**

**COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

***REPORT***

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

**2023 first quarterly report**



*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 the first quarter of 2023.*

*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 results of the observations carried out during the first quarter of 2023 are particularly alarming in terms of restrictions on freedom of information. Apart from the problems of obtaining information from state bodies, the facts of unjustified rejection of inquiries by media outlets and their representatives, or the fact of providing incomplete, blurred answers to them, a number of regressive initiatives of the authorities have been recorded, with which an attempt is made to create legal grounds for limiting the provision of official data.

Thus, as early as on December 22, 2022, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia published the draft on making amendments to the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law" on the e-draft.am website, and from the middle of January 2023 it was put up for discussion. This implies unjustified severe restrictions on access to the Internet and media activities under the conditions of that regime. The provisions related to them are not properly reasoned and are full of loopholes that allow arbitrariness.

Later, on March 1, the National Assembly adopted a comprehensive package of bills proposed by the RA Government, the basis of which was the new law "On State Secrets". Among many other controversial changes, the package also included an addendum to the Law "On Freedom of Information". According to it, inquiries for the provision of official data are subject to rejection if they contain "official information of limited distribution". This wording, which gives rise to subjective decisions, also creates wide opportunities for arbitrariness, because any document in state bodies can fall under this.

Moreover, it has already become a common practice that these regressive bills, before they are published or put into circulation, are not properly discussed with specialized public institutions. Meanwhile, the tripartite Memorandum[[1]](#footnote-1) signed last year between journalistic NGOs, as well as representatives of legislative and executive authorities envisages an opposite approach and attitude.

 Journalistic organizations made statements in relation to these processes, demanding public and expert (including international) discussions on problematic legislative initiatives, as well as to adhere to democratic values and the commitment to ensure the transparency of the Government activities. Meanwhile, such regressive legislative changes can negatively affect the accountability of the authorities to the public and contribute to the increase of corruption risks.

In this respect, the decrease in the ranking of Armenia according to the index of perception of corruption is noteworthy (details of this are presented in the "Media Activities Environment" section). This is comparable to the alarming statistics that the CPFE received during the first quarter when investigating violations of the right to receive and disseminate official information. In particular, **48** cases of such violations were recorded, which is 3 more than the data of the same period last year.

One of the peculiarities of the period under review is that no case of physical violence against media representatives was recorded during the quarter. However, compared to the same period last year, the number of various other pressures increased by 5, reaching **17**.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

 In January-March, according to established tradition, prestigious international organizations published their annual reports, also addressing the situation of our country in the media sphere. Those documents have become the subject of discussion among state, political, and public institutions, as well as media.

Thus, on January 12, the international human rights organization Human Rights Watch, in its "World Report-2022"[[2]](#footnote-2), while presenting the Armenian media activity, made a reference to the CPFE data[[3]](#footnote-3) and emphasized that a large number of violence against media representatives was recorded during the coverage of the protest demonstrations of the opposition forces. And the decriminalization of the so-called "serious offense" was mentioned as a positive change. In the report, special attention was paid to the fact that although the amount of legally defined fines for unjustified failure to provide official data has been increased, the number of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information has not decreased. This issue was also in the center of attention of Armenian journalistic institutions, which we will discuss in detail below.

According to the international human rights organization Freedom House, Armenia continues to be among the "partially free" countries. In the annual report "Freedom in the World-2023" published on March 9, the state of political rights and civil liberties was presented, and the RA rating in 2022 was estimated at 54 on a 100-point scale (in the previous year's report, Armenia had 55 points).[[4]](#footnote-4)

 The CPFE data, particularly in relation to physical violence against media representatives, was also referred to in its annual report published by the US Department of State on March 20, in which it presents the general situation of human rights in various countries and in Armenia as well.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is noteworthy that this time the document mentions that there is a legacy of systemic corruption in the country in many areas, and also expresses concern regarding the embezzlement of public funds and dubious business activities involving officials.

Earlier, the international organization Transparency International drew attention to these problems, according to whose annual report published on January 31, the ranking of Armenia in the world corruption perception index has decreased, and our country has reached the 63rd place, instead of the 58th place last year.[[6]](#footnote-6)

This regression was predictable, because the fight against corruption begins with freedom of information, transparency and accountability of Government activities to the public, while the recent trend is the opposite and is characterized by an increase in cases of unjustified rejections and obstructions to the provision of official data.

Currently, a whole regressive chain of legislative initiatives limiting freedom of information has emerged in Armenia. The authorities are actively promoting changes that further complicate the process of providing information. Thus, on March 1, the Parliament adopted the draft of amendments to the Law "On State Secrets", which significantly expands the scope of this secret and tightens liability.[[7]](#footnote-7) The draft to make amendments and addenda to the Law "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law", which provides ample opportunities for applying arbitrary and disproportionate restrictions, is currently under discussion. In particular, it refers to the freedom of expression of opinion, the content broadcast on television and distributed via the Internet, the activity of social networks, websites, applications in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, which can be suspended (blocked) or the access of which can be reduced.

In this regard, 11 journalistic organizations issued a joint statement on January 12, expressing their conviction that the above-mentioned provisions of the bill in this form are not based on proper discussions, evaluation of obvious risks and analysis of possible severe negative consequences, and therefore are completely rejectable.[[8]](#footnote-8) Undoubtedly, the fight against fake news, misinformation, hostile propaganda and cyber-attacks is even more important, especially under the conditions of martial law. However, the related legal regulations should be reasonable, more precise, without loopholes allowing arbitrariness.

 The chain of regressive legislative processes continued on March 1, when the National Assembly adopted a comprehensive package of bills proposed by the RA Government, based on the new law "On State Secrets", which, by the way, extended the terms of encryption of information and changed the declassification procedures. A new restriction was also introduced in the Law "On Freedom of Information". In particular, in Clause 1, Part 1 of Article 8, which envisages the rejection of information if it "contains state, banking, commercial secrets", the words "or official information of limited distribution" were added. With this amendment, in fact, the whole law was distorted and devalued. First of all, it is at least not clear by what criteria "official information of limited distribution" is defined, and, in addition, the substantiation of this restriction is highly controversial. It turns out that almost every document circulating in state institutions, even if it does not have any secrecy, can be characterized as containing "official information of limited distribution". The wording of this concept is so general that it can conceal, for example, the shady sides of the activities of state bodies and officials, omissions and abuses, which in any country striving for democracy should be the target of public and press criticism.

 Another draft of the new Law "On Environmental Information", put into circulation, is aimed at limiting the availability of official data, covering up omissions and abuses. According to it, the provision of data related to environmental protection is strictly limited by the same logic. In this regard, specialized journalistic organizations also made a statement and expressed a very critical attitude.[[9]](#footnote-9)

It is particularly alarming that these bills were not properly discussed with specialized public institutions before they were published or put into circulation. Meanwhile, on April 19 of last year, 11 journalistic organizations signed a Memorandum with the legislative body (represented by the Chairman of the NA Standing Committee on Education, Science, Culture, Youth and Sport) and the executive power (represented by the Deputy Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia) to the effect that each amendment of the relevant laws related to the information sector should be made on the basis of the principles of the Concept of Legislative Reforms currently under development, holding professional discussions from the stage of generation of ideas. However, the facts prove that during the past one year, the authorities did not observe the agreements stipulated in the Memorandum in a number of cases.

In another statement on March 13, the media organizations demanded the President of the Republic of Armenia not to sign the new Law "On State Secrets" and the package of legislative amendments adopted with it, to pay special attention to the addendum made to the Law "On Freedom of Information" and to send it to the Constitutional Court to determine the compliance of this document to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (on March 24, however, the President of the Republic of Armenia signed it).

The authors of the statement demanded from the National Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Armenia to remove from circulation the bill "On Environmental Information" and the draft of amendments and addenda to the Law "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law", to initiate additional studies and extensive discussions with expert circles, as well as to send those documents for international expertise.

After these statements, the Ministry of Justice in a letter addressed to the CPFE stated that in addition to sending the draft law "On Amendments and Addenda to the Law on Martial Law" to the stakeholders, discussions were held with the representatives of the National Security Service, Security Council, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs and other bodies. On the basis of the submitted remarks and recommendations, appropriate amendments and addenda were made. By the way, the Chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression was present at one of those discussions and suggested removing the provisions related to the media and starting discussions in the direction of identifying the actual problems and finding their possible solutions, after which only develop the legislative proposals.

As for the draft Laws "On State Secrets" and "On Environmental Information", the agency noted that they were developed by the National Security Service and the National Assembly, respectively.

*The result of repeated sharp criticism was that on January 16, the legislative package, containing the  draft of the RA Law "On Environmental Information" along with the drafts of the Law "On Making Amendments to the RA Law on Freedom of Information” and the Law  "On Making Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia”, submitted to the National Assembly, were withdrawn by the author on March 9.*

 In general, after the revolution of 2018, it is difficult to remember that the new authorities adopted just one law that would have made official data more accessible to the public and the press. On the contrary, new restrictions were added to the ones applied by the previous authorities. Back in 2018, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression and partner organizations reminded the new Government and Parliament that in 2016, during the rule of Serzh Sargsyan, a Law on "Procurement" was adopted, according to which the representative expenses of the first 3 persons of the State - the President of the Republic of Armenia, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the National Assembly, are considered a state secret. Experts in the field urged the revolutionaries to change this reality containing corruption risks, they even drafted and proposed a bill, but the law remained the same.

**It is alarming that the new Government presenting democracy as a national brand, on the one hand, has no desire to rectify the mistakes of the previous authorities, on the other hand, it is coming up with problematic new initiatives.**

 By the way, according to the Government Decision dated December 29, 2022, the Information and Public Relations subdivisions of provincial governments are abolished and united under the Department of Staff Management, Document Circulation and Public Relations.[[10]](#footnote-10) With this step, the situation regarding the provision of official information may deteriorate, because there is already a strong need to improve the work of press spokesmen or public relations departments, and to prepare and train personnel. And instead of solving these problems, the Government, in fact, refuses to have specialized subdivisions of official information in marzes. This decision, undoubtedly, will complicate the work of the media outlets with the provincial governments and will require additional efforts and time to get information.

As for the current situation, during the first quarter, **48** violations of the right to receive and disseminate information were recorded, out of which **6** cases were filed in courts. This number exceeds the highest indicator of the previous year, which was recorded in the same period.

During the period under review, the total number of different pressures on the media and their representatives amounts to 17. These are cases of unfriendly attitude towards journalists, threats and groundless accusations, new lawsuits against media, as well as hacking attacks. The latter deserves attention because it followed the announcement about the criticism addressed to the authorities. Thus, on March 14, as a result of a cyber attack, the YouTube channel of Aravot.am news website was hacked, and the entire archive of videos was deleted. According to Anna Israelyan, the editor of the website, this happened after the editorial office posted an announcement with the following content: "...How and to what extent did the revolutionary officials get rich in a warring country, in a year of war? Who are the "Miller Kings" of today?" It referred to the investigative video to be published in the next few hours. Expressing their indignation regarding the hacking attack on the media, the journalistic organizations issued a joint statement demanding the law enforcement agencies to take immediate measures to identify the culprits and bring them to justice.[[11]](#footnote-11)
 The results of observations of both this and previous periods show that the assessments of the authorities regarding the freedom of speech and the conditions of media activity do not always objectively reflect the prevailing situation. Thus, on March 29, at the "Media Freedom as a Cornerstone of Democracy" event held within the framework of the "World Forum for Democracy" initiated by the US President, the RA Prime Minister announced: "Armenia is continuously implementing reforms aimed at improving the legislation in order to ensure a better environment for the media and journalists to carry out their professional duties safely and freely."
 Meanwhile, the above-mentioned legislative initiatives, recorded various pressures and unreasonable restrictions on freedom of information prove that there are serious problems in the media sector that complicate the work of the media, hindering the proper implementation of the right to receive and disseminate information.
 By the way, during the period under review, the RA Prime Minister called a press conference twice. Unlike the previous times, when questions from media and NGOs were accepted online, after which they were presented to Nikol Pashinyan on the air of Public TV Company (this format was criticized by the journalistic community; many complained that their questions were either edited, or were not announced at all), the last press conferences took place in the traditional way, with direct communication. However, in this case too, the Government's discriminatory approach has become a reason for media complaints. Thus, 7 cases of complaint were recorded in relation to not receiving an invitation to the first press conference, and 11 in the case of the second one. Moreover, among those not invited are media outlets with a stable audience, including Yerkir Media TV Company, Yerevan.Today and PARA TV online news websites, etc. (for details see the "Pressures" section).
 Among the remarkable events of the first quarter were also the discussions related to making amendments and addenda to the Law "On Audiovisual Media". In particular, in the session of March 21, the Parliament put 2 proposed amendments to this law for the second reading. The first one envisages establishing a uniform application for the order of broadcasting of all audiovisual programs included in the public multiplex, regardless of the distribution area, operator and broadcaster. The authors of the initiative are MPs Sisak Gabrielyan, Narek Babayan and Hakob Aslanyan. According to the current regulations, RA network operators determine the distribution order of their audiovisual programs independently. With the legislative amendment, the order of broadcast programs will be the same for everyone. In the period between the first and the second reading, the Government presented one proposal: in favor of the regional network operators, the programs of authorized but unlicensed broadcasters were removed from the list, which is due to the fact that the technical opportunities of these operators are sometimes not sufficient to include many channels in the network.

The other draft to make addenda to the Law on "Audiovisual Media", authored by MP Sisak Gabrielyan, defines the grounds for considering the legally effective decision of the court to terminate the operation of the slot license in the public multiplex and, as a result, reduce broadcasters' rights and business risks. To put it more simply, it is recommended not to stop the activities of the television companies that received a license as a result of the previous tender, which was declared invalid by the court judgement, until the new licensing tender is held.
 Earlier, on March 7, MPs Lilit Galstyan and Elinar Vardanyan also submitted a proposal to amend the same law.[[12]](#footnote-12) With this, the authors aim to partially overcome the incomplete representation of women in the Council of the Public Broadcaster and the Regulatory State Body, as well as to attach importance to the need for effective use of women's potential in public perceptions.
 According to the CPFE, all three drafts raise a number of questions, in particular, from the perspective of the goals and objectives, urgency, rationale and effectiveness of these initiatives. None of the documents were discussed with journalistic organizations. According to experts, the Law "On Audiovisual Media" has much more serious problems, which are continuously ignored: the proper transparency of the evaluation of applications in licensing tenders is not ensured, the requirements for justifying decisions are weak, the idea of forming and applying self-regulation within private television companies is distorted, etc.
 One of the remarkable events of the period under review was also the decision to stop the printing of the Republic of Armenia Daily and the Russian-language newspaper "Respublika Armenia", which was made on March 29 at the meeting of the authorized representatives of the shareholders of Armenpress State CJSC. Accordingly, due to the low level of cost-effectiveness, from June 1, 2023, there will be no printing of the Republic of Armenia Daily and the Russian-language newspaper "Respublika Armenia". Those funds will be directed to the implementation of new programs and projects, in particular, to modernize the work of the Armenpress news agency, including in order to provide news in Persian, Georgian and Chinese.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2023 according to the following classification by the CPFE:

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

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

The relevant sections of the report list the facts on the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2023, as well as the developments related to the previous incidents.

***In total, there were 65 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2023. 17 were cases of pressure against the media and their personnel, and 48 were cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information. No cases of physical violence were recorded.***

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

**Quantitative Data on Violations in the 1st Quarters of 2022-2023**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2022 | 1st quarter of 2023 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **1** | **0** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **12** | **17** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **45** | **48** |

 **Lawsuits, Involving Media and Journalists in the 1st Quarters of 2022-2023**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2022 | 1st quarter of 2023 |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 7 | 9 |
| Economic and other disputes | 0 | 0 |

As in the previous reports, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression would like to note that the data in the table may not be comprehensive and do not claim absolute accuracy. Media representatives sometimes find it unnecessary to publicize facts 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***

 *During the first quarter of 2023, there was no case of physical violence against media personnel. Below we present the developments related to the past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

**On January 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the trial on the fact of violence against Artak Khulyan, correspondent at Shantnews.am news website, and Hovhannes Sargsyan, cameraman at Factor.am news website.

We should remind that the criminal case was initiated in connection with the violence that took place during the days of the April Revolution in 2018, including against representatives of media outlets. It was sent to the Court with the indictment of 8 people.(For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were held on February 21 and March 24. The next court hearing was scheduled for April 27.

**On January 16**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *168.am website correspondent Ani Keshishyan and Public Radio correspondent Liana Yeghiazaryan and other citizens v. former commander of RA Police armed forces Levon Yeranosyan*.
 We should remind that Levon Yeranosyan was charged for intentionally committing acts that were manifestly outside his powers, using special measures, and caused substantial damage to citizens' rights, and negligently brought about severe consequences. Ani Keshishyan was injured in Baghramyan Avenue, Yerevan, on April 16, 2018, and Liana Yeghiazaryan was injured at the intersection of Artsakh-Erebuni Streets, on April 22, covering the protests and police activities. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2018-2022, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

 The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for April 6.

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

*In the first quarter of 2023 there were registered* ***17*** *cases of various instances of applying pressure against the media and their personnel. 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 3,** Grisha Davtyan, a former employee of the Judicial Acts Compulsory Enforcement Service, filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the Investigative Journalists NGO and journalists Anya Sarkisova, Saro Baghdasaryan and Grisha Balasanyan, demanding to publicly refute factual information considered defamatory and to pay compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article entitled: "The Debtor was Deceived in the Bank, the Employee of the Judicial Acts Compulsory Enforcement Service was Fired and Bought His House", published on the Hetq.am website on December 3, 2022.[[13]](#footnote-13)

On January 17, the claim was accepted for proceedings, during the year hearings were held on June 6, September 13, November 2, and December 14.

 **On January 3**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings the lawsuit filed by the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan against V.I.V. Today and Tomorrow LLC, the founder of Ankakh.com news website, 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?”.[[14]](#footnote-14) The website specifically noted that the RA President 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.

A court hearing has been scheduled for April 19.

 **On January 3**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings the lawsuit filed by Pretty Way LLC, which is the owner of Vesta electrical appliances store chain, against Murk LLC, the founder of Mitk.am website, and journalist Simon Sargsyan, dated December 20, 2022, claiming to oblige them to apologize and refute the defamatory information detrimental to their business reputation and pay monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by 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.[[15]](#footnote-15)

A court hearing on the case was also held on March 10, another one was scheduled for June 30.

 **On January 4**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the lawsuit filed by Vardan Badasyan (the father of the former RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan. *Comment by CPFE*) against Alternative NGO Co-Chair Narek Mantashyan and News.am, Analitik.am, 168.am, Iravunk.com, Blognews.am, Alternativ.am, Ipress.am websites on the grounds that the statute of limitations has expired.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on July 10, 2020, demanding to publicly refute the defamatory factual data, publish the refutation in the above-mentioned media outlets, compensate the damage caused to the honor, dignity and business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by articles about Vardan Badasyan's former activity of many years, published on the above-mentioned websites, according to which he assigned positions for money.[[16]](#footnote-16)
 The court also ruled to confiscate 200,000 AMD attorney's fee from Vardan Badasyan in favor of Iravunk Media LLC (the founder of Iravunk.com).
 By the way, the civil case of *Vardan Badasyan v. Narek Mantashyan, NewsAM LLC, Datablog LLC (founder of Blognews.am), Analytic LLC and Ipress.AM LLC* was separated from the case against 168 Hours LLC and Iravunk Media LLC. The next court hearing on the last mentioned case was scheduled for April 11. And the separated case was accepted for proceedings on February 10; a court hearing was scheduled for May 3.

 **On January 5,** NA MP Khachatur Sukiasyan filed a lawsuit against Alternative Media LLC (Alternativ.am website) and Media Plus LLC (Yerevan.today) in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, demanding public apology, publication of the court judgement, refutation of the defamatory information, as well as a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by the article published on Alternativ.am website on December 5, 2022, under the heading, ""Black Clouds" of the Velvet "Racket" above the Kirov Factory. The Buyer of the Factory Put up for Auction in His Own Bank is the Sukiasyans' Driver"[[17]](#footnote-17), which was also published by the Yerevan.today website, referring to the original source. "Sukiasyan's Driver Buys the Factory Put as a Collateral in Sukiasyan's Bank: Alternativ.am".[[18]](#footnote-18) The publication specifically states: "According to the reliable information of Alternativ.am, when the Kirov factory was removed from the auction at a price several times lower than the amount taken from the auction, the buyer was found at once, and he was no one else, but the same Sukiasyans' driver."

On January 16, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The motion to apply injunction to put a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected. The court hearing was scheduled for May 16.

 **On January 5,** Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC filed a lawsuit against journalist Tehmine Yenokyan, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and a compensation (in the amount of 6 million AMD). The lawsuit was caused by the journalist's post on her Facebook page on December 1, 2022, where, using open sources, she stated: "The pipeline going to the ZCMC tailings dump broke down again, the Voghji River was polluted again, a criminal case was initiated again and it will be forgotten again, a cover-up will be done..." .[[19]](#footnote-19) The CJSC representative first demanded a refutation from the journalist, which was not fulfilled, after which a lawsuit was filed in court.

On January 17, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, it was refiled on February 6, and accepted for proceedings on the 13th. A court hearing was held on March 14, the next one was scheduled for April 19.

 **On January 5,** Grisha Tamrazyan, Advisor to the Rector of Brusov State University, filed a lawsuit against Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory. The lawsuit was caused by a report broadcast on the "News" program of the Public TV Company on December 10, 2022, where it is stated that Tamrazyan insulted the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Vahram Dumanyan after the Rector's election.[[20]](#footnote-20) On January 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. As of the end of the quarter, a court hearing has not been scheduled.

 **On January 9,** the defendant on the case of *businessman (currently MP) Khachatur Sukiasyan v. News AM LLC, founder of News.am website*, applied to the Court of Cassation, which received the case on February 21.

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”[[21]](#footnote-21) with a link to an unidentified Telegram channel.

On April 29, 2022, the lawsuit was upheld concerning publication of a refutation and compensation for court expenses. On July 25, the defendant applied to the Court of Appeal, filing a complaint against this judgement. On December 9, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the complaint.

**On January 16,** the defendant on the case of *Mega Trade LLC owned by Khachatur Sukiasyan v. News.am*, filed for the same reason, appealed the judgement of the First Instance Court, by which the lawsuit was partially upheld. The defendant was obliged to publish a refutation, as well as to pay 100,000 AMD in compensation for the damage caused to the company's honor and dignity through defamation, and 100,000 AMD as an attorney's fee.

On January 27, the appeal was accepted for proceedings, a hearing was held on March 24, and publication of the judicial act was scheduled for April 7.

 **On January 10,** the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's press conference was held, to which a number of media outlets were not invited. Among them are: TV companies Yerkir Media and ParaTV, as well as websites NewDay.am, MediaHub.am, PastInfo.am, Yerevan.today, Oragir.news, while FreeNews.am correspondent Diana Davtyan was not allowed to enter the press conference hall because she arrived 10 minutes before the start, while the doors had already been closed 20 minutes earlier.

 **On January 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the trial on the case of *businessman Vahe Keushguerian 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 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 Keushguerian.[[22]](#footnote-22) The website also wrote that the businessman was still enjoying the privilege, granted to him by the former government, and was almost the only buyer of all the grapes grown in Khachik village, this being an exceptional raw material for producing his expensive wine.

A court hearing on the case was also held on January 30, the next one is scheduled for April 20.

 **On January 10**, On January 10, the Court of Appeal rejected the motion of the plaintiff on case of *citizen Zaven Hakobyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., the founder of Zhamanak Daily*, to consider the reasons for missing the deadline set by law for filing an appeal to be excusable, on the basis of its lack of substance. The appeal was also returned, which was refiled on the 17th and accepted for proceedings on the 23rd.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, demanding a compensation for the non-pecuniary damage caused to business reputation, a public apology and a refutation, was caused by an article, published in the daily on June 13, under the heading, "What Vanetsyan Left Behind? Who are Zaven and Sos Hakobyans?", where it was particularly mentioned that when the former Head of the NSS Artur Vanetsyan was in office, “his godson Zaven Hakobyan who was notorious for being extremely corrupt was promoted from an operative inspector to the Head of the super profitable Araratyan Customs, however, after Vanetsyan’s dismissal, he also managed to escape the system by a near miss.” [[23]](#footnote-23)

On July 19, 2022, the court partially upheld the lawsuit. Zhamanak Daily was obliged to publish an apology text, to pay the plaintiff 200 thousand AMD in compensation for non-pecuniary damage, 100 thousand AMD - the attorney's fee and 8 thousand AMD as a state duty.

No other developments were recorded during the quarter.

 **On January 10**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to reject the claim against the journalist on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC and its Executive Director Davit Papazyan v. Hraparak Daily LLC and journalist Suzan Simonyan* and to confiscate 200,000 AMD attorney's fees from the plaintiffs in favor of Suzan Simonyan, on the grounds that the statute of limitation has expired.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 2, 2021, was caused by the article on Hraparak.am website, published on July 24, entitled: “State Interest or Business of a Group of People?”, which particularly states that Davit Papazyan published a Q&A talk, addressing the deal signed with Air Arabia company on July 14.[[24]](#footnote-24) Then the journalist expressed a final thought, “The state invests, the businessman puts the money in his pocket...”

According to another decision dated January 10, the case regarding Hraparak Daily LLC was separated. It was filed in the court on February 2, and proceedings were not accepted until the end of the quarter.

On March 13, the plaintiff appealed the court judgement to the Court of Appeal. The appeal was assigned to the judge on March 24, the judge was replaced on the March 28.

**On January 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund* CJSC *v.* *Hraparak Daily* *LLC and journalist Suzan Simonyan*, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation, and a monetary compensation. The lawsuit was filed on the same day and for the same reason as the previous case.

On the same day, by the court judgement, the defendant Suzan Ararat Simonyan was replaced by the proper defendant Susanna Komindos Simonyan.

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 29.

 **On April 4, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Marz (Alaverdi residence) held a regular court hearing with new proceedings on the case of *the Director of Alaverdi Medical Center CJSC Stepan Mosinyan v. 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, 2022, was caused by an article entitled: “Alaverdi: Medical Center Surgeon's Negligence and Director's Business Interests”[[25]](#footnote-25), 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.”[[26]](#footnote-26) On September 20, according to the court judgement, the lawsuit regarding the publication dated January 19 was rejected on the grounds of statute of limitations, and the case regarding the article dated March 14 was separated, and on September 26, a new proceeding was accepted.**

**Court hearings were also held on February 15 and March 16. The next hearing has not been scheduled as of March 31.**

**On January 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted new proceedings on the case of citizen *Erik Yeghinyan vs. CMG LLC (*the founder of Pastinfonews website).

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on February 14, 2019, was caused by the September 10, 2018 publication on the above-mentioned website, entitled: “The Prisoner Attempted a Suicide Because He was not Taken to the Dentist”.[[27]](#footnote-27) (For details see CPFE’s 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 upheld. the judgment of the First Instance Court was overturned, and the case was sent to the court for a new trial.

Court hearings were also held on February 21 and March 27. The next one is scheduled for June 5.

 **On January 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the investigation of the criminal case, related to the execution of the judicial act implemented by the lawsuit of the second President of the Republic of Armenia Robert Kocharyan against Skizb Media Kentron Ltd.․

We should remind that on July 6, 2020, the Court of General Jurisdiction 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 a 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 reports of CPFE, 2019-2022 on *Reports* section on [www.khosq.am](http://www.khosq.am)website).

A new court hearing on the case has not been scheduled as of the end of the quarter.

 **On January 12,** the correspondent of Aravot.am news website Hripsime Jebejian posted screenshots on her Facebook page, where unknown persons, including fake users of the social network, cursed, threatened and insulted the journalist.[[28]](#footnote-28) The reason is that during the press conference of the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, held on January 10, the journalist asked the Prime Minister a question about serving punishment for his sins.

 **On January 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Samvel Hayrapetyan v. Russian-based political scientist Mariam Hovsepyan and* *Armdaily News Agency LLC*.

The lawsuit, filed on January 7, 2022, was caused by 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”[[29]](#footnote-29), 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 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 also held on January 23, February 15 and 17, the next one was scheduled for April 13.

**On January 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *former Zoo Director Ruben Khachatryan v. journalist Narine Kirakosyan*, demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation of 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 on the animals by declaring himself a sole leader. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 7.

 **On January 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the trial on the case of *citizen Larisa Harutyunyan v.* *Shark LLC* (the legal entity representing 5 TV)

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on October 26, 2021, demanding publication refutation. The lawsuit 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”.[[30]](#footnote-30) The plaintiff suggested the media outlet that they publish refutation since the disagreement among fellow villagers has nothing to do with the khachkar, but a routine argument, and the assertion in the title does not comply with the reality. According to the lawsuit, the media admitted that there had been an imprecision, but refused to publish appropriate refutation.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 18.

 **On January 18,** the Court of Cassation returned the defendant’s appeal on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker (currently NA Speaker) Alen Simonyan v. Gegham Simonyan, the domain owner of Alternativ.am website*,

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on September 18, 2020, demanding compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity, 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.[[31]](#footnote-31)

By the judgment of March 10, 2021, Alen Simonyan's lawsuit was rejected, and the Court of Appeal upheld the plaintiff’s appeal. The case was sent to the same court for a retrial. On May 6, 2022, by the new trial the court upheld the lawsuit partially, obliging Gegham Simonyan to publicly refute the defamatory data on Alen Simonyan, pay a compensation in the amount of 500,000 AMD for defamation, 300,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee and 14,000 AMD as a state duty. The defendant appealed the judgement to the Court of Appeal, where the appeal was rejected. The defendant applied to the Court of Cassation.

 **On January 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanterminated the proceedings on the case of *Global Gold Mining LLC v. Yerkir Editorial Office LLC* (the founder of the Yerkir.am news website), as the plaintiff withdrew the lawsuit.

On April 6, 2022, Yerkir.am wrote that 140 employees of the bankrupt Global Gold Mining have not received salaries for 10 years,[[32]](#footnote-32) and then on April 11, published the LLC’s refutation in regard to the previously made statement.[[33]](#footnote-33) On April 12, the publication entitled “Global Gold Mining's Claims Are Clearly False: Unpaid Employees Deny GGM's Refutation” followed,[[34]](#footnote-34) which became the cause of the lawsuit, demanding refutation of the defamatory information.

 **On January 19,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Lori Marz (Vanadzor residence) continued the 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”[[35]](#footnote-35) and “A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time”[[36]](#footnote-36) which were published on the aforementioned website on October 4 and December 5, 2013, respectively. (For details see the annual reports of CPFE for 2016-2021 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were also held on February 24, March 23, the next one was scheduled for May 10.

**On January 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Europe of Law Union NGO*, *lawyers Lousine Hakobyan, Tigran Yegoryan, human rights activist Zhanna Aleksanyan, Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., NA MP Arman Babajanyan v.Veto* *social -political movement, Narek Malyan, ArmNews TV CJSC and Yerevan.today website*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit, filed on January 29, 2021, was caused by an article published on Yerevan.today on October 24, 2020, entitled: “Working Hand in Hand in the Interests of the Turks”, which targeted the human rights organizations, labeling them as “Sorosians” who “lay the cornerstone of Armenia's downfall”,[[37]](#footnote-37) as well as Narek Malyan's film with the same content shown on December 5 on ArmNews TV.[[38]](#footnote-38)

A hearing on the case was also held on February 24, the next one was scheduled for May 18.

**On January 23,** the plaintiff on the case of *Vanadzor office of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly NGO* *v.* *Antifake.am* *website* appealed the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction, which rejected the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 26, 2021, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused. It was trigered 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.[[39]](#footnote-39)

On December 21, 2022, the court rejected the lawsuit, mentioning that the impugned statements used in the article were abstract judgments, they were not facts and were not addressed to the plaintiff.

On February 14 of the present year, the Civil Court of Appeal returned the appeal for corrections, on the 21st it was refiled, on the 24th it was accepted for proceedings.

 **On January 24,** 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.

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.[[40]](#footnote-40) 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 a payment of monetary compensation in the amount of 2 million AMD.

On March 27 of the present year, the case was redistributed based on the change of the judge.

 **On January 24,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Hayk Khanumyan, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Artsakh v. Hraparak Daily*, demanding refutation of the defamation and payment of a compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on May, 2022, was caused by the articles published in the newspaper stating 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.[[41]](#footnote-41)
 The next court hearing was scheduled for April 25, 2023.

 **On January 24**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, Acting Rector of YSU (currently, Rector) v. Media Plus LLC and* *Platform of Free News* *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 insult.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 27, 2021, was caused by the article, published on Yerevan.today on August 18, entitled: “When are You Going to Name YSU after Soros?”,[[42]](#footnote-42) which particularly states that 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 the nickname “Sorosian”, ascribed to him in the feature, published on Politik.am on August 4, entitled: “Sorosian Hovhannes Hovhannisyan will be appointed as the Acting Rector of YSU”.[[43]](#footnote-43)

A court hearing was also held on March 1, the next one was scheduled for April 19, 2023.

**On January 26,** 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.*

The lawsuit was caused by the article published by HZh on August 21, 2018, entitled: “Ararat, Armnews, H2, News.am, Yerkir Media - All Fakes: Which Media Outlets were “Bought” by Kocharyan?”.[[44]](#footnote-44) According to the plaintiff, with several expressions in the publications about News.am, as well as with the title of the article, damage was caused to its business reputation. News AM LLC brought a claim of compensation of 200,000 AMD to the founder of Haykakan Zhamanak.

The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for June 7, 2023.

**On January 26,** 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 for the damage caused to honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD.

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

The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for May 25, 2023.

**On January 26**, the plaintiff’s appeal on the case of *the successors of the 9 victims of the March 1, 2008 events v. Shark LLC, founder of Channel 5 TV company, and Narek Mantashyan, Co-Chairman of Alternative NGO* was returned because of document inprecisions.

We should remind that the lawsuit 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 5 TV, during which he uttered defamatory and insulting expressions about the successors of the victims of March 1 events.[[45]](#footnote-45) 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.

On November 11, 2022, by the court judgment the defendant’s motion to apply the statute of limitations was upheld and the claim was rejected. The plaintiff filed an appeal.

**January 26,** the defendant on the case of *citizen Arusyak Mkrtchyan vs. Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office LLC* appealed the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction, which had partially upheld the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 12, 2019, demanding refutation of defamatory information and compensation of damage, 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”.[[46]](#footnote-46) 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.

By the judgment of December 21, 2022, 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 March 21, 2023, the case was assigned to the judge at the Court of Appeal.

**On January 28,** citizens reprimanded Ani Gevorgyan, editor of NewDay.am news website, at Yerbulur Military Pantheon for approaching them and asking questions.[[47]](#footnote-47) They urged her to ask questions to the former RA presidents, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, implying that the journalist serves the interests of the former authorities.

**On January 30,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a preliminary court hearing on the case of*Samvel Kharazyan v.* *Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office and its editor-in-chief Knar Manukyan*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit, filed on September 26, 2022, was caused by an article, published in Armlur.am website on August 25 and entitled “The Corrupt System Persists even Today: New Disclosures by the Head of State Supervision Service”,[[48]](#footnote-48) 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.

 The next court hearing was scheduled for May 31, 2023.

 **On January 30,** 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.[[49]](#footnote-49) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2020-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for May 22, 2023.

 **On January 30,** the "Yerevan State University" Foundation filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak Daily LLC, the owner of the Hraparak.am website, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory, and confiscation of a compensation for defamation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on the website on December 30, 2022, entitled "A Financial Deficit has Arisen in YSU".[[50]](#footnote-50) YSU demanded a refutation, which was published with certain comments, but it did not satisfy the plaintiff, and the latter applied to the court.

On February 14, 2023, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. No court hearing date has been set.

 **On February 1**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular 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 Arabiawas granted the status of national airline, is not transparent for the public and contains many corruption risks.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for April 19, 2023.

 **On February 2,** the RA Ambassador to Ukraine Vladimir Karapetyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak Daily LLC, demanding refutation of the defamatory information and confiscation of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the news published in Hraparak Daily, and then on the Hraparak.am website on December 30, 2022, under the heading, "I would Ask Mentally Ill People not to Speak Here". "Vagharshak Harutyunyan scolded Vladimir Karapetyan", where, according to the media, there was a heated debate between the ambassadors on the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.[[52]](#footnote-52)

On February 16, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, refiled on March 14 and accepted for proceedings on March 24. The court hearing was scheduled for May 22.

 **On February 2,** 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”,[[53]](#footnote-53) 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.[[54]](#footnote-54) The amount of compensation mentioned in Sasun Khachatryan's claim is 2 million AMD.

On July 20, 2022, the claim was partially upheld. The court ruled to confiscate 200,000 AMD in favour of the plaintiff as material compensation for defamation, as well as oblige the media outlet to publish a refutation. The defendant filed an appeal against the judgment to a higher instance court. On February 28, 2023, the appeal was rejected, the judgement of the First Instance Court was left unchanged. No other developments were registered until the end of the quarter.

 **On February 3,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on one of the two cases of *Senik Julhakyan, Director of Armhydroenergy Project CJSC, v. Hmayak Hovhannisyan, Chairman of the Political Scientists Union of Armenia and BATS TV online TV Company*, demanding a public apology for insult, as well as refutation of information and confiscation of a compensation for defamation.

We should remind thatthe on March 17,2022, Senik Julhakyan, Director of Armhydroenergy Project CJSC, filed **two lawsuits** with the same content. The lawsuits were caused by the political scientsit’s thoughts expressed on the air of the TV Company on December 21, 2021[[55]](#footnote-55) and January 15, 2022,[[56]](#footnote-56) 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 next hearing on the first lawsuit was scheduled for May 10, 2023. A hearing on the second lawsuit was held on February 7, the next one was scheduled for July 4.

 **On February 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan left the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v.* *Andradardz Press Club NGO* without trial on the grounds that the plaintiff failed to attend the court hearings and did not file a motion to postpone the investigation of the case or to resolve the case in his absence.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 21, 2019, demanding compensation of the damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult, and was caused by an article, entitled: “Another Precious Gift: A Cell-Phone Number that Costs 20 million AMD for Hayk Sargsyan”[[57]](#footnote-57) and published on Newspress.am website owned by Andradardz Press Club NGO. On February 2, 2022, the court rejected the lawsuit, concluding that the plaintiff did not present sufficient evidence that the defendant's statements were offensive and/or defamatory. The plaintiff filed an appeal against the judgment in a higher instance, where it was upheld and sent for a retrial.

As a result of the second trial, the court also ruled to confiscate 120,000 AMD from Hayk Sargsyan as the defendant's attorney's fee. No appeal was filed against the judicial act, and it entered into legal force.

**On February 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the double trial on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v.* *Hraparak Daily Ltd.*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on June 21, 2019, was caused by an article published on May, 2019, entitled: “Hayk Sargsyan “Made a Row” on the Yerevan-Moscow Plane”.[[58]](#footnote-58) At the hearing of February 28, 2020, the court ruled 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, which upheld the claim, abolishing the judgement of the Civil Court of Appeal. The latter abolished the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction, and the case proceedings resumed.

During this quarter, a court hearing was also held on February 20, the next one was scheduled for May 12.

**On February 9,** the Courtof General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *citizen Mariam Hovsepyan v. 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, filed on August 23, 2022, was caused by an article under 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 statements on Facebook about public institutions, politicians, journalists, and businessmen and was fined in the amount of 200,000 AMD.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 15.

 **On March 7,** the court judgement rejected Mariam Hovsepyan’s lawsuit, filed on August 23, 2022, against Slaq Media LLC (the founder of Slaq.am news website) for the same reason and with the same claims.[[60]](#footnote-60)

The grounds the rejection of the claim are the application of the statute of limitations. The court also ruled to confiscate 80 thousand AMD from Mariam Hovsepyan in favor of Slaq Media LLC as an attorney's fee. As of March 31, no appeal against the judgement has been filed.

**On February 13,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Arayik Harutyunyan, the Chief of Staff of the RA Prime Minister v. Hraparak Daily LLC* with claims of refuting the information considered as defamatory and payment of compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on August 19, 2022, was caused by an article, published on Hraparak.am website, owned by the LLC, on July 31, under 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 were taking over all well-funded projects, would play an active role in city management.[[61]](#footnote-61) The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on August 30.

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 5, 2023.

**On February 15**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan launched the new trial on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) v. Iravunk Media Ltd.*.

 We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 4, 2020, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, was triggered by a publication in the Iravunk newspaper on July 20 of the same year, 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. The court obliged the media outlet to publicly refute the information considered defamatory and pay 200,000 AMD as an attorney's fee. The defendant filed an appeal against this judgment. On April 29, 2022, the appeal was upheld, and the case was sent for a retrial. The next hearing was scheduled for May 3, 2023.

**On February 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, after returning the lawsuit twice, filed by lawyer Tigran Yegoryan against Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Board LLC and Union of Journalists of Armenia NGO, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, accepted it for proceedings. The lawsuit was caused by the statement, made by the Union of Journalists of Armenia on October 3 in defense of the Zhoghovurd Daily after an incident, when the former official Samvel Kharazyan, as Tigran Yegoryan's client, filed a second lawsuit against the media outlet.[[62]](#footnote-62) 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.

A court hearing was scheduled for May 11.

**On February 16,** the trial on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Iravunk Media LLC* *and Journalist Ilona Azaryan* waslaunchedin new proceedings.

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. *Comment by CPFE*) reached the NSS with Hayk Sargsyan’s help.”

On March 2, 2021, the court partially upheld the lawsuit. Both the defendant and the plaintiff appealed to the Civil Court of Appeal. At the September 28 hearing, this court ruled to overturn the judgement 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 judgement in the Court of Cassation.

On October 7, 2022, the appeal was granted by the Court of Cassation, and the case was accepted for new proceedings,

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 2, 2023.

**On February 17,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made a redistribution on the case of *Vardan Badasyan (the former RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan's father. Comment by CPFE) v. Alternativ.am news website* on the grounds of the change of the judge.

The lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, demanding confiscation of money and publication of a refutation, was caused by an article, published on the above-mentioned website on June 9, entitled: “The Apple does not Fall Far from the Tree. Rustam Badasyan should Start the Vetting Process from His Own Father.” It was particularly mentioned that Vardan Badasyan used to be the Deputy Head of the Legal Department of the Police, the First Deputy Head of the 6th Department and “the appointments in positions below his level of hierarchy were made on one condition– appointment for money”.[[63]](#footnote-63)

As of March 31, the next court hearing on the case has not been scheduled.

**On February 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (Masis residence) in a new trial continued the case of *Nver Mnatsakanyan, a journalist and anchor, v. Hayeli Club and Garnik Isagulyan*, with claims of apology and publication of the judgment in the media.

The lawsuit, filed on May 15, 2019, 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.[[64]](#footnote-64)

By the judgement of August 16, 2021, the Court rejected Nver Mnatsakanyan’s lawsuit claiming that the plaintiff failed to substantiate the fact that the defendant was seeking to insult the plaintiff and to discredit his honor and dignity. However, the Civil Court of Appeal ruled to overturn the judgment of the Court of General Jurisdiction and send the case to the same court for a retrial.

On March 13, the court partially upheld the claim: it obliged Garnik Isagulyan to apologize, pay 28,000 AMD as a state duty and 300,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee. The lawsuit regarding the claim against Hayeli Club was rejected.

No appeal was filed against the judgement until the end of the quarter.

 **On February 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *NewsAM LLC v. 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, filed on September 23, 2022, was caused by an article, published on Hraparak.am website on August 10,[[65]](#footnote-65) which stated that upon a request from the Ministry of Defence News.am refuted a news story on an unpleasant event, featuring the Minister.[[66]](#footnote-66)

 The next court hearing was scheduled for May 18, 2023.

**On February 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Head of Arshaluys Community of Armavir Marz Zarzand Grigoryan v. citizen Virab Shahbazyan and Bats TV Plus Ltd.*, demanding a refutation of slander, a public apology and confiscation of a compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on July 24, 2020, was caused by the broadcast on Bats TV, dated October 29, 2019, during which Virab Shahbazyan, a resident of Arshaluys village, spoke about Zarzand Grigoryan's activities, in particular, noting that the latter was still continuing his illegal activities even after the revolution. “He has been persecuting, robbing and tormenting the people for 12 years, he manages the village alone, sells the lands at a high price, while the authorities and law-enforcers do not interfere in all this”.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 4, 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.[[68]](#footnote-68)

On June 2, 2022, the court ruled to leave the case without trial, on the grounds that the notified plaintiff failed to appear in 2 successive hearings. The Court of Appeal upheld the plaintiff's appeal against this judgement.

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 8, 2023.

**On February 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the court hearing on the case of *Mher Terteryan, the leader of the United Homeland Party and an advisor to the former RA 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 her lawyer Hakob Charoyan spoke during the program.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The next court hearing is scheduled for May 22, 2023.

**On March 15,** another court hearing was held on the case of the same plaintiff against Naira Terteryan (with Live News Media involved as the third party), demanding to oblige her to refute the information considered defamatory.

The lawsuit was filed on September 3, 2021, for the same reason as the previous case.

The date of publication of the judicial act was set for April 5.

**On February 23,** the Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. the Commission on TV and Radio*.

We should remind that this lawsuit was filed **on March 15, 2021**, against the Commission on TV and Radio, demanding to obligate it to make a decision on recognizing Armenian Second TV Channel LLC as a winner and granting a license to the given channel in the competition for licensing the use of slots in the Public Multiplex. ArmNews CJSC, Shark LLC, Multi Media Center TV CJSC, Armenia TV CJSC, A-TV LLC, Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., Free News LLC, Meltex LLC, Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC, Husaber CJSC, Shant LLC, and the Ministry of High-Tech Industry were involved as a third party. On August 30, 2022, the Administrative Court partially upheld the motion of Armenian Second TV Channel LLC on applying an injunction, prohibiting the Commission on TV 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.

 According to the judgment dated March 17 of the present year, the lawsuit was rejected, the applied injunction was abolished.

 **On March 23,** a court hearing was held in the Administrative Court of Appeal on another case of the same plaintiff against the Commission on TV and Radio, where the "BOON" Scientific and Cultural Foundation (Boon TV) is involved as a third party. The demand of the lawsuit filed on August 9, 2022 is to abolish the decision No. 103-A dated July 15 of that year, according to which the right to broadcast the capital city slot in the public multiplex was obtained by the competitor of "Armenian Second TV Channel", the "BOON" Scientific and Cultural Foundation (Boon TV). On October 10, according to the court judgement, the lawsuit was rejected, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal. April 13 was set as the date of publication of the judgement.
 **On March 3,** new proceedings have been accepted on another case of*Armenian Second TV Channel* *v.* *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. The lawsuit was filed on September 19, 2022. On September 23, it was returned because of the inaccuracies contained therein, which was appealed in a higher instance. The appeal was upheld and the decision on the return of the lawsuit was abolished.
 The next court hearing was scheduled for October 24, 2023.
 **On January 30,** the court hearing on the case of the same plaintiff againstthe Commission on TV and Radio was held, this time with a demand to recognize the winners of the republican coverage slot licensing tender in public multiplex and repealing Decision N 143-A on licensing, dated December 2 (Armenia TV CJSC, ATV LLC, Shant LLC and Multi Media Kentron TV CJSC were involved as a third party.) This lawsuit was filed **on December 21, 2022**. This year a hearing was held on February 13. On February 22, the claim was upheld, the impugned decision was declared invalid. On March 23, 2023, the defendant applied to the Court of Appeal, on the 29th, the complaint was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for May 17.

**On February 23,** the Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the defendant’s appeal 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*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 31, 2020, demanding public refutation of defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity. And it 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”.[[70]](#footnote-70)

By the judgment of September 28, 2022, the claim was partially upheld, 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 applied to the Court of Appeal.

 **On February 24,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular 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.[[71]](#footnote-71) The next court hearing was scheduled for May 12, 2023.

**On February 24,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal on the case of *lawyer Aram Orbelyan v. the Republic of Armenia*, *represented by the National Security Service and the Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC*. The lawsuit was being examined twice.

We should remind that 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 TV 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.[[72]](#footnote-72) On July 26, 2021, the Court ruled to reject the lawsuit. The plaintiff's appeal against the judgement was upheld. the judgment of the Court of First Instance was overturned in its entirety, the case was sent for a new trial. On September 22, 2022, the court rejected the lawsuit again. This judgement was again appealed.

 On March 27, 2023, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation.

**On February 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan made a redistribution on the case of *Davit Galstyan, Advisor to the former Minister of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, v. the First Armenian News Website Ltd. and journalist Nver Mnatsakanyan*, on the grounds of the change of the judge.

The lawsuit was filed on March 23, 2021, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, and public refutation of defamatory information.

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on March 2 with a new presiding judge; the next court hearing was scheduled for April 10, 2023.

 **On February 27,** former member of the Yerevan Council of Elders, RPA member Naira Nahapetyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against First Armenian News LLC, with the demand to oblige them to refute the information considered defamatory. The lawsuit was caused by the video published on the website's YouTube page under the heading: "The Accused is RPA Member Naira Nahapetyan. Chronicle of January 24" , where there is official information, stating that Nahapetyan is accused of hiding a large amount of taxes.[[73]](#footnote-73) According to Astghik Sapeyan, the editor of the website, it was the legal chronicle of the day, which also included news from the press about Naira Nahapetyan.

On March 10, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

 **On February 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the court hearing on the case of *the Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC v. 168 Zham LLC* in a new trial, where it was ruled to distribute the burden of proof.

 We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on May 13, 2021, demanding refutation of the information discrediting business reputation and 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.[[74]](#footnote-74) On December 2 of the same year, upon the decision of the court the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. The court obligated the plaintiff to confiscate 50 000 AMD in favor of 168 Zham as an attorney’s fee. Both the plaintiff and the defendant appealed the judgement to a higher instance. Here, the plaintiff’s appeal was upheld, the judgment was overturned, and the case was sent to the same court for a retrial. Against this judgement, on September 8, the defendant filed an appeal to the Court of Cassation, but the judgement of the Court of Appeal entered into legal force.

 The next court hearing was scheduled for May 4, 2023.

 **On February 28**, the Court of Appeal ruled to reject the plaintiff’s appeal on the case of *citizen Gevorg Harutyunyan v. citizen Larisa Harutyunyan and Shark LLC (the legal entity representing 5 TV)*, to confiscate 450,000 AMD from the latter in favor of the state budget of the Republic of Armenia as the amount of state duty intended for the appeal.

The lawsuit was filed on November 11, 2021, demanding refutation of the defamatory information, discrediting honor and dignity, public apology and a monetary compensation, and was caused by the news report for Haylur news program of 5 TV on October 16, entitled: “She Makes me Grieve; the Neighbor doesn’t Allow to Insert a Khachkar in Tribute to Heroes”,[[75]](#footnote-75) 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 October 31, 2022, the lawsuit was rejected by the court judgement, and the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal.

No other development was recorded until the end of the quarter.

 **On February 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of*NA Deputy Speaker Hakob Arshakyan v. Lurer.com and ArmDay.am news websites*, where it was ruled to distribute the burden of proof.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on March 16, 2022, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information contained in the above-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,[[76]](#footnote-76) then on the latter [[77]](#footnote-77) 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.” By the way, the lawsuit was returned twice, and when Hakob Arshakyan filed a lawsuit for the third time, he demanded to refute the defamatory information and pay compensation in the amount of 5 million AMD.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 6, 2023.

 **On March 1,** the Court of Cassation accepted for proceedings the defendant’s appeal on the case of *Mher Derdzyan vs. Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office Ltd.* against the judgement of rejecting the appeal at the Court of Appeal.

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.[[78]](#footnote-78) The plaintiff demands a public apology and 1,5 million AMD compensation for insult and slander. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019-2022 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. This time the lawsuit was partially upheld, 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. The appeal was rejected twice, due to deficiencies in the documents, and the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation.

**On March 6,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of the *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. 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”.

As of March 31, a court hearing on the case has not been scheduled.

 **On March 6,** 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.amwebsite.[[79]](#footnote-79) 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. The plaintiff filed an appeal in the Civil Court of Appeal, where the appeal was upheld, the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction was overturned, and the case was sent to the same court for a retrial.

A court hearing on this case was also held on March 29, with the next one scheduled for June 7.

 **On March 13,** the Court of General Jurisdiction held a redistribution on the case of *Demi Pharm LLC v. Hetq LLC (founder of Hetq.am website)*, on the grounds of the change of the judge.

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

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 6, 2023.

 **On March 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Shirak Marz termiated the case of *Hayk Hovhannisyan, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Yerevan Metro, v. Paylak Fahradian, the editor of Irakanum.am website*, demanding refutation of the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation and payment of a monetary compensation. The judgement was based on the plaintiff’s motion about withdrawing the claim.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on December 20, 2022, was caused by an article, under the heading “Sargsyan’s Close Friend in the Spotlight of Law Enforcement” published on the website on November 18.[[81]](#footnote-81) 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.
  **On March 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a redistribution on the case of *Livenews.am journalist Arthur Hovhannisyan v. Public TV journalist Levon Sardaryan*, on the grounds of the change of the judge.

The lawsuit, filed on June 22, 2020, demanding an apology for the insult and a public refutation of the information considered defamatory, was caused by Levon Sardaryan's Facebook comment, dated May 21, on the article, entitled: “The Situation in Armenia is Terrible: some will Survive, the Rest will Die” published on Livenews.am website on the same day. Sardaryan quoted the title of the article and wrote: “If anyone proves that after all this the owner of this website is a human being, I will agree to live in a barn. But in my subjective opinion, I will let G.I. enjoy the life in the barn.” (G.I. is Garnik Isagulyan, who is identified as the site owner. *Comment by CPFE*).

As of March 31, a court hearing on the case has not been scheduled.

**On March 14,** the YouTube channel of the Aravot.am news website was hacked as a result of a cyber attack. This was announced by the website's editor Anna Israelyan. According to her, all the videos were deleted from the channel, and the process started from the moment when an announcement was posted with the title "How and to what extent did the revolutionary officials get rich in the warring country, in the year of the war?" In relation to the incident, journalistic organizations issued a statement calling on law enforcement officers to unravel the cybercrime.[[82]](#footnote-82)
 The Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Armenia reported in response to the inquiry of the CPFE that on March 16, at 6:40 p.m., the Department of Investigation of Cybercrime and High Technology Crime of the General Department of Investigation of Particularly Important Cases of the RA Investigative Committee received the joint statement of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression and journalistic organizations regarding the hacking attack on the Aravot.am YouTube channel. Bearing in mind that the said report did not comply with the conditions stipulated by the RA Criminal Procedure Code, therefore no criminal proceedings were initiated, which was confirmed by the supervising prosecutor.
 **We think that regardless of whether this is a legislative omission or the approach of law enforcement agencies, it actually turns out that no liability is intended for hacking a website, which is bewildering.** Yerkir Media and Ararat TV companies, NewDay.am, Meganews.am, Infocom.am, Kavkaz-uzel.eu, Yerevan.today, Lragrogh.com news sites, Iravunk and Azg newspapers, as well as Noyan Tapan news agency were not invited to the press conference of the RA Prime Minister organized **on March 14.** In this regard, the representatives of these media outlets expressed their displeasure in response to the inquiry of the CPFE.[[83]](#footnote-83)

**On March 15,** 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 public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to 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”.[[84]](#footnote-84)

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 2, 2023.

 **On March 16**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan in a new trial accepted for proceedings the case of *Hraparak Daily* LLC *v.* *Media Initiatives Center* *NGO*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and a compensation.

We should remind that 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 misinformation 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.

On July 6, 2022, the court partially upheld the claim, obliging Media Initiatives Center to post a note refuting its publications on the above-mentioned 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 lawsuit.

On August 5, the defendant filed an appeal against this judgement, 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.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 25, 2023.

**On March 16**, the Court of Cassation returned the defendant’s appeal against the judgement of the Civil Court of Appeal on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) vs. Tert.am journalist Ani Gevorgyan,* which in its turn left the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction nearly unchanged.

We should remind that the lawsuit, demanding public refutation of information considered defamatory and a compensation in the amount of 2 million AMD, was filed on May 13, 2021, and was caused by the interview given by Ani Gevorgyan at the Hayeli club on April 16, where the latter accused Alen Simonyan of organizing a campaign against her with threats and insults.[[85]](#footnote-85) By the way, during the hearing on October 5 upon the decision of the court, News.am LLC was involved as a third party.

On May 23, 2022, 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’s appeal was partially granted, namely the text for refutation was amended, and in relation to the rest, the judgment remained unchanged. On December 19, 2022, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation.

 **On March 16,** Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC and the Chairman of the Company's Board of Directors Tigran Avinyan, filed a lawsuit against Pastinfo LLC, demanding to oblige them to refute the information discrediting their honor, dignity and business reputation and to pay monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on the Pastinfo.am news website on February 20, stating, "The information of Pastinfo was confirmed. Avinyan's tenure as Deputy Mayor is illegal. He leads a commercial organization, which he has no right to do", in which the two positions of Tigran Avinyan, Chairman of the Fund's Board of Directors and Deputy Mayor, are considered incompatible.[[86]](#footnote-86) By the way, the plaintiffs did not provide the information requested by the website on that subject.

On March 30, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The motion to injunction putting a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected.

**On March 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a redistribution on the case of *Lyova Abrahamyan, Head of Sarukhan Community in Gegharkunik Marz, v. Narine Hasratyan, a reporter at the Haykakan Zham news website*, on the grounds of the change of the judge. The lawsuit was filed on February 13, 2019, claiming refutation of the information discrediting honor, dignity and business reputation, and was caused by an article entitled: “Who Sponsors Sarukhan Mayor and has Prevented Pre-Trial Investigation since August”, published on the website on January 10 and containing villagers’ complaints about their mayor.[[87]](#footnote-87)
 A court hearing was scheduled for April 3, 2023.

**On March 21**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Karen Melik-Tangyan, the already former Director of the Mother Armenia Museum of Military History under the RA Ministry of Defense v. Social Media LLC*, demanding compensation for 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 MediaLLC on November 11. The article was later removed from the page.

The next hearing was scheduled for April 5.

**On March 22,** the Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the plaintiff’s appeal against the judgement of the First Instance Court on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC* *v. journalist Oleg Safonov and* *168 Hours Ltd.*, according to which the lawsuit was rejected.

The lawsuit, filed on January 25, 2021, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation and pecuniary compensation, 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?”.[[88]](#footnote-88) 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, 2022, the court rejected the claim and confiscated 200,000 AMD in favor of the defendant as the attorney’s fee. The plaintiff filed an appeal to the Court of Appeal.

On March 31, 2023, the appeal was partially upheld. The judgment of the First Instance Court regarding the rejection of the claim against Oleg Safonov was overturned and amended. Safonov was obliged to publicly apologize for the insulting remarks made against the company, to pay 100 thousand AMD for the insult, 300 thousand AMD for damages caused by defamation, and 48 thousand AMD as a state duty.

 **On March 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *businessman Ashot Khlghatyan v. lawyer Lernik Hovhannisyan*, with claims to publicly refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. Investigating Journalists NGO was recognized as the third party on the case.

The lawsuit, filed on October 17, was cause by the open letter addressed to the RA Prime Minister and published on September 8 on Hetq.am website that belongs to the NGO.[[89]](#footnote-89) According to this piece, the gas station belonging to the lawyer's client was illegally operated by the plaintiff Ashot Khlghatyan.

The next court hearing was scheduled for August 23.

 **On March 22**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Ara Mkrtchyan, the Head of Kasakh Community in Kotayk Marz, v. 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 lawsuit filed on December 7, 2021, and the one filed on January 10, 2022 were 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 inspectorate through investigations.[[90]](#footnote-90)

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 14, 2023.

 **On March 22,** 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 article dated May 29, 2019, 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?”.[[91]](#footnote-91)
 The next court hearing was scheduled for May 26, 2023.

 **On March 22,** the editorial office of Zhoghovurd newspaper received a letter from Davit Arakelyan, Chief of the NA Staff, with which the latter "warned" the editor-in-chief Knar Manukyan. This followed the previous day's publication of the Armlur.am website owned by the media outlet, in which two photos and an attached brief text reported how the employees carrying out the security of the NA building, hearing the noise of the MPs, gathered at the door of the NA session hall, in order to enter upon the order of the chairman. According to the Chief of the Staff, with this publication, Knar Manukyan violated the relevant decisions of the NA Speaker, according to which security officers should not be filmed. By the way, the letter was preceded by a phone call from the head of the Public Relations and Communication Department of the National Assembly, by which that official demanded not to publish the photos, and if they have already been published, to remove them from the website. According to Knar Manukyan, the Chief of the Staff abused his powers, in addition, a discriminatory approach was displayed, because in the past, when, for example, the security officers in the NA hall used violence against the MPs, and all the videos were available, no media outlet or journalist was reprimanded by the NA staff.[[92]](#footnote-92)

**On March 22,** on the Facebook page of the Aravot.am news website, comments with offensive expressions were posted addressed to journalist Hripsime Jebejian, apparently from a fake user account. They also say that the journalist is publishing false information against the current authorities.[[93]](#footnote-93)

 **On March 28,** Narek Kirakosyan, the correspondent of the Factor.am website, asked the former Police Chief of the RA Vladimir Gasparyan about the case under investigation in the anti-corruption court, in which the former official is accused of corruption transactions. In response, Gasparyan first told the journalist: "you yourself are corruption",[[94]](#footnote-94) then: "I'm sick and tired of you",[[95]](#footnote-95) and finally promised to pray for him.[[96]](#footnote-96)

**On March 29**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Europe in Law Association NGO, its President Lousine Hakobyan, and superior legal councilor Tigran Yegoryan, v. Hraparak Daily LLC and journalist Davit Sargsyan*, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit, filed on October 7, 2021, was caused by the article, published on August 27 on Hraparak.amwebsite, entitled: “An Open Network of Agencies under the Disguise of the Community of Human Right Defenders”.[[97]](#footnote-97) 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.

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 21, 2023.

 **On March 31,** Yerevan Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan filed a lawsuit against 168 Zham LLC and journalist, commentator Davit Sargsyan in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan with demanding apology, refutation of the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation and confiscation of monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the video published on the YouTube channel of the 168.am website on February 25, under the heading: "Tigran Avinyan: the Newly Discovered Oligarch", where Davit Sargsyan, characterizing Avinyan as having unlimited administrative powers and steadily getting rich, accuses him of economic and political corruption.[[98]](#footnote-98)

**On March 31,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Siranush Abelyan v. the Chief Executive of Politcom.am news website Lilit Silanyan*, demanding apology for the slander and publication of a refutation.
 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 media outlet offered to also publish the viewpoint of the bank, but the plaintiff did not agree and applied to the court.
 The next court hearing was scheduled for June 30, 2023.

**On March 31**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Spayka LLC v. Zhamanak daily LLC and First Armenian News Platform (1in.am website)*,demanding refutation of defamation, 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”.

Publication of the judicial act was scheduled for April 21.

**On March 31,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan received a criminal case from the Prosecutor’s Office of Avan and Nor Nork administrative districts, which concerns the incidents of shooting at the window of journalist Tehmine Yenokyan's apartment. Citizen Hayk Grigoryan was charged in the case.

We should remind that on July 12,2022,journalist Tehmine 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.[[99]](#footnote-99) 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.

The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia, in response to the inquiry of the CPFE, stated that criminal proceedings were initiated in connection with the above-mentioned three cases, which were combined.

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

*In the first quarter of 2023, the CPFE recorded* ***48*** *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 10,** the news site Infocom.am wrote that on December 7, it had already submitted a written inquiry to Yerevan Municipality, asking Deputy Mayor Suren Grigoryan for information and substantiations about the organized cultural events, in particular, which legal act stipulates that the realization of a cultural event is itself a basis for the procedure of purchase from one person, and what was the reason for the impossibility of obtaining the given service from another person? On December 13, the Head of the Information Department of the Municipality informed that Suren Grigoryan was in poor health and needs additional time for an answer, and on December 20, he requested an additional 30-day period. On January 9, the media outlet again reminded about the inquiry, but there was no response.

 **On January 11,** the SRC information and Public Relations Department refused to answer the question of Factor.am journalist Arpi Hakobyan dated December 28, 2022. It referred to the information about tax evasion of the singers. SRC informed the journalist that on the day after that inquiry, SRC Head Rustam Badasyan gave an exclusive interview, and they have nothing else to add.

 **On January 12,** the journalist of Armenpress news agency Anna Gziryan applied to the Ministry of Economy with a request to organize an interview in Armenpress regarding the provision of privileges in the business sector. Press Secretary Lilit Hakobyan did not deal with the issue after many reminders.

 **On January 16,** the journalist of Zhoghovurd Daily Christine Musheghyan sent a written inquiry to Lusine Moghrovyan, the spokesperson of Zvartnots airport, asking to provide information on how the recording of the airport security cameras ended up in the hands of other persons. And the video displayed MP Ishkhan Saghatelyan traveling abroad. There was no response to the inquiry.

 **On January 17,** the Pastinfo.am news website sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the new EU observation mission being sent to Armenia and its functions. The answer to the inquiry was sent in violation of the law after 10 day; moreover, it was incomplete.

**On February 1,** the website sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, asking to provide information about on how many contract servicemen were dismissed in 2022, and how many of them were dismissed based on their own application? On February 6, a response letter was received from the Ministry of Defense about the need for a 30-day period for additional study. And on March 10, the provision of information was refused, on the grounds that it was a state secret.

**On February 7,** the same website sent an inquiry to the Deputy Mayor of Yerevan, Tigran Avinyan, who is also the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF), asking him to inform if he, being the Deputy Mayor, receives a salary from ANIF or not. If not, then since when?

There was no response to the inquiry.

 **On the same day,** another inquiry was sent to ANIF, in which the media outlet requested information about the rates and salaries set for the positions of the members of the Board of Directors and the Chairman, the members of the Investment Board, including those of Tigran Avinyan. They did not respond to the inquiry, stating that there are personal data. By the way, after the publication of Pastinfo on the topic last year, ANIF announced that Avinyan does not receive a salary, but the Fund refused to say when and on what legal grounds. When the website made a publication about this, the Fund applied to the court with demands to oblige to refute the information discrediting the honor, dignity and business reputation and to pay monetary compensation (details in the "Pressures" section).[[100]](#footnote-100)

 **On February 27,** the media outlet sent an inquiry to the President of the Security Council for comments on the peace treaty negotiations and did not receive a response until the end of the quarter.

**On the same day,** the website sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking to provide the stance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the peace treaty negotiations, particularly related to border demarcation and delimitation, as well as possible preconditions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave an incomplete answer to the inquiry, offering to get acquainted with the Minister's statements. Meanwhile, according to the website, the Minister never made a clear statement on the mentioned issues.

**On March 22,** the website sent 2 inquiries to the RA Ministry of Defense: the first - about the territories occupied by Azerbaijan, the second - about the news spread in the press that the use of the expression "Republic of Artsakh" was banned by the secret order of Minister Suren Papikyan. Inquiries were not answered until the end of the quarter. Sona Truzyan, the editor of the website, notes that state bodies often abuse the additional 30-day period provided by the Law "On Freedom of Information", and use it to leave the inquiries unanswered, to avoid issues that need urgent comment, thus contributing to the spread of inaccurate information among the public.

 **On January 19,** the Infocom.am news site, through a written inquiry, asked the Ministry of Defense what types of heating fuel were allocated to the military units of the Armed Forces and the accommodations of combat positions during the last year. In violation of the 5-day period set by law, the Ministry of Defense in its response dated February 3 simply referred to the RA Law "On Approving the Code of Internal Service of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia", noting that the heating process in the buildings of the RA Armed Forces is regulated by Articles 195-200 of the law. The website notes that the mentioned articles do not contain a complete answer to the presented question. Therefore, the editors once again turned to the Ministry, asking them to give comprehensive answers to the questions. The Ministry of Defense responded to the inquiry, which was sent on February 7, on February 20, again violating the period set by the law.

**On January 27,** the Fip.am website belonging to the Union of Informed Citizens NGO sent an inquiry to the Anti-Corruption Committee, asking them to answer how many cases of criminal proceedings were initiated on the basis of reports and applications by public servants in 2021 and 2022. The institution was unable to provide information.
 The following inquiries addressed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs also remained unanswered. One of them **on February 16** was about the use of the Road Control Armenia mobile application, the other was about the CASCO insurance bid for patrol cars, the two inquiries **on March 6** were about the amount and type of illegal drugs seized in January and February, as well as the repair dates of Shirak patrol cars. By the inquiry **on March 21**, information was requested about the duration of the preliminary investigation of all criminal cases initiated under the article of murder and sent to the court with an indictment. By another inquiry **sent on the same day**, information was requested about the glass-breaking equipment of Shirak and Lori's patrol cars.

 **On February 10,** the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia applied to Yerevan Municipality, requesting information about the money confiscated from the Municipality by the Enforcement Service during 2022-2023. The inquiry remained unanswered. **On March 20,** FOICA sent a second inquiry, to which they responded on March 30, violating the period set by the law.

**On February 14,** the news website Infocom.am asked the three factions of the National Assembly through written inquiries whether they had discussed the issue of initiating a legal process regarding the alleged violation by Judge Seda Safaryan of the Constitutional Court. What is their position on it? Are they going to submit a corresponding draft decision? if yes, then when, if not, then what is the reason? Only the secretary of the ruling Civil Contract faction Artur Hovhannisyan did not answer the question. According to his assistant Suzy Sargsyan, the Law "On Freedom of Information" applies to the executive power, but does not apply to the MPs.

 **On February 16,** the Armeniasputnik.am news website wrote that the Armenian side presented a map at the UN International Court of Justice, which marked the territories of the Republic of Armenia occupied by Azerbaijan, while the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia refused to provide them with data and a detailed map. The media outlet also asked the Ministry of Defense whether the Government's statements that 2,700 hectares of territory are occupied in the Nerkin Hand area are true.

The Agency of Defense refused to provide the data, considering it a secret. At the same time, the Ministry of Defense offered to download that map from the video of the live broadcast of the session of the UN International Court.

**On February 27,** the journalist of the Factor.am news website Narek Kirakosyan sent an inquiry to the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia, trying to find out on what grounds Interpol stopped the international investigation against the former Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Holy See Mikayel Minasyan? Are the reasons for the termination clear to the General Prosecutor's Office? Did they apply for clarification to Interpol and what steps were taken to resume the investigation? In the reply sent on March 6, the RA Prosecutor General stated that the information is confidential. Meanwhile, in a conversation with the media, specialists in the field of criminal proceedings noted that the data related to the search of a person cannot be considered a pre-trial secret.

 **On March 1,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit to the Administrative Court against the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia with a demand to respond to the plaintiff's inquiry dated February 14. By the inquiry, the NGO asked to provide exhaustive information on the clearance rate of each of the 4 officers presented for the promotion of the police patrol service in December 2022, as well as what cases were solved. On March 7, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, on the 16th it was refiled and accepted for proceedings on the 23rd. The trial was scheduled for August 16.

**On the same day,** another lawsuit was filed against the same agency, with a demand to respond to the plaintiff's inquiry dated February 13. The inquiry referred to the description of the location of fixed cameras monitored by the police in public places, including cameras that do not record traffic.

On March 9, the lawsuit was returned, on the 21st, it was refiled and on the 28th, it was denied admission because there is another case accepted for proceedings with the same parties, on the same subject matter, and on the same grounds. It refers to the lawsuit with the same content, which was returned on March 9, filed again on the 21st, and accepted for proceedings on the 28th. The trial was scheduled for August 8.

**On March 1,** the Union of Informed Citizens filed another lawsuit, with a demand to respond to the inquiry dated December 22, 2022. By the request, the NGO asked to clarify what caused the unnecessary delay in the repair of police cars.

On March 9, the acceptance of the claim was rejected on the following grounds: the plaintiff organization is a person who does not have the right to filed a lawsuit with the mentioned claim. No other developments were recorded by the end of the quarter.

**On March 1,** the journalist of Aravot.am website Nelly Babayan sent a written inquiry to the Office of Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Khachatryan regarding the development works of Firdus district, the contracts signed with the residents, and the buildings of historical and cultural significance in the area. The Municipality informed the journalist within the timeframe prescribed by the law that the inquiry was forwarded to them, but they still did not provide an answer.

**On March 3,** the journalist of Aravot.am website Hripsime Jebejian, made an inquiry to the Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan about the origin of the acquired property and funds. In violation of the Law on "Freedom of Information", they responded to the inquiry after 6 days and requested a 30-day period for additional study. As a result, not all questions were answered clearly.
 **On March 6,** the journalist addressed the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ararat Mirzoyan with the same question. On March 17, an answer was received in violation of the law, which was again incomplete.
 **On March 6,** the journalist addressed NA MP Davit Danielyan with an inquiry for information with the same content. There was no response to the inquiry.

 **On March 6,** the news website Infocom.am sent a written inquiry to the RA Investigative Committee, trying to find out details about the fire that broke out in one of the military units, as a result of which servicemen were killed. On March 22, in violation of the five-day period prescribed by the law, the Committee replied that the requested information contains pre-investigation information not subject to publication. The website, however, notes that earlier it had addressed the same question to the Ministry of Defense, from where it was suggested to apply to the pre-investigation body.

**On March 10,** the CivilNet.am news website wrote that it contacted the Office of the RA Prime Minister, requesting to provide details about the fate of the former building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in particular, what activities Tango company is going to carry out in that building, as well as information on investments and terms.
The inquiry was forwarded to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, and from there to the State Property Management Committee. The Head of the latter, Arnak Avetisyan, did not provide the answers to all these questions on the grounds of confidentiality.

**On March 15,** the news website Infocom.am sent a written inquiry to the Office of the Prime Minister, asking to clarify on what principle the media outlets invited to the press conferences of the RA Prime Minister on January 10 and March 14 were selected. The Office of the Prime Minister replied that the number of media outlets is conditioned by the limited number of places in the area, and the issue of inviting others will be considered further. The website considered the answer incomplete and sent **another inquiry,** requesting them to answer the questions in essence and also to indicate why Infocom.am was not invited to both press conferences. The Office of the Prime Minister replied that they have nothing to add to the previous answer.

 **On March 19,** the journalist of Aravot.am Hripsime Jebejian applied to the Ministry of Economy, asking for an explanation about the enlargement of the RA lands and did not receive any answer. The journalist's oral inquiry made on December 22, 2022, about the companies exporting goods to Artsakh was also left with no response.

**On March 22,** the news website Infocom.am wrote that a 2-hectare border plot of Voskepar settlement of Noyemberyan Community of Tavush Marz was donated to the Republic of Armenia. In other words, communally owned land has become state owned. In this regard, Infocom has sent a number of inquiries to the state institutions and local self-government, trying to understand for what purpose such a decision was made, what construction works were carried out there, to what extent it is related to the Russian border guards. As a result of nearly half a year of correspondence, Noyemberyan Municipality, the National Security Service, the Ministry of Defense and the Government did not wish to clearly answer the website's questions, evading and even trying to deny the fact of construction, which, however, is confirmed by both satellite and original photos and videos of the website.

**On March 22,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit to the Administrative Court against the Ministry of Internal Affairs, demanding to oblige the plaintiff to respond to the inquiry dated February 20. The inquiry was addressed to the RA Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Kamo Tsutsulyan, asking for what purpose red and blue flashing beacons were installed on some rescue service vehicles. On March 29, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.
 **In another lawsuit filed on the same day,** the NGO demands that the Ministry of Internal Affairs be obliged to answer inquiry dated the February 17 about the purpose of installing flashing red and blue beacons on some military police vehicles. On March 31, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The trial was scheduled for August 8.

 **On March 29,** the Administrative Court held a court hearing on the case of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, v. the NSS, demanding to oblige the plaintiff to provide exhaustive information to the inquiry dated October 28, 2022. With the inquiry, the NGO asked for information about considering RF citizens, in particular, Margarita Simonyan, Konstantin Zatulin, Andranik Mihranyan, as personas non grata in Armenia since January, 2021. Not receiving an answer, the NGO applied to the court on November 17, 2022.

The next court hearing was scheduled for September 26.

**On March 27,** Arpi Hakobyan, the correspondent of the Factor.am news website, asked the Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan about the involvement of specialists and the calculation of costs in the decision to cut off tree species and plant sakura trees instead. The answer provided on March 31 was incomplete, not all inquiries were given appropriate comments.

**On March 31,** the Armeniasputnik.am news website wrote that since October, 2022, different officials have presented different figures about how much territory the Azerbaijani side has occupied in Armenia. Hoping to know an exact number, the website applied to the Ministry of Defense, asking to indicate the real and exact size of the occupied territories. The agency refused to answer the inquiry, making a reference to the answer to the previous inquiry with the same content, in which it refused to provide that information, considering it classified.

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

 **On January 5,** Armenian Second Television Channel LLC filed a lawsuit to the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio, with the inquiry to recognize the LLC as the winner in the licensing competition for the use of the capital broadcasting slot in the public multiplex and oblige it to adopt a decision on granting the license.
 On January 12, the lawsuit was returned to eliminate the error; on February 6, it was refiled; on the 14th, the acceptance of the claim was rejected because it had not eliminated the error in it. On March 21, the plaintiff appealed this judgement to the Court of Appeal.

**On February 6,** the TV company filed another lawsuit against the Commission on TV and Radio, demanding to recognize the company as the winner in the licensing competition for the use of the Republican slot in the public multiplex and oblige it to adopt a decision on granting the license. On February 14, the lawsuit was returned, and on March 23, it was refiled. On March 29, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for November 30.

**On February 21,** the Administrative Court held another court hearing on the lawsuit filed by Armenian Second TV Channel LLC against the Commission on TV and Radio dated February 18, 2022, demanding to recognize the lack of lawfulness of imposing a fine in the amount of one hundred times the minimum wage specified in the RA Law "On Audiovisual Media" Article 57, Part 28, mentioned in the decision of the Commission on TV and Radio No. 86-A dated May 27, 2021. That fine was imposed on the grounds that, according to the Commission on TV and Radio, the TV company did not submit information on the size of the previous year's income and the formation opening to the state regulatory body. According to the judgment dated March 15, the lawsuit was rejected. As of March 31, no appeal against the judgement has been filed.

**On January 12,** the Administrative Court ruled to terminate the case according to the lawsuit filed on August 6, 2021 by Armenian Second TV Channel LLC against the Commission on TV and Radio, demanding to recognize the LLC as the winner in the licensing competition for the use of the capital broadcasting slot in the public multiplex and obligate it to make a decision on granting the license. The grounds for the court judgement are as follows: "Grounds for rejecting the acceptance of the lawsuit have been revealed." On March 1, the plaintiff filed an appeal to the Court of Appeal. No other developments have been recorded as of March 31.

**On January 16,** the defendanton the lawsuit, filed by Huasber CJSC (the founder of Yerkir Media TV company) with the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio on July 14, 2022, applied to the Court of Appeal.

We should remind that the plaintiff claimed the abolition of the Commission on TV and Radio Decrision N 98-A dated July 7, 2022. This decision was caused by a swear word, pronounced on air, during a live broadcast under the heading “Protests in Yerevan and in the Marzes Continue,” the vulgarisms and obscenities, as well as the scenes, undermining and discrediting universal values in the “Corrpution 2: Retribution” film. On December 14, the claim was upheld, namely the judgment on imposing an administrative fine was repealed.

 No other developments on this case have been recorded as of March 31.

 **On January 19,** the Administrative Court accepted for proceedings the case according to the lawsuit filed by Huasber CJSC (the founder of Yerkir Media TV company) 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. We should remind that lawsuit was filed on December 30, 2022.

 On February 21, the proceedings on the case were terminated, as the plaintiff withdrew the lawsuit.

 **On February 13**, however, the same plaintiff filed a new lawsuit against the Commission on TV and Radio, with the demand to oblige the plaintiff to ensure the implementation of the republican broadcast in the Public Multiplex before the entry into force of the judicial act resolving the administrative case No. VD/2112/05/21.

On February 21, the acceptance of the application was rejected, on the 22nd, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, where the appeal was accepted for proceedings on March 13. No other developments have been recorded until the end of the quarter.

 **On February 9,** the RA Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel v. the Commission on TV and Radio*, claiming the recognition of the lack of lawfulness to impose a fine of four-hundred-fold the minimum wage specified in Article 57, Part 22 of the Law “On Audiovisual Media” on the LLC, as stipulated in Decision No. 85-A dated June 13, 2022, which was drawn up and unsigned by the Commission. The lawsuit was filed on August 2, 2022. Judgement publication was scheduled for October 16.

**On March 6**, the Court of Cassation accepted for proceedings the plaintiff’s appeal against the judgement of the Court of Appeal on rejection on the case of *MELTEX LLC, the founder of A1+ TV, v. RA Government and Commission on TV and Radio*.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 18, 2019, 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 June 1, 2022, the Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff’s appeal. On October 4, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation.

 **On March 31,** the Court of Appeal partially upheld the defendant’s appeal against the jusdgement of the First Instance Court on the case of *News AM LLC v. Styopa Safaryan*, overturned it and sent the case to the same court for retrial. We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 28, 2019, was caused by the defendant’s post on Facebook on July 29 of the same year, stating that the website had received an order from Robert Kocharyan’s office to publish some articles about judges.[[101]](#footnote-101)

On July 15, 2022, the lawsuit was partially upheld. 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, to pay 500.000 AMD 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 an appeal with the Court of Appeal.

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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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98. [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=696vWAmCtjk&t=317s**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=696vWAmCtjk&t=317s) [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. [**https://www.facebook.com/tehmine.yenoqyan/posts/pfbid0j3RTd3FidFgdUMJfjpMFsL5kZWjhtn8h1GbWiXjeEr3Y9gsarusreta1ESYrMk7nl**](https://www.facebook.com/tehmine.yenoqyan/posts/pfbid0j3RTd3FidFgdUMJfjpMFsL5kZWjhtn8h1GbWiXjeEr3Y9gsarusreta1ESYrMk7nl) [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
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101. [**https://www.armdaily.am/?p=61205&l=am**](https://www.armdaily.am/?p=61205&l=am) [↑](#footnote-ref-101)