functions of patrol officers, guarding the Christmas tree in the Republic Square in Yerevan. No response was provided.

***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 to oblige the defendant to apologize for the insult and confiscate 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 Book) 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.

Court hearings on the case was also held on February 25, May 6, June 3, July 8, August 26 snd October 28. By the judgment of November 18, the court partially granted the claim, namely obligated Armen Tadevosyan to publicly apologize to Mariam Tashchyan on Facebook and pay her 200,000 AMD as compensation for the damage caused by the insult to her honor and dignity, as well as 8,000 AMD as state duty.

 **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 (now former) 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 ruled as follows: in terms of defamation, 100,000 AMD to be confiscated from Styopa Safaryan in terms of insult - 30,000 AMD and 150,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee in favor of each plaintiff, namely Satik Seyranyan and *168 Zham Ltd.* Besides, it was ruled 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 February 21 and March 3 the plaintiff and the defendant, respectively, filed appeals against the judgment in the Court of Appeal.

On October 14, the Civil Court of Appeal decided to reject Styopa Safaryan’s appeal and partially uphold the plaintiff’s appeal, obliging Styopa Safaryan to refute the information defaming the honor and dignity of Satik Seyranyan and the business reputation of 168 Zham LLC in a Facebook post. The ruling was appealed as of the end of the year.

 **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[[200]](#footnote-200), 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 infringed right.”

This lawsuit was also returned on January 24, refiled on February 2, and accepted for proceedings on January 9. Court hearings on the case were held on May 17 and October 26, and on November 26 the proceddings of the case were dismissed. The court found that the document in question was not an administrative act and could not be disputed over, in other words, the dispute was not subject to examination in any court.

**On January 19,** the same 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, and by the judgment of March 29 the judgment of the Administrative Court was left unchanged.

**On February 18,** *Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC* filed a lawsuit with 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 57.8 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. A court hearing on the case was held on June 28, and on November 21, the judge was replaced. On December 6, the case was accepted for new proceedings. The next hearing was scheduled for February 14, 2023.

**On the same day, on February 18,** the 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 fold the minimum wage, stipulated in Article 57.28 of the RA Law “On Audiovisual Media”, mentioned in the decision No. 86-A of the Commission, dated May 27, 2021. The fine was imposed on the grounds of the failure to provide information to the state regulatory body on the breakdown and amount of the income generated in the previous year.

Court hearings on the case were held on September 13 and November 29, 2022, with the next one scheduled for February 21.

**On March 22,** the Administrative Court held a preliminary court hearing on the lawsuit filed by Armenian TV Channel 2 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 Tender 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.

A court hearing on the case was held on July 7, and the next one was scheduled for January 12, 2023.

**On March 7**, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal against the judgment of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan passed 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.[[201]](#footnote-201) The website considers this to be 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 August 6, 2021 judgment of the first instance court. Accordingly, the Service did not defame 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 independent and unequivocal conclusion on the fact that *Hetq* periodical had disseminated disinformation.
 Investigative Journalists NGO appealed the judgment of the Court of Appeal at the Court of Cassation on April 2022. On May 4, the appeal was returned for corrections, and it was refiled on June 14, to be rejected by the Court of Cassaion and not accepted for proceedings on July 20. Having exhausted all deomestic judicial instances, Investigative Jrounalists NGO intends to go to the European Court of Human Rights.

**On May 12**, the Administrative Court of Appeal held a regular court hearing on the case of *MELTEX LLC, the founder of A1+ TV, v. RA Government and Commission on Television and Radio*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 18, 2019, *MELTEX LLC* in relation to the annulment of acts from 7 broadcast licensing competitions held in 2003. *Armenia TV CJSC, Mo TV Media Holding CJSC, ArmenAkob LLC, AR TV LLC* and *Husaber CJSC* are involved as the third party in the case. On April 6, 2021, the court rejected the lawsuit, and on May 10, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, where the appeal was accepted for proceedings on June 17. The case was redistributed in the Administrative Court of Appeal on July 21, and the appeal was accepted for proceedings on October 27.
 On June 1, 2022, the Court of Appeal rejected the appeal. On October 4, the plaintiff went to the Court of Cassation. No other developments were registered by the end of the year.

 **On July 14,** Huasber CJSC (the founder of Yerkir Media TV company) filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio, claiming the abolition of the latter’s Decrision N 98-A of July 7. This decision was caused by a swear word, pronounced on air, during a live broadcast under the heading “Protests in Yerevan and in the Regions Continue,” the vulgarisums and obscenities, as well as the scenes, undermining and discrediting universal values in the “Corrpution 2: Retribution” film. On July 22, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and a court hearsings were held on October 27 and November 24. On December 14, the claim was upheld, namely the judgment on imposing an administrative fine was repealed.

**On August 31,** the same plaintiff filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio, this time claiming to annul the former’s decision of August 17. By that decision the Commission imposed a fine on Husaber CJSC in the amount of 500-fold of the minimum wage for the violations of the Law on Audio Visual Media and the Law on Advertising. On September 9, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and a court session was held on December 8, and on the 21st the lawsuit was rejected.

 **On December 30,** the CJSC filed a new lawsuit against the Commission on TV and Radio, claiming the Commission on TV and Radio shall refrain from terminating the TV’s national broadcasts by public multiplex before the judicial act of Administrative Case VD/2112/05/21, resolving the case on the merits, entered into force.

 **On July 15,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to partially uphold the lawsuit in the case of *News AM LLC v. political scientist Styopa Safaryan*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to their business reputation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 28, 2019, was caused by the defendant’s post on Facebook that the website had received an order from Robert Kocharyan’s office to publish some articles about judges.[[202]](#footnote-202)

The court obliged the defendant to make a public refutation of the defamatory information, discreting the business reputation of NewsAM LLC on his personal Facebook page and publish the court judgment. Besides, it was ruled to confiscate 500.000 AMD from Styopa Safaryan in favour of the plaintiff as compensation for slander, 18.000 AMD as state duty and 250.000 AMD as an attorney’s fee.

On August 22, the defendant filed a complaint with the Court of Appeal which was returned because of the deficiencies in the documents. It was refiled again on October 12 and was accepted for proceedings on November 2. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On August 2,** *Armenian TV Channel 2* filed another lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio, claiming the recognition of the lack of jurisdiction to impose a fine of four-hundred-fold the minimum wage specified in Article 57.22 of the Law On Audiovisual Media on the LLC, as stipulated in Decision No. 85-A of June 13, 2022, which was drawn up and unsigned by the Commission. On August 9, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the court hearing was scheduled for February 9, 2023.

 **On September 2,**  the judge was replaced at the Administrative Court on the case of the *Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC* *vs. the Commission on Television and Radio*, this time with the claim of abolishing Decision 86-A of the Commission of May 27, 2022, on imposing an administrative fine. This lawsuit was filed on June 4, 2021, and rejected on August 23. The plaintiff filed an appeal with the Court of Cassation. On December 1, 2022, a court hearing was held at this instance, and on December 22, the appeal was rejected.

**On November 14,** Armenian TV Channel 2 LLC filed another lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio, with a claim to repeal Decision No. 137-A made on October 28, “On Announcing the Winner of the Licensing Tender for the Use of the Slot for Broadcasting in the Capital via Public Multiplex and Issuing a License.” It was accepted for proceedings on November 16, and court sessions were held on December 5 and 16, and the lawsuit was rejected by the judgment, passed on December 22. The court found that there were no grounds for repealing the impugned decision.

**On November 25**, Shark LLC (the founder of the Channel 5 TV company) submitted a lawsuit to the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction against the National Assembly MP Khachatur Sukiasyan, with claims to oblige him to publicly refute the information considered as defamatory and pay monetary compensation. The reason for the lawsuit was the incident that happened in the National Assembly on November 7. During a briefing with journalists, Sukiasyan shouted at Channel 5 TV reporter Arpi Sukiasyan, did not let her finish the question, then referred to the media's political patronage, linking it to the second president of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, and called the latter a thief, a bandit, who was engaged in embezzlement: “You should join your owner and bring the billions back, you have no right to be called a media outlet...”[[203]](#footnote-203)

The lawsuit was not accepted for proceedings as of the end of the year.

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***This report was made within the scope of the project of Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression implemented with the support of National Endowment for Democracy (NED, USA). Opinions and assessments contained in the report belong to the CPFE and might not be consistent with the opinions and dispositions of the NED.***

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