**

**COMMITTEE TO PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**



*REPORT*

*ON STATUS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ARMENIA AND VIOLATION OF MEDIA RIGHTS IN 2023*



 *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 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 journalistic 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***

 Mass protest demonstrations, escalation of the socio-political situation, depopulation of Artsakh, resettlement of more than 100,000 forcibly displaced people in Armenia, elections of Yerevan Council of Elders with tense pre-election struggle and post-election developments. This was the environment in which the media operated and carried out coverage of events in 2023.

In this situation, both physical violence against media representatives and various other pressures in the form of threats, expression of hatred, and impolite treatment were exercised. During the year, the CPFE outlined an alarming picture in terms of restrictions on the freedom of information: the facts of unjustified rejection of the inquiries of media representatives addressed to the state bodies or of providing them with incomplete, blurred answers, a number of regressive legislative initiatives of the authorities, with which an attempt was made to create legal bases for limited provision official data. A certain increase in the number of new lawsuits against mass media and journalists was recorded compared to 2022.

If we present the results of these observations in figures, there will be the following picture:

 **The number of cases of physical violence against mass media representatives is 6, various other pressures amount to 60, while violations of the right to receive and disseminate information amount to 134. In the last two cases, there was an increase compared to the previous year. The number of new lawsuits filed against the media outlets and journalists is 36, out of which 34 are for defamation and insult, and 2 are based on copyright infringement. By the way, the majority of them - 23, are represented by state bodies, officials or the power in office.**

The CPFE reports that, as a rule, opportunities to resolve information disputes through out-of-court mechanisms are disregarded. Moreover, politicians and officials often aim to put additional pressure on the media, to "get back at them", demanding extremely high monetary compensations and also filing a motion to apply an injunction and put a freezing order on the property and bank accounts of the defendants in the amount of the claim. During the period under review, the courts upheld these motions in 2 cases: one on the case of *Yerevan Deputy Mayor (currently Mayor) Tigran Avinyan v. 168 Hours LLC (168.am website) and journalist Davit Sargsyan*, the other on the case of *Civil Contract Party v. Union of Informed Citizen NGO, founder of the Fip.am website*. In both cases, after the statements of the journalistic organizations, those decisions of the court were reviewed, and the freezing order on the bank accounts was lifted on the case of journalist Davit Sargasyan and UIC, but it remained in the case of 168.am.

During 2023, the issues of legislation related to media activities were also in the focus of attention of the Armenian journalistic community and international organizations. Thus, at the beginning of the year, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia discussed a draft law on making amendments and addenda to the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law", which, under the conditions of that regime, implied unjustified strict restrictions on Internet access and mass media activities. After criticism from the expert community, this initiative was frozen. The draft of the RA Law "On Environmental Information" presented to the National Assembly on January 16 and the related package of bills "On Making Amendments to the RA Law on Freedom of Information" and "On Making Addenda to the RA Criminal Code" received the same, highly critical attitude and was eventually withdrawn.

In contrast to these cases, on March 1, the National Assembly adopted an extensive package of bills proposed by the RA Government, based on the new Law "On State Secrets". Among many other controversial amendments, the package also included an amendment to the Law "On Freedom of Information". According to it, inquiries for the provision of official data are subject to rejection if they contain "service information of limited distribution". With this wording, wide opportunities are created for arbitrariness, because any document available in state bodies can fall under this.

 Journalistic organizations issued statements regarding these processes, demanding public and expert discussions on problematic legislative amendments, because such regressive initiatives can negatively affect the freedom of information, accountability of the authorities to the public, and contribute to the increase of corruption risks.

At the end of the year, from November 29, the Ministry of Justice published and discussed on the official website e-draft.am the draft law on amendments and addenda to the law "On Mass Media" and related laws, which was developed by journalistic organizations, in particular, with the participation of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Yerevan Press Club, and Media Initiatives Center. The draft law encourages the development of quality journalism through the use of media self-regulation mechanisms based on the norms of professional ethics. On this occasion, on December 21, the Ministry of Justice also initiated a discussion of the bill with the participation of media and civil society representatives.

During the year, the international organizations Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, as well as the US Department of State published their annual reports, also addressing the freedom of speech and media activities in Armenia. In general, an improvement of the situation was recorded in this area, but a number of problems related to the legislation regulating the media sphere and impunity for violations of journalists' rights were also pointed out.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

 Year 2023 was again full of difficult and alarming events for Armenia. After the blockade of Artsakh, in September there was a military aggression by Azerbaijan, which was followed by the forced displacement of Artsakh Armenians and the aggravation of the socio-political situation. Coverage of these events required the greatest efforts from the mass media, especially if we take into account the difficult conditions created for journalistic activities.

Since the Lachin Corridor blockade, Armenian media outlets have faced serious obstacles to carry out their professional activities in that and adjacent areas. Moreover, as a rule, Russian peacekeepers were the ones who obstructed. They violated the right of journalists to receive and disseminate information even in the Armenian territory, which was outside their area of responsibility. [[1]](#footnote-1)

The tense political situation both in Armenia and Artsakh led to the fact that many media coverages triggered heightened emotions, sometimes leading to physical violence. The CPFE recorded 6 such cases, one of them in Stepanakert, the others in Yerevan.

For instance, the incident of physical violence against a reporter of the Civilnet news website and a journalist of the Analyticon periodical Hayk Ghazaryan in Stepanakert on July 11 received a wide public response.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Regarding those facts, 11 journalistic organizations issued condemning statements.

The period of elections of Yerevan Council of Elders held in September was also tense, which was accompanied by pressures, targeting of media representatives, violations of the right to receive and disseminate information, and physical violence. Thus, on September 15, the last day of the election campaign, one of the participants in the rally of the Government candidate Tigran Avinyan cursed and hit the editor of NewDay.am website Ani Gevorgyan with a flag. And earlier, on September 11, again during the campaign and again one of the supporters of the ruling power attacked the same Ani Gevorgyan, insulting and threatening her. As it turned out later, this is the same citizen who sent threats on the Internet to Aravot.am reporter Hripsime Jebejian after the latter asked improper questions to the head of the country during the press conference of the RA Prime Minister on July 25. "Have you ever thought what will happen on the day when you cease your physical existence? Who will mourn you, except your family members...?" During the same press conference, Ani Gevorgyan, the editor of the NewDay.am news website, also asked hateful questions, after which those two journalists were targeted by various people on Facebook, including fake users.

The Prime Minister's press conference and the uproar surrounding it on July 28 triggered another announcement by CPFE and partner journalistic organizations.[[3]](#footnote-3) This time, attention was drawn not only to the rights of journalists, but also to the responsibilities, the need to observe the norms of professional ethics. The authors of the statement called on the Government to fulfill its positive duty and protect the rights of journalists, to take appropriate measures to identify and prosecute the offenders, and on the representatives of the journalistic community and the public communication sector to hold civilized professional discussions about the incident, excluding mutual insults and hate speech.

This statement was not accepted unequivocally by a part of the journalistic community, and on July 30, they issued a response statement,[[4]](#footnote-4) noting that "The journalists' questions were sharp in some episodes, which is typical of all journalists who respect the profession, and against the background of the current situation in Armenia and Artsakh, those who live in Armenia and especially the journalists who feel the weight of the situation on themselves, as besides being journalists, they are also citizens."

Meanwhile, by expressing such a stance, the authors of the statement, in fact, neglected the difference between the rights and responsibilities of professional journalists and ordinary citizens in the information field. In particular, the fact that there is a whole system of domestic and international legal regulations for journalistic activities, which are not mandatory for other persons.
 As for the cases of insulting and threatening journalists Ani Gevorgyan and Hripsime Jebejian on the Internet, the first of them filed 1 and the second one filed 2 lawsuits against specific Facebook users. These facts are presented in the "Pressures" section of the report.
At the same time, some media outlets also stood out for their discrimination and hate speech when covering the protest demonstrations that took place in Yerevan in September. In particular, the publications targeted the "Karabakh people", who were generally attributed the debacles recorded during the demonstrations. In this regard, the Information Disputes Council and the Media Self-Regulation Observatory made a joint statement emphasizing the inappropriateness of such coverage.

 **The attack on the journalist Marut Vanyan, who was displaced from Artsakh and continues to work in Armenia, has triggered another announcement by journalistic organizations on the Internet.[[5]](#footnote-5) He addressed the miserable condition of the streets of Hrazdan city on his Facebook page. After a short time, the Mayor's "defenders" insulted and threatened the journalist under the post, targeting him as an Artsakh citizen. The media organizations demanded from the law enforcement agencies to reveal the identity of the persons who made posts containing hate speech, insults and threats against Marut Vanyan and to hold them accountable, and from the Mayor of Hrazdan to call on his supporters to show tolerance towards critical speech, regardless of who is its author**

 **In the course of the year, the CPFE recorded 60 cases of various pressures on media representatives, 36 out of which are in the form of new court cases. The majority of the latter - 23, are represented by state bodies, officials or the ruling power.**

 It is alarming that judicial practice continues to see processes where plaintiffs, in addition to lawsuits, also file motions to put a freezing order on the media outlet's and/or journalist's property and bank accounts as an injunction, and the courts grant them, which essentially means putting additional pressure on the media and contradicts international norms.
 During the period under review, the most unusual court case was the one initiated by Yerevan Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan against 168 Hours LLC and journalist Davit Sargsyan, in which the plaintiff demanded a maximum monetary compensation of 9 million AMD for insult and defamation, and filed a motion to apply an injunction in the amount of the same claim and put a freezing order on the property and bank accounts of the defendants, and the court granted that motion. In this regard, 11 journalistic organizations issued a statement on May 12 [[6]](#footnote-6) condemning such pressure against a media outlet and a journalist, especially when there is no reason why the plaintiff thought so, and the court upheld his approach, that unless there is a freezing order on the defendants' property and funds, the judicial act cannot be enforced.

The authors of the statement also expressed their belief that some of the unacceptable manifestations of this judicial process are directly related to the amendments made to Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code on March 24, 2021, according to which the upper limits of monetary compensation provided for insult and defamation were tripled, becoming 3 million and 6 million AMD respectively. Journalistic organizations demanded from the court to immediately repeal the decision to apply an injunction on the above-mentioned case, and for Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan, as a high-ranking official, to show more tolerance, show behavior more appropriate for the position he holds, and during the court case to focus on rectifying the publication about him and, if there are grounds, on refuting it, or, preferably, to withdraw the claim and resolve the issue out of court by applying to the Information Disputes Council or the Media Self-Regulation Observatory for the purpose of obtaining an expert opinion. A few days later, the representative of Tigran Avinyan announced in a response statement that he will file a motion with the court regarding the removal of the freezing order. As a result, only the freezing order on the journalist's accounts was lifted, but not the one on the media outlet's accounts.

It is also alarming that after all this, the authorities continued to use this means of pressure. Thus, on August 17, the Civil Contract Party filed a lawsuit against the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am news website, demanding to refute defamatory information and pay compensation, and then filed a motion to apply an injunction and place a freezing order on the property of the founder of the media outlet in the claim amount of 1 million AMD. In this regard, the journalistic organizations issued a statement again on September 6[[7]](#footnote-7) urging the Civil Contract Party to show political broad-mindedness and tolerance, to withdraw the motion of applying an injunction and to focus on the actual informational dispute in the court case. As a result, on November 27, by the motion of the plaintiff and the court judgement, the injunction was repealed.

 Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information have had a disturbing picture during the year: unjustified refusals, including inappropriate references to state secrets, "blurred" or incomplete answers. Complaints submitted by journalists to the CPFE regarding such violations concerned the RA Government Staff, Yerevan Municipality, the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Internal Affairs. Meanwhile, it is natural for the media to be especially interested in the activities of the law enforcement agencies, because in the post-war period the topics that concern the public the most are the security issues, both external and internal.

It is encouraging that the editorial offices defend their rights to receive and disseminate information in court as well. **During the year, 17 lawsuits were filed in the Administrative Court for this purpose, and the total number of violations of this right is 134, which is 19 more than last year.**

 One of the examples of the unprofessional work of the state institutions with the media, making arbitrary decisions, is the deprivation of the journalist of the Zhoghovurd daily Knar Manukyan of the National Assembly accreditation, in connection with which the journalistic organizations issued a statement.[[8]](#footnote-8) Accordingly, it was proposed to start discussions on the legislative provisions related to the accreditation of journalists, with the aim of reforming the related National Assembly procedures and aligning them with international norms.

In the given situation, the legislative initiatives of the authorities, which further complicate the process of providing official information, are even more incomprehensible. Thus, from the beginning of the year, discussions began about the draft law on making amendments and addenda to the law "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law", which was prepared by the Ministry of Justice. That bill provided ample scope for arbitrary and disproportionate restrictions. In particular, it referred to the freedom of expression of opinion, programs broadcast on television, content distributed through the Internet, social networks operating in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, websites, applications that could be blocked or their access reduced.
 In this regard, 11 journalistic organizations issued a joint statement on January 12, expressing their belief that the above-mentioned provisions of the bill in this form are not based on proper discussions, assessment of obvious risks and analysis of possible severe negative consequences, and therefore are completely rejectable.[[9]](#footnote-9) In the end, the draft law was not submitted to the Parliament.

 Another draft of the new Law on "Environmental Information" put into circulation was aimed at restricting the availability of official data. Here too, with the same logic, unjustified prohibitions were envisaged for providing information related to environmental protection. In this regard, 11 more journalistic organizations issued a statement and expressed a strong critical attitude, demanding the National Assembly and the RA Government to initiate additional studies and extensive discussions with expert circles regarding the bill.[[10]](#footnote-10) As a result, the draft law submitted to the National Assembly on January 16 was withdrawn by the author on March 9.

In contrast to these processes, on March 1, the National Assembly adopted a comprehensive package of bills presented by the RA Government, based on the new law "On State Secrets". By the way, the terms of encryption of information have been extended in it, and the procedures for decryption have been changed. With one of the amendments included in the package, a new restriction was also introduced in the law on "Freedom of Information". In particular, in Article 8, Part 1, Clause 1, which stipulates the rejection of information if it "contains state, banking, or commercial secrets", the words "or service information of limited distribution" were added. First of all, it is not clear by what criteria "service information of limited distribution" is defined. The wording of this concept is so generic that a lot of things can hide under it: for example, the shady sides of the activities of state bodies and officials, as well as omissions and abuses, which in any country striving for democracy should be the target of public and press criticism.

From December 19, the Ministry of High-Tech Industry put up for discussion on the official e-draft.am website the draft law on amendments to the RA Law "On Freedom of Information".[[11]](#footnote-11) The authors expect that it will contribute to the implementation of the unified information policy, as well as the formation, development and modernization of the state information system. Meanwhile, the document has received sharp criticism from independent experts and has been evaluated as a step backwards compared to the existing law in terms of the intended restrictions.

During the year a sumber of legislative amendments were made to the Law "On Audiovisual Media". In particular, on March 22, the Parliament accepted 2 proposed amendments to this law. 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 other amendment stipulated not to stop the activities of the television companies, the license provision of which is still under dispute at court, until the new licensing tender is held.

By the way, thanks to this change, the Yerkir Media TV company, deprived of air broadcasting since January 2023, returned to the air on June 30. And such a situation was created when Armenian Second TV Channel LLC (H2) contested in the court the decision of the Commission on TV and Radio regarding not granting it a license as a result of the tender for the republican slot in the public multiplex, and, the court granted the motion to put a freezing order on holding a tender, as an injunction. In the end, the court lifted this freezing order, and a new tender was announced. However, Yerkir Media was off the air again from September 15. This time Fast TV was recognized as the winner.[[12]](#footnote-12)

By the way, MPs Lilit Galstyan and Elinar Vardanyan also submitted a proposal to amend the same law.[[13]](#footnote-13) It was intended to partially overcome the underrepresentation of women in the Council of Public Broadcaster and the Commission on TV and Radio. On September 12, this amendment was also adopted.

On October 25, another addendum was made to the same law, which envisages the introduction of a system for rating TV channels and individual programs and studying the demand and preferences of the TV audience.[[14]](#footnote-14) Accordingly, a TV audience measurement toolkit will be set out, a TV industry committee will be established, and as a result, the pricing scale in the advertising market will become measurable.

According to the CPFE, all these changes raise a number of questions, in particular, from the point of view of the goals and objectives, urgency, justification and effectiveness of these initiatives.

It is noteworthy that the aforementioned changes were not discussed with journalistic organizations, although according to the memorandum signed in April 2022 by the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sports of the National Assembly, the Ministry of Justice and 10 journalistic non-governmental organizations, any legislative initiative related to the media should envisage the participation of this specialized NGO at the initial stage. We should remind that according to that memorandum, a concept of media legislation reforms should be prepared with joint efforts, on the basis of which new laws will be developed. The works in that direction are underway.

In this regard, the round table organized by the CPFE on April 28 on the topic "The Need to Reform the Media Legislation of Armenia and Possible Solutions to Problems" was crucial, which was aimed at improving the legal regulation of media activities. The round table was attended by the representatives of mass media, Parliament and Government, other state bodies, non-governmental organizations, and international institutions.

One of the first outcomes of such discussions and the cooperation provided by the tripartite Memorandum is the draft on making amendments and addenda to the law "On Mass Media" and related laws posted on the e-draft.am website on November 29[[15]](#footnote-15), which was jointly developed by the NA Head Committee, the Ministry of Justice and journalistic organizations. This is intended to contribute to the development and dissemination of quality journalism, to encourage self-regulation of mass media based on the norms of professional ethics, and the effective use of its various mechanisms. On December 21, with the initiative and support of the international organization Freedom House, the Ministry of Justice held a discussion on the package of these bills with the participation of representatives of the media and journalistic organizations.

The 4 press conferences of the RA Prime Minister were among the remarkable events of the year. Unlike the ones held previously, when the questions from the media and NGOs were accepted online, after which they were presented to Nikol Pashinyan on the first channel of Public Television, the 2023 press conferences were held in the traditional way, with direct contact. However, in this case too, media outlets' dissatisfaction arose with the Government's discriminatory approach during the organization of the first 2 of those 4 press conferences, when reporters from some editorial offices were not given the opportunity to participate in those events (see details in the "Pressures" section).

 Reputable international organizations have published their reports since the beginning of the year, touching upon the Armenian media sector as well. Thus, the human rights organization Human Rights Watch, in its "World Report-2022"[[16]](#footnote-16) made a reference to the CPFE data [[17]](#footnote-17) 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.

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.[[18]](#footnote-18)

On May 3, the World Press Freedom Day, the international human rights organization Reporters Without Borders published its report, "World Press Freedom Index 2023", which assesses the working conditions of journalists in 180 countries and territories around the world.[[19]](#footnote-19) Accordingly, Armenia improved its position and came in the 49th place, instead of the 51st place last year, being among the countries with a "fairly good" situation. As in the previous year, Armenia is the leader in terms of freedom of speech in the South Caucasus. Neighboring Georgia ranks 77th, Turkey ranks 165th, Azerbaijan ranks 151st, and Iran ranks 177th. The report also states that the polarization of the media is a reflection of the polarization of the political field in Armenia.

The organization also touched upon the legislation regulating the media sphere and emphasized that it does not sufficiently protect the freedom of the press and that recent reforms have not solved this problem. Special attention was paid to the availability of information, its accessibility was considered limited by state bodies. According to the report, journalists are regularly subjected to pressure and violence both by the representatives of the Government and the opposition, and the perpetrators of these incidents are often not identified or remain unpunished.

On May 24, the international human rights organization Freedom House published the annual report "Nations in Transit", where Armenia has recorded an improvement in the level of democracy, the country's rating was estimated at 3.11 on a seven-point scale.[[20]](#footnote-20) Last year, that indicator was 3.04. Armenia in 2023 is the only transition country included in the report to improve in more than one indicator. In particular, in terms of freedom of the press, this year the RA received 3.00 points compared to 2.75 points in 2022. The report emphasized the role of the NGO sector in effectively fighting against problematic legislative amendments.

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

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

***In total, there were 201 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in 2023. 6 were cases of physical violence, 60 were cases of pressure against the media and their personnel, and 134 were cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information.***

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

**Quantitative Data on Violations per Quarter in 2023**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2023  | 2nd quarter of 2023  | 3rd quarter of 2023  | 4th quarter of 2023  | Total |
| Physical violence against journalists | 0 | 0 | **3** | **3** | **6** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | 17 | 18 | **13** | **12** | **60** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | 48 | 24 | **33** | **29** | **134** |

**Comparative Data on Violations in 2022 and 2023**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 2022  | 2023  |
| Physical violence against journalists | **14(16 victims)** | **6** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **55** | **60** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **115** | **134** |

**Lawsuits, Involving Media and Journalists in 2023 per Quarter**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2023  | 2nd quarter of 2023  | 3rd quarter of 2023  | 4th quarter of 2023  | Total |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 9 | 15 | **6** | **4** | **34** |
| Economic or other disputes | 0 | 1 | **0** | **1** | **2** |

**Lawsuits, Involving Media and Journalists in 2022 and 2023**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 2022 | 2023  |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | **30** | **34** |
| Economic or other disputes | **2** | **2** |

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

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

 *In 2023, 6 cases of physical violence against media workers were recorded. Below we present the facts and developments related to both those cases and 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 and quarterly reports for 2018-2023 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were held on February 21, March 24, April 27, May 4, June 5 and 12, July 19 and 26, August 1, October 17, December 12 and 25. During various hearings, the criminal prosecution against some of the accused was stopped on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. The next court hearing was scheduled for January 17, 2024.

 **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 on 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).
 Court hearings on the case were also held on April 21, May 12 and 26, June 9 and 23, July 7 and 14, September 15 and 29, October 13, December 8, 15 and 22. The next one was scheduled for January 5, 2024.

 **On July 11**, Hayk Ghazaryan, a reporter of the Civilnet news website and a journalist of the Analyticon periodical, underwent physical violence in Stepanakert. A group of people ambushed him, tried to kidnap him, and when they failed, they beat him up. The journalist recognized some of those people and said that they were from the circle of the NKR Minister of Internal Affairs Karen Sargsyan. This incident was preceded by the obstruction of Hayk Ghazaryan's lawful professional activity two days ago. While covering the protest demonstration in Stepanakert, a policeman snatched the phone from his hand, which was later returned, but the recorded footage was deleted. The CPFE and partner journalistic organizations issued a condemning statement in this regard.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**On September 15**, the last day of the election campaign of Yerevan Council of Elders, one of the participants in the rally of the Government candidate Tigran Avinyan cursed and hit the editor of NewDay.am website Ani Gevorgyan with a flag.

The CPFE sent an inquiry regarding the case to the RA Prosecutor's Office, from where it was addressed to the Prosecutor's Office of Erebuni and Nubarashen administrative districts. In a reply letter, they informed that criminal proceedings were initiated in connection with the incident under Article 237, Part 3 of the RA Criminal Code, journalist Ani Gevorgyan was recognized as a victim and was interrogated. The pre-investigation is ongoing.

**On September 19**, Hetk Media Factory journalist Anush Mkrtchyan, who was covering the demonstration, was injured as a result of the use of stun grenades by the police against the citizens who were protesting in front of the RA Government building.[[22]](#footnote-22) She received a shrapnel injury, which, according to the doctors, also caused a superficial burn.

 **On October 20,** Narine Ghukasyan, a journalist of "Yerkir Media" TV company, was injured in the building of the NKR representation in Yerevan, during the demonstration of the forcibly displaced citizens from Artsakh. She was hit by protesting citizens, as a result of which she fainted. The police officer on the spot provided first medical aid to the journalist.

 **On October 20,** the work of a number of media representatives was obstructed in the building of the NKR representation in Yerevan, during the demonstration of forcibly displaced citizens from Artsakh. In particular, when the latter tried to ask questions to the President of Artsakh Samvel Shahramanyan, the people around him cursed and disrespected the journalists who were carrying out their professional activities. Thus, in the videos spread on the Internet, it is clearly seen how they tried to take away the phone from the reporter of Channel 5 TV company Arpi Sukiasyan, with which she was filming, or how Samvel Shahramanyan pushed away the hand of the reporter of Factor.am website Arpi Hakobyan, who was holding out a microphone. In this regard, journalistic organizations issued a statement.[[23]](#footnote-23)

 **On December 11,** the editor of the NewDay.am website Ani Gevorgyan, tried to film how the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was leaving the 3rd building of the Government, but the security guards did not allow her.[[24]](#footnote-24) In response to the journalist's resistance, the law enforcement officers made a reference to the relevant order, but the ban was also accompanied by a struggle.

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

*In 2023,* ***60*** *cases of various instances of applying pressure against the media and their personnel were registered. 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.[[25]](#footnote-25)

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 on December 22, 2022, 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?”.[[26]](#footnote-26) 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.

Court hearings on the case were also held on June 9, September 6, November 1, December 8. The next one was scheduled for January 17, 2024.

 **On January 3**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings the lawsuit filed by Pretty Way LLC (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.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Court hearings on the case were also held on March 10, June 30, and on July 12, the court ruled to terminate the proceedings of the case based on the settlement agreement signed between the parties.

 **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 news websites on the grounds that the statute of limitations had 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.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The court also ruled to confiscate 200,000 AMD from Vardan Badasyan in favor of Iravunk Media LLC, and 150,000 AMD in favor of 168 Hours LLC as an attorney's fee, and to separate the case of these two media outlets. The plaintiff filed an appeal against the judgement, which was accepted for proceedings on October 2. Before that, new proceedings were initiated regarding the other media outlet. Court hearings were held on May 3, July 14, and November 1. The next one was scheduled for February 26, 2024.

 **On January 5,** NA MP Khachatur Sukiasyan filed a lawsuit against Alternative Media LLC (founder of Alternativ.am website) and Media Plus LLC (founder of 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"[[29]](#footnote-29), 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".[[30]](#footnote-30) 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. Court hearings were also held on May 16 and September 11. The next one was scheduled for February 5, 2024.

 **On January 5,** Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC filed a lawsuit against journalist Tehmine Yenokyan in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, 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...".[[31]](#footnote-31) 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. Court hearings were held on March 14, April 19, and September 28. The next one was scheduled for January 18, 2024.

**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 was stated that Tamrazyan cursed the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Vahram Dumanyan after the Rector's election.[[32]](#footnote-32) On January 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. During the year, hearings were held on June 21 and October 4. The next one was scheduled for January 12, 2024.

 **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”[[33]](#footnote-33) 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 March 22, 2023, the acceptance of the cassation complaint was also rejected.

**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 on April 7, the Court of Appeal upheld the defendant’s complaint, overturning the judgement of the First Instance Court. In addition, Mega Trade LLC was obliged to pay 150,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee and 13,000 AMD as a state duty. On May 5, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation, where it was ruled to reject the complaint on September 20.

**On April 28,** the trial continued on the case of *Khachatur Sukiasyan v. Armday.am LLC, the founder of Armday.am* (Tatevik Ayvazyan, a reporter for the website was later involved as defendant) filed for the same reason, demanding a public apology, refutation of information considered defamatory, as well as payment of compensation. By the way, the court granted the motion to apply an injunction to place a freezing order on the property owned by the defendant Tatevik Ayvazyan in the amount of the claim, i.e. 3 million AMD, until the final judicial act on this case is passed.

A court hearing was also held on June 6, and on June 27 the court passed a decision to separate the cases of the two defendants. Court hearings on the case against Armday AM LLC were held on October 10 and December 14. The next one was scheduled for February 20, 2024. A separate lawsuit against Tatevik Ayvazyan was filed on June 27 and on the same day, the court ruled to reject the claim on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired, and also to cancel the freezing order imposed on the property belonging to Tatevik Ayvazyan.

 **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 were: TV companies Yerkir Media and ParaTV, as well as websites NewDay.am, MediaHub.am, PastInfo.am, Yerevan.today, Oragir.news. Meanwhile, FreeNews.am correspondent Diana Davtyan was not allowed to enter the press conference hall because she arrived 10 minutes before the start, and 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.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Court hearings on the case were also held on January 30, April 20, July 7, October 6, November 24, and on December 12 the lawsuit was rejected by the court judgement. No other developments have been recorded as of the end of the year.

 **On January 10**, the Court of Appeal rejected the motion of the plaintiff on the 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 damage caused to honor and 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.” [[35]](#footnote-35)

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, 100 thousand AMD - the attorney's fee and 8 thousand AMD as a state duty.

 On May 19, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff's appeal against the decision of the First Instance Court, by which the motion to change the manner and order of execution of the judgment was rejected. On June 1, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation, continuing to challenge the same decision. On September 6, it was accepted for proceedings. There were no further developments by the end of the year.

 **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 by joint obligation in favor of Suzan Simonyan, on the grounds that the statute of limitation has expired. On March 13, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the judgement, which was rejected by the decision made on November 29.

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.[[36]](#footnote-36)

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 year.

**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.

A court hearing was also held on May 29. The next one was scheduled for January 16, 2024.

 **On January 10, 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 a compensation.**

 **The lawsuit, filed on April 4, 2022, was caused by an article entitled: “Alaverdi: Medical Center Surgeon's Negligence and Director's Business Interests”**[[37]](#footnote-37)**, 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.”**[[38]](#footnote-38) **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, new proceedings were accepted.**

**In 2023, court hearings were also held on February 15 and March 16. On June 14, the court rejected the claim. On July 6, the plaintiff filed an appeal, which was returned on August 8, filed again on the 17th, and accepted for proceedings on September 8. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.**

**On January 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted new proceedings on the case of *citizen* *Erik Yeghinyan v. CMG LLC (the founder of Pastinfo news 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”.[[39]](#footnote-39) (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 in 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, March 27, June 5, and September 19. On October 11, the claim was rejected. No appeal was filed against the judgement.

 **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 hearing on the case was also held on June 23, and on August 7, the court ruled to find the defendant guilty and to terminate the criminal prosecution against him without assigning a punishment, on the grounds that the statute of limitations for criminal prosecution had passed. The judgement was not appealed.

 **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.[[40]](#footnote-40) 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”[[41]](#footnote-41), 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. And on April 20, the court terminated the proceedings of the case based on the withdrawal of the claim. In addition, a decision was made to confiscate 200,000 AMD in favor of Mariam Hovsepyan, as an attorney's reasonable fee.

 **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).

On April 7, the case was redistributed on the basis of the termination of the judge's powers, and no developments were recorded by the end of the year.

 **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 of 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”.[[42]](#footnote-42) 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 claim, the media admitted that there had been an imprecision, but refused to publish appropriate refutation.

Hearings on the case were also held on April 18, September 11, and October 16. And on November 6, the court partially upheld the lawsuit, obliging the media outlet to publish a refutation and pay a state duty in the amount of 4 thousand AMD in favor of the plaintiff. No appeal was filed against the judgement by the end of the year.

 **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 a 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.[[43]](#footnote-43)

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,[[44]](#footnote-44) and then on April 11, published the LLC’s refutation in regard to the previously made statement.[[45]](#footnote-45) On April 12, the publication entitled “Global Gold Mining's Claims Are Clearly False: Unpaid Employees Deny GGM's Refutation” followed,[[46]](#footnote-46) 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”[[47]](#footnote-47) and “A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time”[[48]](#footnote-48) 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, May 10, June 19, August 24, October 19, November 3 and 29. The next one was scheduled for February 26, 2024.

 **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”[[49]](#footnote-49), as well as Narek Malyan's film with the same content shown on December 5 on ArmNews TV.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Hearings on the case were also held on February 24, May 18, July 12, October 12, and November 17. The next hearing has not been scheduled as of the end of the year.

 **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 triggered 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.[[51]](#footnote-51)

On May 19, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff's appeal. This decision was not appealed, the judgement remained unchanged.

 **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.[[52]](#footnote-52) 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 live television 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 April 19, the case was accepted for new proceedings. A court hearing was held on November 22. The next one was scheduled for May 16, 2024.

 **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.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Hearings on the case were also held on April 25 and September 28. The next one was scheduled for February 8, 2024.

**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 news websites,* 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 website on August 18, entitled: “When are You Going to Name YSU after Soros?”,[[54]](#footnote-54) 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”.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Court hearings were also held on March 1 and April 11. On May 11, the court ruled to partially uphold the claim: to oblige Media Plus LLC to refute the information considered defamatory, to confiscate 500 thousand AMD in favor of the plaintiff as compensation for damages caused through defamation, 14 thousand AMD as state duty and 50 thousand AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee. The rest of the case proceedings were terminated on the grounds of improper defendant.

The judgment was not appealed and entered into legal force.

 **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?”.[[56]](#footnote-56) 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.

Hearings on the case were also held on June 7 and October 5. On the 16th of the same month, the case was redistributed, and it was accepted for proceedings on October 27. A court hearing was scheduled for July 18, 2024.

 **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.

Court hearings on the case were also held on May 25 and October 2. The next one was scheduled for February 6, 2024.

**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.[[57]](#footnote-57) 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. The case was submitted to the court archive.

**On** **January 26,** the defendant on the case of *citizen Arusyak Mkrtchyan v. 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”.[[58]](#footnote-58) 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 and pay 150,000 AMD as an attorney’s fee.

On August 8, the Court of Appeal accepted the defendant's appeal for proceedings. The judicial act will be published on January 9, 2024.

**On January 28,** citizens reprimanded Ani Gevorgyan, editor of NewDay.am news website, at Yerbulur Military Pantheon for approaching them and asking questions.[[59]](#footnote-59) 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 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”,[[60]](#footnote-60) 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.

#  Court hearings on the case were also held on May 31 and October 12. No other developments were recorded before the end of the year.

 **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 aforementioned website on February 11, stating particularly 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.[[61]](#footnote-61) (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2020-2022 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Hearings on the case were also held on May 22 and September 11. The court judgement expected on October 3 has not been published.

 **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".[[62]](#footnote-62) 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, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, after which the case was redistributed twice, and finally the case was accepted for new proceedings on June 20. Court hearings were held on October 3 and November 23. The next one was scheduled for February 5, 2024.

 **On January 30,** the court hearing on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. the Commission on TV and Radio* was held, 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, 2022 (Armenia TV CJSC, ATV LLC, Shant LLC and Multimedia Kentron TV CJSC were involved as a third party.) This lawsuit was filed on December 21, 2022.

In 2023, a hearing was held on February 13. On February 22, the claim was upheld, the impugned decision was declared invalid. On March 23, the defendant applied to the Court of Appeal.

On October 5, the appeal was upheld, the judgement was completely overturned and changed, the plaintiff's claim was rejected. The latter was obliged to pay 20,000 AMD of state duty compensation. The plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation on November 16.

**On February 23,** the Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on another case of the same plaintiff against the Commission on TV and Radio. This lawsuit was filed **o**n March 15, 2021, demanding to obligate the Commission on TV and Radio to make a decision on recognizing Armenian Second TV Channel LLC as a winner and granting a license to the given channel in the tender 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 also abolished. **On May 25,** the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, challenging the judgement of the First Instance. A court hearing was scheduled for May 8, 2024.

**On March 3,** new proceedings were 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 dated 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 has not been scheduled as of the end of the year.

**On April 13,** the Administrative Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff's appeal on the case of Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. Commission on TV and Radio ( with BOON Scientific and Cultural Foundation, Boon TV as the third party), leaving unchanged the plaintiff's appeal - the judgement of October 10, 2002.

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 applied to the Court of Appeal.

On June 20, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Cassation, on July 12, his appeal was returned, and after filing it again, its proceedings were rejected on September 13.

 **On February 1**, 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 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 reinstates 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.[[63]](#footnote-63)

A court hearing on the case was also held on April 19, while on May 4, the lawsuit was rejected by the court's decision. Armenian National Interests Fund was obliged to pay 100,000 AMD in favor of the media outlet as an attorney’s reasonable fee. The plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, where the appeal was accepted for proceedings on August 9. No other developments were recorded.

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

On February 16, the lawsuit was returned for corrections, refiled on March 14 and accepted for proceedings on March 24. Court hearings were held on May 22, July 18 and 25, as well as October 10. The next one was scheduled for January 18, 2024.

 **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”[[65]](#footnote-65), 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.[[66]](#footnote-66) 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, the appeal was rejected. On April 7, the defendant appealed to the Court of Cassation. On May 17, the court ruled to return the appeal for corrections.

**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.

We should remind thaton 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[[67]](#footnote-67) and January 15, 2022,[[68]](#footnote-68) 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.

 Hearings on the first lawsuit were held on May 10. On June 19, the case was redistributed, and the next hearing was scheduled for January 11, 2024.

Hearings with the second lawsuit were held on February 7 and July 4. The next one was scheduled for February 1, 2024.

 **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”[[69]](#footnote-69) 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 26, 2019, entitled: “Hayk Sargsyan “Made a Row” on the Yerevan-Moscow Plane”.[[70]](#footnote-70) On 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.

Hearings on the case were also held on February 20 and May 12.

The judgment passed onJune 2granted the claim in part. The media outlet was obligated to publicly apologize to Hayk Sargsyan, pay 200,000 AMD for insult and defamation, and 100,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee. On June 30, the defendant filed an appeal, which was accepted for proceedings on August 11. By the end of the year no other developments have been recorded.

**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.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Court hearings were also held on May 15, July 3, September 4 and November 22. On December 12, the court judgement partially upheld the lawsuit. The media outlet was obligated to publish refutation and pay the plaintiff 50 thousand AMD in compensation for the insult and defamation, and the same amount as an attorney’s fee, as well as 43 thousand AMD as state duty.

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

The grounds for 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. No appeal against the judgement was 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.[[73]](#footnote-73)

A court hearing was also held on May 5, then the case was redistributed. Within the framework of the new proceedings a court hearing was held on November 27. The next one was scheduled for April 2, 2024․

**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.

 On May 3, the court upheld the plaintiff’s motion to engage journalist Hayk Gevorgyan as a defendant, as well as to change the subject of the lawsuit, obligating Iravunk Media Ltd. and Hayk Gevorgyan to refute information considered defamatory and to jointly confiscate from them 2 million AMD in compensation.

A court hearing on the case was also held on June 19, and then the case was transferred to another court. Here court hearing were held on September 13 and November 27, while on December 13, the case on the part of Hayk Gevorgyan was separated and on the same day was rejected on the grounds of statute of limitation.

 The next court hearing on the main case was scheduled for March 4, 2024.

**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 on November 2, 2022, 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.[[74]](#footnote-74) In particular, the announcement stated 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 also held on May 11. The next one was scheduled for February 5, 2024.

**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. 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. 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.

On June 5, in the new proceedings, the Court ruled to leave the case without trial and confiscate 200,000 AMD from the plaintiff in favour of the defendants. The decision is based on the fact that the notified plaintiff did not show up for 2 successive sessions. The decision was not appealed.

**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, and on the 23rd it was accepted for proceedings.

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”.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Hearings on the case were held on March 27, April 26, May 18, August 28, October 9, and on the 30th, the lawsuit was partially upheld. The court obliged the media outlet to publish a refutation, as well as to pay the plaintiff 250,000 AMD in compensation for defamation and 9,000 AMD as state duty. The judgement was not appealed as of the year's end.

**On February 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes (Masis residence) in a new trial continued the case of *a journalist and anchor Nver Mnatsakanyan 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.[[76]](#footnote-76)

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.

On April 25, Garnik Isagulyan went to the Court of Appeal, where his lawsuit was rejected on August 30. On October 18, he filed an appeal in the Court of Cassation.

 **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,[[77]](#footnote-77) which stated that upon a request from the Ministry of Defence News.am refuted a news story on an unpleasant incident, featuring the Minister.[[78]](#footnote-78)

 Court hearings were also held on May 18, July 18, and October 12. The next one was scheduled for February 15, 2024.

**On February 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Head of Arshaluys Community Zarzand Grigoryan v. citizen Virab Shahbazyan and Bats TV Plus Ltd.*, demanding a refutation of slander, a public apology and 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”.[[79]](#footnote-79)

On April 12, 2023, by the decision of the court, the proceedings of the case were terminated, because the plaintiff withdrew his claims.

**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.[[80]](#footnote-80) 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 hearings on the case, scheduled for June 8 and October 16, 2023, were not held. The next one was scheduled for February 19, 2024.

**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 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.[[81]](#footnote-81)

A court hearing was also held on May 22, 2023. On June 19, the case was redistributed, and was accepted for proceedings on the 27th. The next hearing was scheduled for February 12, 2024.

**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.

On April 5, 2023, the proceedings on the case were terminated on the grounds of the withdrawal of the lawsuit.

**On May 10**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the regular court hearing on the case of *attorney Lusine Avagyan v. Naira Terteryan (Live News Media LLC as third party),* with claims of refuting information considered as defamatory and compensation of damage caused to the diginity, honour and business reputation.

The lawsuit, filed on August 10, 2021, was caused by the same show, containing allegations by Naira Terteryan that Lusine Avagyan who was her ex-husband Mher Terteryan’s lawyer, apart from fulfilling her professional duties, would also interfere in their private and family life.[[82]](#footnote-82)

A court hearing was also held on November 21, 2023. The next one was scheduled for March 26, 2024.

**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”.[[83]](#footnote-83) 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, and 200,000 AMD as an attorney’s reasonable fee. On November 16, the defendant applied to the Court of Appeal.

On June 29, 2023, the case was redistributed in the Civil Court of Appeal on the grounds of a change of judge. On July 6, the appeal was accepted for new proceedings, and on December 20, it was rejected.

**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.[[84]](#footnote-84) Hearings on the case were also held on May 12 and September 15. The next one was scheduled for February 20, 2024.

**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 triggered 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.[[85]](#footnote-85) 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. The latter rejected to accept the plaintiff’s appeal for proceedings on May 17.

**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, 2023, with a new presiding judge. Court hearings were held on April 10, May 4, August 15, and December 5. The next court hearing was scheduled for April 9, 2024.

 **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.[[86]](#footnote-86) 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. Hearings were held on June 20 and October 24. On December 18, the case was redistributed, on the 25th, it were accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for March 14, 2024.

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

 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.[[87]](#footnote-87) 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 Hours 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, the defendant filed an appeal in the Court of Cassation, but the judgement of the Court of Appeal entered into legal force.

Court hearings were also held on June 16 and October 20, 2023. On November 10, according to the court judgement, the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds of the expiration of the statute of limitations. In addition, the plaintiff was obliged to pay 200,000 AMD as an attorney's reasonable fee.

On December 13, the plaintiff filed an appeal.

**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”[[88]](#footnote-88), 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 appeal was filed against the decision of this court.

 **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[[89]](#footnote-89), then on the latter [[90]](#footnote-90) 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.

 Hearings on the case were also held on April 6 and August 25, 2023, and the lawsuit was partially upheld by the judgment of September 8. The websites were obliged to publicly refute the expressions in question and to jointly pay the plaintiff 500 thousand AMD in compensation for defamation and 35,000 AMD as state duty. No appeal was filed against the judgment.

 **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.[[91]](#footnote-91) 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 with 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 July 31, the appeal was reassigned here. No other developments were reported by the end of the year.

**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. Irates newspaper and the eponymous electronic website*, demanding compensation for 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”.

Hearings on the case were also held on June 7 and September 26, 2023. On October 6, the court ruled to leave the lawsuit without trial, because the notified plaintiff failed to appear at two successive court hearings. In addition, the court ruled to confiscate 300,000 AMD from the plaintiff as an attorney's reasonable fee of the media outlet. On October 23, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the judgement of the First Instance Court, but it was returned on November 20, and the motion to restore the missed deadline for filing an appeal was also rejected. On November 29, the appeal was refiled, on December 5, it was accepted for proceedings.

 **On March 6,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a retrial on the case of *citizen Arthur Vardanyan v.* *168 Hours 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.[[92]](#footnote-92) 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 ruled 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, 2023. On July 17, the court ruled to partially uphold the claim, obliging David Pirumyan to apologize and confiscating state duties from him, and obliging both parties at the same time to pay 100,000 AMD each, as attorneys' reasonable fees. Both the plaintiff and the defendant filed appeals against the judgement. On November 7, the Court of Appeal accepted the defendant's appeal for proceedings, and on the 14th, the same was done for the plaintiff's appeal.

 **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”.[[93]](#footnote-93) 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.

On June 13 of the present year, the case was redistributed, on July 7 and August 9, court hearings were held. According to the judgment published on August 23, the lawsuit was completely rejected, and the confiscation of 100,000 AMD from the plaintiff in favor of the defendant was upheld as an attorney's fee. The judicial act was not appealed and acquired legal force.

 **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.[[94]](#footnote-94) (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2022-2023 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

**On March 14,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a redistribution on the case of *Livenews.am journalist Arthur Hovhannisyan v. 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*).
 The case was redistributed twice: the case was sent to another court and was accepted for proceedings on October 9. A court hearing was scheduled for June 4, 2024.

**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.[[95]](#footnote-95)
 The Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Armenia reported in response to the inquiry of the CPFE that on March 16, the RA Investigative Committee received the joint statement of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression and journalistic organizations. Bearing in mind that the said report could not be considered a report about crime and 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 gap or a flawed approach of law enforcement agencies, it actually turns out that the website was hacked and there is an alarm about it, but the law enforcement agencies do not initiate proceedings citing formal conditions, 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.[[96]](#footnote-96)

**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”.[[97]](#footnote-97)

A court hearing on the case was also held on June 2. According to the judgment made on June 16, the claim was partially granted, the defendant was obliged to refute the disputed statements on H1 TV channel, pay 500,000 AMD as compensation for defamation, and 18,000 AMD as state duty. The defendant filed an appeal on July 26, 2023, which was accepted for proceedings by the higher instance court on August 18. No other developments were recorded.

**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, while Facebook and Instagram block them. The plaintiff 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 in 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, 2023, 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 First Instance Court held court hearings on April 25, July 3 and October 19. The next one was scheduled for March 27, 2024.

**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) v. 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.[[98]](#footnote-98) 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.

 Having failed in three courts, Ani Gevorgyan fulfilled the demands of the judgment through fundraising.

 **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 a 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.[[99]](#footnote-99) 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 apply an injunction putting a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected.

Hearings on the case were held on June 16 and October 20. The next one was scheduled for March 18, 2024.

**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.[[100]](#footnote-100)
 After the case was redistributed on April 3, 2023, it was accepted for new proceedings, a hearing was held on September 13. The next one was scheduled for February 28, 2024.

 **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.

A hearing on the case was also held on April 5, and with the judgment of April 27, the court partially upheld the claim. The website was obliged to apologize for offensive expressions, publish a refutation, pay 40 thousand AMD as a state duty, 100 thousand AMD as an attorney's fee. On June 29, the defendant filed an appeal against the judgement, which was accepted for proceedings on September 19. No other developments were recorded in the Datalex information system until the end of the year.

**On March 21,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevanheld a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Narine Abrahamyan v. journalist Kristine Aghalaryan*, demanding public refutation of the information considered as defamatory, as well as payment of a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on June 2, 2017, was caused by an article, entitled: “Meghri Medical Center vs. SRC” published on Lurer.com website on May 17, 2017, in which a reference was made to Narine Abrahamyan appearing in the epicenter of a number of scandals during her professional activity.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Court hearings were also held on May 10 and July 24. There is no information about the next regular hearing.

**On March 21,** a redistribution was made on the case of Sofia Hovsepyan, MP of the National Assembly, v. Anna Gevorgyan, editor of the Haykakan Zham news-analytical agency. The lawsuit, filed on July 29, 2020, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation and refutation of defamation, was caused by a series of publications on the Hzham.am website: namely, "They are Worried that Money will be Distributed for the Elections", dated March 13,[[102]](#footnote-102) "Velvet Corruption", dated June 1,[[103]](#footnote-103) and "Civil Contract Members about Their Achievements", dated July 10.[[104]](#footnote-104)

On November 22, 2023, a regular court hearing was held on the case, the next one was scheduled for June 4, 2024.

**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?”.[[105]](#footnote-105) 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. This decision was not appealed and entered into force.

 **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, 2022, was caused by the open letter addressed to the RA Prime Minister and published on September 8 on Hetq.am website that belongs to the NGO.[[106]](#footnote-106) According to this piece, the gas station belonging to the lawyer's client was illegally operated by the plaintiff Ashot Khlghatyan.

 Court hearings on the case were also held on **August 23** and December 6, 2023. The next one was scheduled for May 8, 2024.

 **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.[[107]](#footnote-107)

A hearing on the case was also held on June 14. The next one was scheduled for May 22, 2024.

 **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 NA MP Taron Sahakyan (with Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., founder of Zhamanak Daily involved as the third party)*, demanding public apology for the insult, 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?”.[[108]](#footnote-108)
 Court hearings were also held on May 26 and August 21. And on September 11, according to the court judgement, the claim was rejected. No appeal was filed against the judgement.

 **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 Speaker. According to the Chief of the Staff, with this publication, Knar Manukyan violated the order regarding the work of the journalists in the NA, 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.[[109]](#footnote-109)

**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 said that the journalist was publishing false information against the current authorities.[[110]](#footnote-110)

 **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"[[111]](#footnote-111), then: "I'm sick and tired of you"[[112]](#footnote-112), and finally promised to pray for him.[[113]](#footnote-113)

**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 Hraparak.amwebsite, owned by the LLC, entitled: “An Open Network of Agencies under the Disguise of the Community of Human Right Defenders”.[[114]](#footnote-114) 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.

Court hearings were also held on June 21, July 13, and November 23, 2023. During that time, the court rejected the motion of defendant Davit Sargsyan to apply the statute of limitations.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 18, 2024.

 **On March 31,** Yerevan Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan filed a lawsuit against 168 Hours Ltd. and journalist, commentator Davit Sargsyan in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, 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.[[115]](#footnote-115)

On May 2, the court accepted the case for proceedings and granted the motion to apply an injunction, putting a freezing order on the property and bank accounts of the media outlet and the journalist in the amount of 9 million AMD. After the condemning statement, published by the journalistic organizations, the decision to grant the motion was canceled on May 18, as per the plaintiff’s request. Court hearings were also held on July 17, September 4, and November 8, and on November 28, the court rejected the defendant's motion to apply the statute of limitations. The next hearing was scheduled for February 9, 2024.

**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.

Court hearings were also held on June 30, September 14, and November 17, 2023. The next one was scheduled for February 13, 2024.

**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 LLC*,demanding refutation of defamation, opportunity for the publication of its reply, public apology and a 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, owned by the aforementioned LLCs on March 11, entitled: “Slavery at Spayka: Employees Work also on Sundays without Pay”.

On April 21, the proceedings of the case were terminated, the plaintiff withdrew the claim.

**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 on 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 shot bullet landed in the living-room of her apartment.[[116]](#footnote-116) The journalist 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.

Court hearings on the case were held on April 20, May 11, June 8, September 7, and December 11, 2023. The next one was scheduled for January 30, 2024.

 **On April 3**, Deputy Head of the Shirak Marz Investigative Department Hovhannes Poghosyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against 168 Hours Ltd. and journalist Gohar Savzyan, demanding to refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article about the plaintiff published on the 168.am website, owned by the LLC, on March 7 under the heading “Prosecutor Unfit for His Position is Now Deputy Head of the Regional Investigative Department”.[[117]](#footnote-117) The website, referring to its sources, noted that Hovhannes Poghosyan, in terms of the appointment in the position, benefited from being the colleague of the Chairman of the Investigative Committee, Argishti Kyaramyan. The application was returned twice due to incomplete documentation. It was accepted for proceedings on July 21. The preliminary court hearing on the case has not been scheduled as of the end of the year.

 **On April 3**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Styopa Safaryan, the former Chairman of the Public Council, v. LiveNews correspondent Taguhi Aslanyan*, demanding public apology for statements of insult and 1 million AMD in compensation.

 The lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2021, was caused by the expressions of the journalist, posted on Facebook on June 20, particularly stating: “You are not just rejected, but pissed on…”.[[118]](#footnote-118) The journalist, making reference to an unidentified source, has written that the neighbors have pissed on Styopa Safaryan for serving the Prime Minister.

A court hearing was also held on September 13, 2023. The next one was scheduled for March 1, 2024.

 **On April 4,** the case of *Ruben Khachatryan, the former Director of the Yerevan Zoo, v. citizen Manuk Manukyan (third party – Iravunk Media Ltd.)* was redistributed in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan. The lawsuit, claiming refutation of defamatory information and monetary compensation for non-pecuniary damage, was filed on April 29, 2022 and was caused by the statements made by Manuk Manukyan on the air of Iravunk TV on April 1, according to which the Zoo was standing on the edge of the abyss, because for years, in particular, when led by Ruben Khachatryan, a corruption scheme was operating: public funds were embezzled, and animals were neglected.[[119]](#footnote-119)

On April 21, 2023, the case was accepted for proceedings, presided by a new judge, a court hearing was held on August 18. The next one was scheduled for January 30, 2024.

**On April 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the former Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and current Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan v. Anna Gevorgyan Private Entrepreneur* (founder of *Hzham.am* news website).The court distributed the burden of proof between the parties.

The lawsuit was filed on June 22, 2020, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article published on Hzham.am website on May 15, entitled: “My Step Party Members are Interested in the Real Estate Market”, which states in particular that the province governors, led by Minister Suren Papikyan, are buying houses in the capital city “without paying” as they provide services, demanding an apartment as a donation.[[120]](#footnote-120) On December 17, the motion to apply an injunction of a freezing order on the property was upheld.

On March 31, 2022, the court ruled to reject Suren Papikyan's lawsuit and maintain the injunction of a freezing order on the private entrepreneur in the amount of 1,200,000 AMD, until the decision enters into legal force. On April 29, the plaintiff appealed the judgment in the Court of Appeal. On September 6, the appeal was granted. The judgment was overturned in relation to the claims of obliging the defendant to refute the information considered as defamatory, and the case was sent to the same court for a new trial in relation to this part.

With the new trial a hearing was held on August 1, 2023. The next one was scheduled for April 23, 2024.

 **On April 6**, Alisa Mkhitaryan, the director of Maralik Community School No. 1 in Shirak Marz, filed a lawsuit against the Haykakan Zhamnews website, with claims to refute the information discrediting her honor, dignity and business reputation and obligate the media outlet to pay compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the news published on the Facebook page of the website on February 19, according to which the plaintiff instructed the teachers and parents of the school to vote for the Government's candidate in the Council of the Elders elections, otherwise she threatened they would face reprisals.[[121]](#footnote-121) On April 17, the claim was returned, as the plaintiff addressed the claim to different defendants, namely in one case it was a claim against the website, in another case – the founder. On April 28, the case was handed over to the court archive.

  **On April 6**, the former Mayor of Yerevan Hrachya Sargsyan and the former Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Hayk Hovhannisyan filed a lawsuit against Zhoghovurd newspaper editorial office LLC, claiming a refutation of the information discrediting honor, dignity and business reputation and payment of a monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article published in the Zhoghovurd newspaper on March 30, under the heading “New Details on the Procurement of Buses. What Happened?”.[[122]](#footnote-122) According to the newspaper, the acquisition of Chinese buses for Yerevan was accompanied with corruption practices with the involvement of the co-plaintiffs. The claim was accepted for proceedings on April 18, whereas the motion for injunction to put a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected. Court hearings were held on July 3, August 21, and December 5. The next one was scheduled for February 19, 2024.

 **On April 6,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the court hearing on the case of *Hayk Terteryan v. Hraparak Daily LLC,* demanding refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the expression discrediting his business reputation. The plaintiff is the son of Hayk Terteryan, Honorary Consul of the RA in Aktyubinsk Region of Kazakhstan.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on February 2, 2021, and was caused by an article, entitled: “The Pig Farm of the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Kazakhstan has Caused an Ecological Disaster”, published on December 9, 2020 on Hraparak.am website.[[123]](#footnote-123) The article particularly mentions that the bodies of sick pigs were buried in the land around the pig farm belonging to the Terteryans, causing enormous damage to the communities around the city of Aktoba. Although on January 21, 2021 the website published a refutation, correcting some of the information in the article that caused the lawsuit, it did not satisfy the plaintiff.[[124]](#footnote-124) Court hearings on the case were also held on June 15, July 11, August 21, September 28, and November 7, 2023. The next hearing has not been scheduled as of the end of the year.

**On April 6,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for new proceedings (on the grounds of a different judge appointed) on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Armenuhi Hovsepyan, the founder of Newspress.am website*, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to the honor, dignity and good reputation through slander and insult.

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

Court hearings were also held on July 11, October 19, and November 28, 2023. The next one was scheduled for March 14, 2024.

 **On April 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan redistributed the case of *Van-Charter LLC v. Armenia TV CJSC*, filed on May 12, 2020, demanding refutation of the defamation and a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by an opinion about the company in relation to the wrong declarations and insufficient quality of alcohol-based sanitizer production, expressed during the Acute Angle program on the TV channel on April 12, 2020.[[125]](#footnote-125) On January 29, 2021, the court rejected the claim, finding that the defendant did not seek to discredit the plaintiff's business reputation with its publication, therefore, the disputed expressions were qualified as a value judgment. On March 5, the plaintiff appealed to the Civil Court of Appeal, where the appeal was upheld, and the case was sent for a retrial.

The case was accepted for new proceedings on April 21, 2023, and a court hearing was held on November 16. The next one was scheduled for April 25, 2024.

 **On April 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan rejected the lawsuit filed by the Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC against Pastinfo LLC, claiming a refutation of the information discrediting the business reputation and a payment of monetary compensation. According to the judgment of the court, the plaintiff was also obliged to pay 200,000 AMD in favor of the media outlet as an attorney’s reasonable fee.

The lawsuit, filed on August 2, 2022, was caused by an article, published on PastInfo.am website owned by the LLC on June 25. The article stated, that in violation of the RA Law on Freedom of Information, the CJSC failed to disclose the contact information of foreign members of the Board of Directors, and the inquiries made by the editors sent to the Fund office did not reach the right addressees.[[126]](#footnote-126)

On August 3, 2023, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the April 11 judgement. After the change of judges in this instance, the appeal was accepted for proceedings on October 13. No other developments were recorded.

 **On April 13**, the Deputy Mayor of Yerevan Tigran Avinyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Oragir Media LLC, demanding to obligate the media outlet to refute the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation, and confiscate a monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by an article published on Oragir.news website on March 9 under the heading: “Appetite Comes when Eating. Avinyan has Got down onto Vivacell-MTS.”[[127]](#footnote-127) Referring to its sources, the website noted that after buying Grand Hotel Yerevan, Avinyan had decided to also purchase the telecommunications operator “Vivacell-MTS”, and that he was using administrative levers to prevent the implementation of the transaction with another buyer, demanding to sell the telecommunications company to him only.

On April 25, the claim was accepted for proceedings, the motion for injuction to place a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected. A hearing on the case was held on September 26. As of the end of the year, no information about the date of the next hearing has been published.

**On April 13**, the Deputy Mayor of Yerevan Gevorg Simonyan filed a lawsuit against Pastinfo LLC in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, claiming refutation of the information discrediting his honor, dignity and business reputation and monetary compensation (a total of 6 million AMD). The lawsuit was caused by the article published on Pastinfo.am website on March 11 under the heading: “Interesting Documents were Found during the Search of Gevorg Simonyan's Office. Tigran Avinyan's Situation is Aggravating”.[[128]](#footnote-128) The website wrote that, according to the information it availed of, the search of Gevorg Simonyan's office revealed to the law enforcement officers lists on his computer, which related to the involvement of the staff of polyclinics and ambulance service in the upcoming elections of Yerevan Council of Elders. One of the documents revealed that some loyal medical workers were fired recently.

The claim was accepted for proceedings on April 28, the plaintiff's motion to apply an injunction was rejected. A court hearing was scheduled for January 16, 2024.

 **On April 14, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz (Echmiadzin residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *Serob Sargsyan, Deputy Head of Ajapnyak administrative district of Yerevan, v. Liana Sargsyan, journalist of Yerkir Media TV company*, with claims to oblige the defendant to pay a compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, refute defamatory information and make an apology. The defendant's motion for the recusal of the judge on the grounds of bias was rejected.**

**The lawsuit was filed on May 16, 2022, and was caused by Liana Sargsyan's post on Facebook dated April 30, about an incident that took place during the march organized by the parents of the fallen servicemen. The journalist specifically wrote that “...the person who called the parents of the victims “unclean” is Serob Sargsyan, the Deputy Head of Ajapnyak administrative district. And here you go. And thousands of men have died for this scoundrel, while this scoundrel lives beside you...”**

**Court hearings were also held on May 12, June 9 and 30, July 14, August 18, September 29, December 1 and 8, 2023. And on December 28, according to the court judgement, the lawsuit was rejected.**

 **On April 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *MP Hayk Sargsyan v.* *Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Office LLC,* claiming compensaton for the damage caused to his dignity and good reputation through slander.

The lawsuit was filed on December 10, 2021, and was caused by an article, published in the eponymous Zhoghovurd newspaper owned by the LLC as well as on Armlur.am news website on November 17. The article was titled “On the Day of the Murder MP Hayk Sargsyan was Near the Former MP’s House, Waiting for Tuy.”[[129]](#footnote-129) On the next day, the MP submitted a refuation text to the media outlet, however, the editorial office found controversies in the invoked facts and included this information in the comments published along with the text of refutation.[[130]](#footnote-130)
 Court hearings were also held on June 1 and 30, September 29, October 26, and December 19, 2023. The next one was scheduled for May 14, 2024.

**On April 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan granted the claim on the case of *citizen Ashot Parazyan v. Tert AM LLC, the founder of Tert.am news website*, demanding to publicly refute the data, considered as defamatory and compensate for the damage, caused to honor and dignity.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 16, 2019, was caused by an article, entitled: “Vahe Parazyan, Who Reported Against Samvel Karapetyan’s Nephew, Has a Criminal Backgound”, and published on the aforementioned website on July 16 of the same year.[[131]](#footnote-131) On January 21,2021, the lawsuit was rejected. The court based its decision on the assertion that the impugned expressions were value judgments. The plaintiff went to the Court of Appeal, which upheld the appeal, and the case reentered the Court of General Jurisdiction for a new trial.

 According to the judgment made, the media outlet was obligated to refute the impunged statements, pay 14,000 AMD as a state duty and 100,000 AMD as an attorney’s fee. The judgment was not appealed.

 **On April 19**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Yura Adyan v. Skizb Media Kentron Ltd., the founder of the Zhamanak newspaper*, claiming refutation of defamation and compensation in the amount of 2 million AMD.

The lawsuit, filed on June 10, 2019, was caused by the article, published by the Zhamanak dailyon May 9 of the same year under the heading “The Old Fox of Old and New Armenia.” The plaintiff demanded refutation of the point that he is the uncle of the Adyans, who occupy posts in the State Control Service, and in the times of the former authorities was considered the “old fox” in the field of procurements, participating in tenders beyond his field of specialization and sold the contract to other companies, after winning these tenders.

Court hearings were also held on July 25, September 6, and November 29, 2023. The next one was scheduled for January 17, 2024.

 **On April 19**, Narek Kirakosyan, a reporter of Factor TV accredited in the parliament, tried to videotape RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the NA hall with a mobile phone from the lodge intended for journalists. However, the filming was obstructed by Pashinyan's security officer.[[132]](#footnote-132) In particular, the latter forbade filming the Prime Minister in close-up, zooming in.

 **On April 19**, NA Speaker Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Mediahub LLC (founder of Mediahub.am website), claiming refutation of defamatory information and payment of a compensation in the amount of 1 million AMD.

The lawsuit was caused by an article published on the website on April 13 with the heading “The Government Signs a 79 Million AMD Agreement with Alen Simonyan's Brother’s Company with no Tender”, stating that the agreement signed with the official's brother's company did not reflect why the Government gave him so much money from the state budget for road construction without even opening a call for tender. [[133]](#footnote-133)

The claim was accepted for proceedings on May 5, the motion to place a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was rejected. Preliminary court hearings were held on August 8 and December 12. The next one was scheduled for March 19, 2024.

 **On April 25**, Project Inter-Invest LLC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak Daily LLC and journalist Suzan Simonyan, demanding to refute the information discrediting business reputation and pay monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the March 6 publication on Hraparak.am website with the title “Black Clouds over the Head of the Oligarch, Dear to the Heart of the Government.”[[134]](#footnote-134) According to the publication, the founder of the plaintiff company Narek Nalbandyan evaded taxes as a result of machinations, devised cunning schemes to avoid paying taxes to the state, and was caught. On May 17, the application was returned due to inaccuracies. It was refiled on June 27, and was accepted for proceedings on July 10. On July 10, according to the court decision, the plaintiff's motion to apply an injunction was rejected. A court hearing was also held on December 8. The next one was scheduled for May 17, 2024.

 **On April 25**, the ruling Civil Contract Party filed **4** lawsuits in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, claiming refutation of defamatory information and compensation. The lawsuits were filed against 168 hours, 24 News, News.AM LLCs and Hayeli Club NGO, caused by the news piece, published in 168.am, 24news.am, news.am and hayeli.am websites that on the day of elections in Sisian and Ani communities, namely March 26 (which the law defines as a day of no campaign), the media engaged in counter-propaganda against the Civil Contract Party by copying the statement made by the Citizen's Decision Party pre-election headquarters, bearing the headline “Civil Contract Gives out Bribes”. By the way, the publication was later removed from the websites.

The lawsuit against 168.am was accepted for proceedings on May 4, and court hearings were held on July 7 and October 31. The next one was scheduled for February 8, 2024. The lawsuit against 24news was accepted for proceedings on May 2, court hearings were held on July 14 and December 14. The next one was scheduled for May 2, 2024. The lawsuit against News.am was accepted for proceedings on May 11, court hearings were held on August 23 and December 6. The next one was scheduled for July 16, 2024. And the lawsuit against Hayeli.am was accepted for proceedings on April 28. The motion to apply an injunction was upheld. Preliminary court hearings were held on July 18, October 9 and December 4. The next one was scheduled for April 15, 2024.

 **On April 25,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Ruben Arakelyan, the former Director of the Center for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise SNCO, v. Power of Speech NGO* (founder of 4rd.am website), demanding public refutation of the information considered as defamatory.

The lawsuit, filed on May 31, 2022, was caused by an article, entitled “Reform According to Nikol Pashinyan” and published on the website on April 20, about the numerous violations recorded during the internal audit in the SNCO, as a result of which the culprits were fired, and the initiated criminal case in relation to the violations was archived. The publication also mentioned that the Director of the organization Ruben Arakelyan, together with his relative extorted the money allocated for the SNCO.[[135]](#footnote-135)

 A court hearing was held also on June 19, 2023, and on 23, the court ruled to leave the lawsuit without trial, since the notified plaintiff failed to appear at 2 successive hearings. The Court also obligated the plaintiff to pay 50,000 AMD as the defendant’s attorney’s reasonable fee.

 **On May 2,** on the grounds of changing the judge, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted the case of *Medisar LLC v. News AM LLC*, *the founder of News.am news website* for new proceedings, demanding compensation for the damage caused to its business reputation.

The lawsuit, filed on July 2, 2021, was caused by an article published on May 29 on the above-mentioned website, entitled: “Did They Get Excess Profit by Purchasing a DNA Identification Device for War Victims? New Facts from a Suspicious Deal”. The website particularly stated that as a result of the tender conducted by the Scientific and Practical Center of Forensic Medicine SNCO of the RA Ministry of Health, a contract worth 295.8 million AMD was signed with Medisar LLC, engaged in the supply and import of laboratory equipment and chemicals, which generated a profit of at least 111 million AMD as a result of the procurement process.
 A court hearing on the case was held on October 23, 2023. The next one was scheduled for April 19, 2024.

 **On May 3,** journalists tried to ask questions to Vladimir Gasparyan before the court hearing on the case of illegal property attributed to the former RA Police Chief Vladimir Gasparyan and other former high-ranking officials, but he started insulting and cursing them.[[136]](#footnote-136)

 **On May 16,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Union of Journalists of Armenia NGO*, *its President Satik Seyranyan and 168 Hours Ltd. v. Civic.am news website and Chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression NGO Ashot Melikyan* to oblige them to refute defamatory information, publish the refutation text, as well as pay a compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and/or business reputation.

 The lawsuit, filed on February 28, 2022, was caused by an interview with Ashot Melikyan published on Civic.am news website on January 31, where the latter, referring to the January 29 congress of the Union of Journalists of Armenia, particularly said: “It was not a congress of the Union of Journalists, but more an alliance of Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan's propagandists, who had gathered to decide what to do next and elect the head of that organization serving their camp ... .”

A hearing on the case was also held on October 26, 2023. The next hearing has not been scheduled.

 **On May 18,** Veolia Jur CJSC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the citizen of France and French military and investigative journalist of Armenian descent Leo Nikolian, Hayeli Club NGO (Hayeli.am website) and Live News Media LLC (Livenews.am website) with demands to oblige the defendant to remove defamatory publications, refute them, and confiscate monetary compensation. The lawsuit was caused by Leo Nikolian's statements on May 2[[137]](#footnote-137) and 14[[138]](#footnote-138) on the YouTube channel of Hayeli.am that the French Ambassador to Armenia received a bribe from Aliyev to carry out espionage, and in Armenia, the management of French Veolia Jur CJSC is a corrupt entity and cooperates with Ambassador Anne Louyot in order to gain a stronger footing with the RA authorities. The cause of the lawsuit is also an interview with the French-Armenian journalist on the YouTube channel of Livenews.am on May 4, where he reiterated that "the French Ambassador to Armenia is spying for Azerbaijan in Yerevan, and Veolia Jur bribed Anne Louyot, so that the Ambassador would put in a good word for Director General Marianna Shahinyan before the RA authorities to enjoy their protection." [[139]](#footnote-139)

On June 1, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was held on September 25. The next one was scheduled for January 23, 2024.

**On May 23**, Marianna Shahinyan, Director General of Veolia Jur CJSC, filed a separate lawsuit against the same defendants on the same occasion with the same claims. On June 2, this claim was accepted for proceedings. At the hearing held on September 26, the plaintiff filed a motion to change the subject of the lawsuit, which was granted. Accordingly, the text of the refutation and the forms of distribution were clarified. No other developments were recorded as of the end of the year.

 **On May 22,** Solid Partners LLC filed a lawsuit against Best Media LLC (engaged in film provision) with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, claiming compensation for the damage caused and copyright infringements. The Commission on TV and Radio and Multi Media-Kentron TV CJSC are involved in the case as third parties.

The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on June 5. A court hearing was scheduled for February 14, 2024.

**On May 22,** the Court ofGeneral Jurisidction of Yerevan held a regular hearing on the case of *Arman Martirosyan v.* *Exclusive Media Holding* LLC (founder of Exclusive.am news website), demanding refutation of slander, an apology for insult, compensation, and publication of the conclusive part of the court’s judgment.

The lawsuit, filed on October 22, 2021, was caused by an article, published on September 29, entitled: “Arayik Harutyunyan Rewarded the Owner of Entertainment Clubs with a Weapon: for What Act of Heroism? For Running the Clubs During the War?”[[140]](#footnote-140)

On June 12, 2023, the claim was granted in part. The media outlet was obliged to publicly refute the impunged information, pay 170,000AMD, out of which 20,000 AMD would be charged as a state duty, and 150,000AMD as an attorney’s fee. The judgment was not appealed.

 **On May 24**, the Court of Cassation rejected to accept for proceedings the plaintiff’s appeal on the case of *citizen Emma Kirakosyan v. the* *Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC* against the decision of the Court of Appeal, which had partially upheld her appeal against the judgement of the First Instanace Court on rejecting the claim. The Court justified that judgement by the fact that the disputed expressions were value judgments based on certain facts.

 The lawsuit, filed on January 10, 2019, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity and refutation of defamation, was caused by The Single Window program broadcast on Public TV on December 10, 2018.[[141]](#footnote-141) The plaintiff finds that the program contained “false information” about her. (For details see CPFE’s annual and quarterly reports for 2019-2022 in the *Reports* section on *khosq.am website*).

 **On June 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Alvina Gyulumyan, a former member of the Constitutional Court, v. Dareskizb Ltd., the founder of the Haykakan Zhamanak daily*, demanding refutation of slander and a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on August 22, 2018, was caused by the publication of an article stating that when Gyulumyan was representing Armenia at the European Court of Human Rights as a judge, she did not spare any effort to postpone the investigation of one of the cases in relation to the March 1, 2008 events in Yerevan. Alvina Gyulumyan’s lawsuit was rejected on December 6, 2019, on the grounds of applying statute of limitations, and the plaintiff filed an appeal on December 30, which was upheld, and the case was sent to the same court for a new trial. (For details see CPFE’s reports for 2018 – 2023 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).
 A hearing on the case was also held on September 26, 2023. On December 5, the court ruled to leave the claim without trial, because the notified plaintiff failed to appear at two successive court hearings and did not file a motion to postpone the case trial or to resolve the case in her absence, and the defendant did not motion to continue the case trial. On December 27, the plaintiff appealed this decision to the Civil Court of Appeal.

 **On June 13**, the Corruption Prevention Commission and its Chair Haykuhi Harutyunyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Information Committee information NGO, as well as Sevak Mamyan, the editor-in-chief of the NGO's Infocom.am website, and its journalists Mkrtich Karapetyan and Katya Mamyan, with claims to oblige them to publicly refute the factual information considered as defamatory.

The lawsuit was caused by an article, published on the website on May 6: "Members of the family of the President of the Central Intelligence Agency have not submitted a declaration for two years. No proceedings have been initiated."[[142]](#footnote-142)

Before filing the lawsuit, the Commission sent a refutation text to the editorial office, but the website refused to publish it. The Commission informed on its Facebook page[[143]](#footnote-143) that the website had distorted the facts, and then applied to the court.

On June 27, the lawsuit was returned due to inaccuracies in the documents. A new lawsuit has not been filed.

 **On June 13**, businessman Davit Yeremyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Datablog LLC (the founder of Blognews.am website), claiming public refutation of the information considered as defamatory and offensive, obligation of an apology and confiscation of compensation. The lawsuit was caused by a news piece, published on the website on May 12 with reference to Armeniannews.Info Telegram channel, under the heading of “‘Businessman” Yeremyan Davo has Gone off-Limits”[[144]](#footnote-144), where, in addition to the use of disrespectful vocabulary, the plaintiff was attributed a number of illegalities and unethical behavior.

By the way, on the same day, on his Facebook page the businessman called for making a public apology for tarnishing his business reputation, in response to which the website printed the words of the businessman, with no apology.[[145]](#footnote-145)

On June 27, the claim was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for January 24, 2024.

 **On June 22,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Gegham Vardanyan, Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission, v. Pastinfo Ltd.,* demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit, filed on September 9, 2020, was caused by an article, published on Pastinfo.am website on August 31, 2020, under the heading: “The Armenian Representative in the Eurasian Economic Commission is Suspected of Abuse”.[[146]](#footnote-146)

On July 14,2023,the court ruled to uphold the lawsuit, obliging the defendant to publish a refutation and pay 500,000 AMD in compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, 200,000 AMD as an attorney's fee and 48,000 AMD as a state duty. On October 23, the defendant appealed the judgement and filed a motion to consider the reasons for missing the deadline for the appeal to be excusable. On November 14, the Court of Appeal rejected both the motion and the appeal.

**On June 28,** the Prosecutor’s Office of Kentron and Nork-Marash administrative districts of Yerevan received a motion from an investigator about the editor-in-chief of Oragir.news news website Gevorg Emin-Teryan, on terminating public prosecution against him, which was granted by the decision of the supervising prosecutor on June 29. This information was provided by the RA General Prosecutor’s Office in response to the inquiry of CPFE.

We should remind that on December 14, 2022, Gevorg Emin-Teryan published a Facebook post: “As a sign of protest, the Christmas tree in the main square should be put to fire”,[[147]](#footnote-147) after which he was invited to the police for interrogation. He was charged with an act provided for in Article 329.2(3) of the RA Criminal Code. Public criminal prosecution was initiated against the journalist, and he was indicted.

The criminal proceedings were terminated on June 30, 2023.

 **On July 3,** the Supreme Judicial Council prohibited the media from entering the previously announced open court hearing. They did not provide any explanation or reasoning from the Supreme Judicial Council. Thus, the decision of that body was violated, according to which the access of journalists to open hearings is free.[[148]](#footnote-148)

**On July 6,** the Court of General Jursdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *already former* *NA MP Vahe Enfiajyan v.* *Social Media LLC*, *the founder of Mamul.am website*, demanding public refutation of the information discrediting his honor and dignity and a compensation for defamation.

The lawsuit was filed on April 16, 2021, and was caused by the article published on Mamul.am website on December 9, 2020, entitled: “Vahe Enfiajyan's Assistant Offers to Write Praises about Tsarukyan in Exchange for Money, and to Discredit Pashinyan”.[[149]](#footnote-149) On March 9, 2022, the lawsuit was partially upheld: the court obligated Social Media LLC to refute the defamatory information about Vahe Enfiajyan on the Mamul.am website, noting also that Liana Manukyan mentioned in the article was not Vahe Enfiajyan's assistant. On April 18, the defendant filed an appeal with the Civil Court of Appeal where on June 22, the judgment was overturned, and the case was sent for a new trial.

On July 27, according to the court judgement, the lawsuit was rejected. The judicial act entered into legal force.

 **On July 11,** Luyser CJSC filed a lawsuit against Zhoghovurd newspaper editorial office LLC, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on June 8 on the Armlur.am website owned by the LLC, entitled: "The Yard of Luyser Residential Buildings Crawls with Snakes and Scorpions. Residents are Raising the Alarm".[[150]](#footnote-150)

On July 26, the claim was returned due to inaccuracies, it was refiled on September 8, and was accepted for proceedings on September 20. The motion to apply an injunction was rejected. A court hearing on the case was held on December 7. The next one was scheduled for March 21, 2024.

**On July 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *citizen Arsen Ghukasyan v. Media News LLC* *(the founder of the Medianews.am website)*, demanding refutation of defamatory information and a compensation for damage.

The lawsuit was filed on June 14, 2022, and was caused by the article published on the website on May 26, entitled: "Arsen Ghukasyan Made a Row in the Court Yesterday and Insulted the Judge. Why did the Court of Appeal Decide to Investigate the Appeal against Pashinyan behind Closed Doors?”.[[151]](#footnote-151) According to the article, the relatives of the victims of the 44-day war, including the plaintiff, are politicizing the ongoing court hearings on charges of treason and using them against the current authorities through manipulation.

A hearing on the case was also held on October 24, 2023. The next one was scheduled for March 5, 2024.

 **On July 20,** during a public hearing at the Vanadzor Municipality, the acting secretary of the staff Hayk Virabyan, obstructed the professional activities of the journalist of Lori TV station Lusine Sargsyan, specifically forbidding filming. The official demanded accreditation, which is not provided by any legislative act in the case of local self-government bodies.

 **On July 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *NA MP Khachatur Sukiasyan v. Vazgen Sagahatelyan, the Press Secretary of the Reviving Armenia Party (third party: NewsAM LLC)*, with claims of public apology, refutation of information considered defamatory as well as payment of a compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on August 12, 2022, was caused by the ideas expressed by Saghatelyan during the July 29 rally of the opposition in Yerevan according to which the MP was involved in the business of licensing the gas cylinders in cars and was benefitting from the relevant decree of the Government. The speech under question was published by News.am website, belonging to NewsAM LLC, involved in the case as the third party. On August 23, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and the plaintiff’s motion of placing a freezing order on the property, as well as the monetary assets of the defendant in the amount of the claim, was rejected.

A court hearing was also held on November 30, 2023. The next one was scheduled for March 7, 2024.

**On July 26,** editor of NewDay.am news website Ani Gevorgyan and Aravot.am journalist Hripsime Jebejian were targeted on Facebook by various people, including fake users, for the questions they addressed to the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during the press conference the day before. Threats, insults and curses were addressed to the journalists.[[152]](#footnote-152) In this regard, Hripsime Jebejian filed claims to the court, which we will touch upon in the last section of the report.

**On July 27,** the "French University in Armenia" Foundation filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against French citizen Leo Nikolian (3rd party: Bats TV LLC) with demands to oblige him to refute defamatory information and to confiscate a compensation for statements discrediting business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by Leo Nikolian's interview on Bats TV, in which he accuses of corruption the former Ambassador of France to Armenia Anne Louyot and the French University in Armenia.[[153]](#footnote-153)

On August 10, the claim was returned, on the 21st it was filed again, on the 31st it was accepted for proceedings. The motion to place a freezing order on the property belonging to the defendant in the amount of the claim was granted. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On July 31,** the Rector of the French University in Armenia Sandra Bourdichon (aka Salwa Nacouzi), filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the French citizen Leo Nikolian, demanding to publicly apologize for the insult, to refute the defamatory information, and to confiscate compensation from the defendant for statements discrediting business reputation. Third party on the case included: Free Speech Platform Media NGO (founder of the Politik.am website) in connection with the article: "The French Ambassador to Armenia Sold Information to Azerbaijan for 5 Million AMD" published on July 12, in which accusations were also addressed to the Rector of the University;[[154]](#footnote-154) Hayeli Club NGO (founder of the Hayeli.am website) for the insulting remarks made by Nikolian in that club on July 14, according to which the Rector is the ambassador's friend, and they are known for corruption scandals;[[155]](#footnote-155) Iravunk.com news website of the Constitutional Law Union Party for the article: "Criminal Case should Be Initiated against Anne Louyot under the Article of Treason. Leo Nikolian", in which the Rector of the French University is again accused of corrupt dealings with the Ambassador of France; [[156]](#footnote-156) as well as Bats TV LLC for similar accusations made on the air again.[[157]](#footnote-157)

The claim was returned on August 11, and the plaintiff appealed this judgement in the Court of Appeal on August 28. That appeal was also returned; on September 22, it was filed again; on the 28th, its acceptance was rejected by the judgement of the Court of Appeal. The case was submitted to the court archive.

**On August 11,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Syunik Marz (Meghri residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *investigator Narek Abgaryan v. former Mayor of Meghri Arshavir Hovhannisyan (with the founder of the Syunyats Yerkir newspaper Syunyats Ashkhar LLC as a third party)*, with claims of refutation of defamatory information and compensation of the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit was filed on July 16, 2019, and was caused by the statements made by Arshavir Hovhannisyan about Narek Abgaryan, which were published on June 16 in the Syunyats Yerkir provincial newspaper. In particular, those statements included: "nonsense", "smarty pants", "the investigator didn't understand", "look how my investigator grew into a big boy", "the parents don't influence either".

 Court hearings were also held on September 22, October 20, and November 24, 2023. The publication of the judgement was scheduled for January 5, 2024.

 **On August 17**, the Civil Contract Party filed a lawsuit against the Union of Informed Citizens NGO (the founder of the Fip.am news website), demanding to refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the investigative article published on the Fip.am website on July 21 entitled: "Civil Contract Collects Votes for Avinyan Using the Administrative Resources of Other Communities".[[158]](#footnote-158) On August 25, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The court upheld the motion of applying an injunction and placing a freezing order on the defendant's property in the claim amount of 1 million AMD. Journalistic organizations issued a statement in this regard, considering the application of the freezing order as additional pressure on the media outlet.[[159]](#footnote-159) A court hearing was also held on October 2, and on November 27, the court ruled to repeal the decision on the injunction.

The next court hearing was scheduled for February 6, 2024.

 **On August 22,** citizen Yurik Grigoryan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Kentron TV Company - Multimedia Kentron CJSC, demanding to publicly refute defamatory information and pay a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by the July 23 edition of the "In the Footsteps of Crime" program of the Kentron TV Company, during which the presumption of innocence was violated; the plaintiff was accused of organizing a murder. "The ex-boyfriend was killed by blowing up the car. What does "Tokhmakh Yuro" have to do with it?".[[160]](#footnote-160)

On September 5, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was held on November 2. The next one was scheduled for January 24, 2024.

 **On August 26,** a soldier of the Russian peacekeeping forces in Goris, without any explanation, forbade Tigran Hovsepyan, the Syunik correspondent of Radio Liberty, to film several dozen Artsakh citizens who passed through the Lachin Corridor accompanied by peacekeepers and reached the territory of Armenia. Journalistic organizations issued a statement in this regard.[[161]](#footnote-161)

 **On August 31,** at the court hearing on the case of the catastrophic explosion of the Yerevan Surmalu fair, in the Center residence of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, the correspondents of the Public TV Company, Factor.TV, and News.am were forbidden to broadcast live and then to film. 10 minutes after the beginning of the hearing, the judge, given the complexity of the case, ordered to stop the video recordings, whereas the accused did not object to coverage of the hearing.

 **On August 31**, **the Civil Court of Appeal upheld** the defendant’s appeal against the judgement of the First Instance Court on the case of *the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister Eduard Aghajanyan v. the founder of 168.am website 168 Hours Ltd*., according to which the lawsuit was rejected, but the defendant appealed it only in terms of the confiscation of attorney’s fee (150 thousand AMD).

We should remind that the lawsuit, filed on July 10, 2020, claiming refutation of defamatory information and confiscation of a compensation, was caused by an article, entitled: “A Party in the Government-Owned Fermata Club” and published on the website on June 7.[[162]](#footnote-162) The article narrated that the club, owned by Eduard Aghajanyan, violated the Commandant’s decisions by organizing a night-club style party with the participation of several dozen people in a closed space, such as his club, which is an act prohibited during the state of emergency caused by COVID-19. Eduard Aghajanyan sent a refutation text to the editorial office, but the latter did not publish it due to disagreement with the presented arguments. (For details see CPFE’s reports for 2020-2023, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The judgement of the Court of Appeal was not appealed, and entered into force.

 **On September 11, during the rally of supporters of the Government candidate Tigran Avinyan, organized within the framework of Yerevan Council of the Elders election campaign, Diana Martirosyan, one of his supporters, attacked Ani Gevorgyan, the editor of the NewDay.am website, insulting and threatening her. "...Rejoice that I did not throw you under my feet".**[[163]](#footnote-163) In reply to the question: Who are you?, she stated: "I'm the one who'll pull out your eyeballs. Have you got a problem? I promised that I would come closer and I say, "Pray, you did not end up under my feet."

By the way, this is the same citizen who threatened Aravot.am reporter Hripsime Jebejian on the Internet, for which the latter filed a lawsuit against her. After this incident, Ani Gevorgyan also filed a lawsuit, which will be discussed in the last section of the report.

 **On September 18,** the Hetq.am website of Investigative Journalists was subjected to a DDoS attack, which caused access problems. Later, specialists rectified the situation.

**On September 27,** the Head of the Kentron administrative district Samvel Ghukasyan filed a lawsuit against Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Board LLC with the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, demanding a public apology, publication of the court judgement, an obligation to refute the defamatory information, as well as confiscation of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by articles in Zhoghovurd newspaper and Armlur.am website owned by the LLC entitled: "PHOTO. The Head of the Kentron District, Casting the Problems Aside, Joined the Civil Contract Campaign with His Staff"[[164]](#footnote-164) and "The Head of the Kentron District and Its Residents. Who Invaded Abovyan 22? Zhoghovurd"[[165]](#footnote-165) published on August 26 and September 9, respectively. The claim was accepted for proceedings on October 6. A court hearing was scheduled for January 12, 2024.

 **On October 13,** at the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected Mayor of Yerevan, Tigran Avinyan, the entry of journalists was prohibited. The municipality explained this restriction by the lack of space, offering journalists to use the official broadcast. On this occasion, the journalistic organizations issued a statement in which they presented their critical attitude to that decision.[[166]](#footnote-166)

 **On October 10,** "Yerevan State University Foundation" filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Oragir Media LLC, demanding public refutation of factual information considered defamatory, and confiscation of a compensation for defamation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on September 5 on the Oragir.news website owned by the LLC, entitled: "STEM. Another Disgrace from YSU".[[167]](#footnote-167) Accordingly, the program of the science-mathematics oriented school opened under YSU has failed, because it has only 36 students, and the allocated money was not spent purposefully. On October 24, the lawsuit was returned due to document inaccuracies, on November 30, it was filed again, and on December 12, it was accepted for proceedings.

**On October 17,** Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Oragir Media LLC to publicly refute the information considered defamatory and to pay a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article, entitled: "Trojan Horse in Syunik. Azerbaijanis have been Appointed to Positions in ZCMC. Employee" published on the Oragir.news website owned by the LLC on September 2. The article particularly states: "There are 5-6 people. They were brought down from Baku in May and they are dismantling the structures and so on. I don't know under whose orders they came, but they are demolishing all the structures."[[168]](#footnote-168) On October 31, the lawsuit was returned due to document inaccuracies, on November 15, it was filed again, and on the 27th, it was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing has not been scheduled.

**On October 20,** Photolur LLC (news agency) filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Skizb Media Kentron LLC, the founder of the 1in.am news website, demanding to stop using copyright objects. The lawsuit was caused by the illegal use of the agency's authorial photos in 1in.am. The claim was accepted for proceedings on November 1.

**On October 26,** Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against the president of the Hayeli club, journalist Anzhela Tovmasyan, demanding an apology for the insult and payment of a compensation.

The lawsuit was caused by Anzhela Tovmasyan's swearing posted under the NA Speaker's address on the Tert.am website on September 21, entitled: "We must Finally Inherit a Free, Independent and Peaceful Armenia to Our Children. Alen Simonyan".[[169]](#footnote-169)
 On November 8, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was held on December 11. The next one was scheduled for February 27, 2024.

**On October 30,** in the National Assembly, the first session of discussions of the 2024 state budget draft were held, in which Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also participated. However, journalists were forbidden to enter that hall. The staff of the Parliament explained this by the fact that there was no place in the hall, but there had been no such ban before, even if there had been no place to sit.

**On November 20**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Olymp Construction Ltd. v. Hetq Ltd. (the founder of Hetq.am website)*, demanding refutation of defamatory information and a compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 29, 2020 and was caused by an article, entitled: “The Construction Company Developing a New Building Refuses to Hand Over the Pumping Station to the Water Committee: Residents are Complaining” and published on Hetq.amwebsite*.*[[170]](#footnote-170) Although the author of the article incorporated a comment from the representative of the development company, too, the plaintiff did not agree to the residents’ complaint.
 The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for February 14, 2024.

**On November 22,** an Azerbaijani hacker attack was registered on the 7or.am news website, as a result of which the platform's activity was temporarily disrupted and restored after the rehabilitation work conducted by the specialists.

**On December 10,** there was an alarm on Facebook regarding the threat and hate speech directed at journalist Marut Vanyan. Earlier on his Facebook page, the journalist referred to the miserable condition of the streets of Hrazdan city, published photos and asked a rhetorical question. "Does this city have a mayor..." After a short time, the Mayor's "defenders" cursed and threatened the journalist under the post, targeting him as an Artsakh citizen. In order to avoid the torrent of hate speech, Marut Vanyan had to close his Facebook page. On this occasion, journalistic organizations issued a condemning statement.[[171]](#footnote-171) In response to the inquiry of the CPFE. the RA Prosecutor's Office said that there were no criminal proceedings regarding the statement.

 **On December 15,** the editorial office of Zhoghovurd newspaper informed in a letter from the staff of the National Assembly that Knar Manukyan, accredited in the Parliament, was given a warning by that media outlet, and since it was the second time during the given year, the journalist was deprived of accreditation. This time, the dissatisfaction of the NA staff was caused by the fact that the journalist carried out her activities in an officially prohibited area. In addition, according to the staff's letter, Knar Manukyan "carried out professional activities without the consent of the MP, continued to harass and raise defamatory and insulting questions." The journalistic organizations issued a statement demanding the NA leadership to revise the legislative provisions regarding the accreditation of journalists and the related procedures in the NA, making them in line with international norms.[[172]](#footnote-172)

**On December 15,** MP Artur Hovhannisyan, secretary of the NA Civil Contract faction, announced from the NA podium that some media outlets, in particular, Zhoghovurd, Hraparak newspapers, Asekose.am and others publish articles for money.[[173]](#footnote-173)

 **On December 14,** during the press conference held after the conference organized by EcoLur NGO, one of the participants, environmentalist-activist Ani Khachatryan, showed an unfriendly attitude towards Hraparak newspaper journalist Lia Sargsyan, in particular, she responded to her questions: "These are stupid questions." Ashot Ohanyan, a representative of the Environment and Health NGO, began to teach journalists a lesson, accusing them of carrying out a political order and considering that they are wasting their time with them.

 **On December 20,** the "Armenian National Agrarian University" Foundation filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Hraparak Daily LLC, demanding to oblige it to publicly refute the defamatory information and to confiscate a compensation sum. The lawsuit was caused by the article entitled: "Electoral Chaos in the Agrarian University" published on November 22 in Hraparak newspaper and on the eponymous website[[174]](#footnote-174), where referring to the Rector's elections to be held at the University, the newspaper specifically wrote that a forgery was committed. "...actually, a candidate for the post of Rector was not nominated, yesterday the documents of Vice-Rector Hrachik Zakoyan, a close friend of the Acting Rector Vardan Urutyan, were submitted with a back date." The plaintiff considers this information as defamation. As of the end of the year, the claim has not been accepted for proceedings.

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

*In 2023, the CPFE recorded* ***134*** *facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. In only* ***17*** *cases a lawsuit was filed with the court, demanding provision of official information. The violations 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,** Infocom.am news website 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. On December 13, the Head of the Information Department of the Municipality informed that Suren Grigoryan was in poor health and needed 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 provide the information requested by Factor.am journalist Arpi Hakobyan about tax evasion of the singers. The journalist submitted the inquiry on December 28, 2022. The agency only informed the journalist that on the day after that inquiry, Head of the SRC gave an exclusive interview, and they have nothing else to add. Meanwhile, the interview did not cover the information of interest to the journalist.

**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 of the agency did not deal with the issue after many reminders.

 **On January 16,** the journalist of Zhoghovurd Daily Christine Musheghyan sent a written inquiry to 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 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. 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).[[175]](#footnote-175)

 **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 information 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,** Pastinfo.am 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 in the official documentation of the Ministry by the order of Minister Suren Papikyan. Inquiries were not answered.

**On January 19,** the Infocom.am news website, through a written inquiry, asked the Ministry of Defense what types of heating fuel were allocated to the military units of the Armed Forces 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 editorial office once again addressed the Ministry, asking them to give comprehensive answers to the questions. The Ministry of Defense responded to the inquiry, dated 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 website inquiries addressed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs also remained unanswered.
 One of the two inquiries **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,** Infocom.am news website 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 disposition on it? Are they going to submit a corresponding draft decision? If yes, when? If not, what is the reason? Only the ruling Civil Contract faction did not provide information with the reasoning that the Law "On Freedom of Information" applies to the executive power, but does not apply to the MPs, which is a misinterpretation of the law and does not correspond to the reality.

 **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 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 General Prosecutor's Office 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 in 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. The NGO asked the Ministry 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. A court hearing was held on December 18, and on the 27th, the lawsuit was upheld by the court judgement. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was obliged to provide the complete information requested by the NGO. In addition, it was decided to confiscate 10,000 AMD from the Republic of Armenia in favor of the plaintiff as the amount of the state duty paid in advance.

 **On March 1,** the Union of Informed Citizens filed **another lawsuit**, 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 August 8, a trial was held on that case. The next court hearing was scheduled for February 22, 2024.

 **On the same day,** the Union of Informed Citizens filed another lawsuit against the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 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 file a lawsuit with the mentioned claim. On March 21, a lawsuit was filed again, on the 28th, it was rejected, and on April 17, the case was handed over to the court archives.

  **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 term prescribed by the law, which was 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,** Infocom.am news website 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 their 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,** Infocom.am news website 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, although its answer was being expected in January.

 **On March 22,** Infocom.am news website 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, community 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 in the Administrative Court against the Ministry of Internal Affairs, demanding to oblige to respond to the inquiry of the plaintiff 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. A court hearing on the case was held on August 8, and on December 5, the case was terminated by the court decision, because the claim became pointless due to the presence of certain circumstances: namely, it was found that the inquiry was answered.

In another lawsuit filed **on March 22,** the NGO demanded that the Ministry of Internal Affairs be obliged to answer the inquiry dated February 17 about the purpose of installing flashing red and blue beacons on some military police vehicles. On March 29, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. The trial was scheduled for May 23, 2024.

**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 to provide exhaustive information to the inquiry of the plaintiff 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. Not receiving an answer, the NGO applied to the court on November 17, 2022.

The next court hearing was held on September 26, and on October 5 the lawsuit was rejected by the court judgement on the following grounds: part of the requested information is included in the data bank of foreigners, and the plaintiff does not have the right to use it, and part of it contains data about an individual's personal life, the provision of which is subject to refusal in accordance with Article 8, Part 1, Clause 2 of the RA Law "On Freedom of Information".

**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 in Yerevan 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.

**On April 4,** Infocom.am news website, not receiving a response to the written inquiry sent to Yerevan Municipality on March 28 within the 5-day period established by law, called the Information Department of the Municipality. They claimed not to have received the inquiry. The website was asking to clarify the legal grounds supporting the decision for qualifying Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan as the one to chair procedural consultations, if the relevant decision of the Mayor stipulates that they shall be conducted by the Mayor, and in the latter's absence, by the Mayor’s first deputy. On the same day, April 4, the inquiry was filed for the second time. On April 10, the department sent a letter stating that the information will be provided within a 30-day period, as defined by law. The Municipality finally responded to the inquiry on May 5, after the maximum period provided for by law had expired, which the website considered an unreasonable delay.

 **On April 4**, the correspondent of Radio Liberty Naira Bulghadaryan posted a Facebook status, mentioning that it was impossible to get information from the Ministry of Economy on the ban on the export of dairy products to Russia. According to the journalist, the press secretary promised to talk to the Deputy Minister and organize an interview a week ago, but did not take any measures.

 **On May 2**, the reporter of Aravot.am news website Hripsime Jebejian sent an inquiry to the Office of the RA Prime Minister, requesting to provide information on the weapons, awarded after the 2018 revolution. The answer was delayed and was received on May 30.

On the same day, the journalist sent an inquiry of the same contents to the Minister of Defense. The reply, which contained a rejection, was received late, on June 6. In this case, the Ministry considered the same information to be a state secret.

 **On May 5**, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO (the founder of the Fip.am website) applied to the General Prosecutor's Office, requesting information on how many cases of murder committed in 2021 and 2022 were disclosed and were sent to court with an indictment.

**On the same day,** the NGO wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs, asking how the Ministry planned to ensure the uniformity of the appearance (color) of patrol police cars in Yerevan and the marzes.

Both inquiries remained unanswered.

 **On May 10**, Narine Kirakosyan, an Eco Media Network journalist, warned on Facebook that the Ministry of Environment blocked her on social networks in an attempt to silence her. Earlier, the journalist asked the agency questions about the status of the Shikahogh reserve, the programs implemented in the protected areas of the Republic of Armenia, all of which received incomplete answers.[[176]](#footnote-176)

**On May 11,** the Administrative Court ruled to grant the claim on the case of the *Union of Informed Citizens NGO (the founder of the Fip.am website) v. the RA Police,* demanding to oblige the defendant to provide exhaustive information.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 6, 2022, since the agency had not responded to the inquiry on May 27. The website had asked to provide the names, surnames of the chiefs and deputy chiefs as well as working phone numbers of all regional police departments, divisions and units.

On June 26, the defendant filed an appeal against the judgement, which was accepted for proceedings on August 7. A court hearing was scheduled for February 9, 2024.

**On May 11,** the Administrative Court of Appeal examined the appeal of the defendant against the judgment of the First Instance Court on the case of *Transparency International Anticorruption Center NGO*, *Law Development and Protection Foundation and Civilitas Foundation (the founder of Civilnet.am news website) v. Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body of the Republic of Armenia.* That judgment had granted the claim in part.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on August 23, 2021, claiming to obligate to provide the information and documents requested on July 12 of the same year. The inquiry and the requested data had to do with the results of an inspection in the mining sector in a specific period. The court ruled to obligate the defendant to provide the requested information.

On June 1, the appeal was rejected, and the judgment of the First Instance Court was left unchanged. **On July 19,** the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation, appealing the decision of the Court of Appeal. On September 27, the Court of Cassation returned the appeal due to document inaccuracies. It was refiled on November 2. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On May 11**, Infocom.am news website asked the General Prosecutor's Office, to say whether the decision of the Criminal Court of Appeal on the case of Restart initiative members was appealed or not. Since the verbal question received an unclear answer, a written inquiry was sent on May 15. The Prosecutor's Office responded to this clearly, however, only on May 24, which is a violation of the 5-day period established by the RA Law On Freedom of Information.

 **Since May 11**, the Corruption Prevention Commission, failing to send replies to the inquiries Infocom.am website reporter, without mutual consent started to publish them in the News section of the official website of the Commission. The latter justified this practice with their subjective evaluations of the operation of the website.[[177]](#footnote-177) Taking into account the above stated, the editorial office applied to the Information Disputes Council to get an expert evaluation of the above-described practice and the issues it caused for journalists. In response to the application, on June 5, the Information Disputes Council announced that the actions of the Commission contradicted the national and international norms of freedom of information and protection of personal data.[[178]](#footnote-178) The editorial office sent the independent expert opinion to the Corruption Prevention Commission, and the latter terminated this practice thereafter. Later, the approach of the Corruption Prevention Commission was repeated.

Hence, **On August 24,** the journalist of the Infocom.am website Lusine Manvelyan sent an inquiry to the Corruption Prevention Commission, asking to provide the 2022 list of officials who are obliged to submit an annual declaration, according to individual structures. The inquiry was left unanswered. **On September 1**, the journalist repeated the question, and on September 7 she received an answer, a link to the CPC website, where they published both the inquiry and the answer, noting that given the "repeated behavior" of another journalist on the website, that is, the facts presented are reproduced by distorting them, misleading the reader, creating an illusion about the impartiality and accuracy of the reported information, the inquiries received from the same news site and its journalists are answered exclusively in public."

According to the CPFE, this behavior is an ongoing violation of freedom of information.

**On May 15**, Lilit Hovhannisyan, the editor of Media Kentron of the Public Journalism Club, wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vahe Ghazaryan, asking him to organize a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Arpi Sargsyan, in order to include the agency’s commentary on the incidents of torture at police stations and remarks on the police recruitment policy, in general, in a film under production. Both the letter and the subsequent calls remained unanswered.

**On May 16,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of Fip.am fact-checking platform, filed a lawsuit in the RA Administrative Court against the RA Investigative Committee, demanding to oblige the Committee to provide a comprehensive answer to the February 17 inquiry. The question read as follows: “Have criminal proceedings been instituted after the 44-day war regarding the theft of electric circuits, microprocessors and other parts from the missiles in the arsenal of the RA Armed Forces (if so, please provide some details of the relevant cases)?” The Investigative Committee promised to call back to respond to the inquiry, but no information was provided.

The claim was returned twice on the grounds that no evidence was presented as to the date of sending the inquiry to the defendant.

 **On July 14,** Fip.am filed a new lawsuit on this occasion, which was returned again on July 24 in order to eliminate the inaccuracies, but was not filed in the court again.

**On May 22**, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of Fip.am fact-checking platform, filed a lawsuit in the RA Administrative Court against the staff of the RA Supreme Judicial Council, the Judicial Department and its head Nairi Galstyan, demanding to oblige them to provide exhaustive information to the inquiry made on March 14 and bring Nairi Galstyan to administrative liability.

The website made an inquiry, requesting details on the cases of desertion in a specific period of time. The inquiry remained unanswered.

On May 25, the lawsuit was returned on the grounds that the claims were related to different disputes, were not intertwined and were targeted at different defendants. On June 14, the amended lawsuit was filed again, this time only against the staff of the RA Supreme Judicial Council and the Judicial Department. It was accepted for proceedings on June 21. The preliminary court hearing was held on December 6. The next one was scheduled for June 12, 2024.

**On June 14**, the NGO filed a separate lawsuit against Nairi Galstyan, the Head of the Judicial Department, on the same occasion and with the demand to bring him to administrative liability on the grounds of Article 189.7 (Failure to provide information) of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Armenia. On June 21, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, and a court hearing was held on December 6. The next one was scheduled for June 12.

 **On May 29**, the editor of Asparez.am website Ani Mkrtchyan sent an inquiry to the Mayor of Gyumri community about control over illegal construction and initiation of administrative proceedings. The response to the inquiry was received with a delay, namely on June 19, and was incomplete

**On May 30**, PastInfo.am news website sent an inquiry to the Prosecutor General's Office of the RA on the cases of infection with Pegasus online spyware. On June 2, a response letter was received from the Prosecutor's Office stating that the inquiry was forwarded to the National Security Service, which did not provide a response.

 **On June 5**, Investigative Journalists NGO, the founder of Hetq.am online periodical, filed a lawsuit in the RA Administrative Court against the RA Ministry of High-Tech Industry (the RA Ministry of Finance is the 3rd party in the case). The NGO demanded to oblige the Ministry of High-Tech Industry to provide the information, requested on May 22, namely on the organizations which had signed contracts with the agency and specify the amount of state support provided to them. On June 13, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for January 24, 2024.

 **On June 6,** Sputnik Armenia news website sent an inquiry to the Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia, asking them to inform about what gift the President of Turkey Recep Erdoğan received from Nikol Pashinyan during his inauguration ceremony. The response that contained a rejection was received with a delay, namely on June 23, following many calls. The RA Prime Minister's Office informed that the data related to such measures were included in the list of procurements containing state secrets, therefore that information was not subject to publication.

**On June 9**, the editor of Asparez.am news website, Ani Mkrtchyan, sent an inquiry to Karen Harutyunyan, Director General of Electric Networks of Armenia CJSC, expecting to receive information about why the residents' request to straighten the bent electric pole was not met, whether it was dangerous, and if it was deemed safe, a professional opinion was requested. The Electric Networks of Armenia CJSC sent its reply by post on June 28, with a delay, yet the issue was not resolved between the inquiry and the response.

**On June 12**, the journalist of Forrights.am website Hasmik Hambardzumyan asked the Ministry of Defense for clarifications regarding the health problems of a former serviceman and the procedure of organizing his treatment. No answer was received, and the spokesman of the Ministry of Defense did not respond to the calls either.

 **On June 17**, Asparez.am news website sent an inquiry to the Mayor of Artashat community regarding the number of children studying in preschool institutions, the tuition fee amounts set, provided previliges, and other issues. The inquiry was replied in violation of the 5-day period, established by law, and was received on July 3.

 **On June 19**, Sputnik Armenia news website sent an inquiry to Yerevan Municipality, expecting answers to a number of questions regarding the modernization of the metro and the financing of construction works. No answer was received.

**On June 21**, Arpi Hakobyan, a journalist of Factor.am news website, sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Internal Affairs about smoking ban violations, as well as the methods of control used. There was no response from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

**On June 22**, the editor of Asparez.am news website, Ani Mkrtchyan, sent an inquiry to the Mayor of Gyumri community to find out the reasons for the postponement of the elections of directors in the CNCOs of the city and the planned competitions. The response to the inquiry was received with a delay on June 30 and was incomplete, since some questions were skipped.

**On June 22**, the reporter of Aravot.am news website Hripsime Jebejian sent an inquiry to National Assembly MP Tsovinar Vardanyan about the results of business trips to Russia, Greece, Spain and other countries. The inquiry remained unanswered.

 **On July 10,** the Freedom of Information Center (FOICA) applied to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, requesting to provide the copies of the documents related to the SDO-1175 decision on the compliance of the obligations with the RA Constitution stipulated in the contract signed between Eurasian Economic Union and Armenia on May 29, 2014. The application remained unanswered.

 **On July 11,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am fact-checking website, sent an inquiry to the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, requesting certain information related to the content of school programs, particularly certain concepts. A general answer was given to the survey, which the site considers incomplete.

 **On July 13,** Pastinfo.am news website sent a written inquiry to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia to find out what happened after the end of the 44-day war and after the announcement of November 9, 2020, on what grounds a number of border settlements of Syunik and Gegharkunik marzes, houses owned by people with property rights, as well as separate sections of the interstate road were handed over to Azerbaijan. Was the process of handing over the territories to Azerbaijan carried out with any map?[[179]](#footnote-179) The RA Ministry of Defense requested an additional period to answer the inquiry, then they refused to provide the information, with the reasoning that it is a state secret.

 **On July 13,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, requesting to provide data on the money spent for the purpose of organizing information campaigns in 2022 and 2023. The reply was provided with a delay, on July 26.

**On July 18,** the news website Oragir.News wrote that the editorial office sent an inquiry to the Office of the RA Prime Minister, asking them to provide information on when the Prime Minister and ministers will go on vacation. The Prime Minister's Office did not provide a clear answer.[[180]](#footnote-180)

**On July 20,** Infocom.am news website sent an inquiry to the Office of the RA Government, asking them to answer what steps have been taken to return the registered RA citizens temporarily living in Artsakh to Armenia.[[181]](#footnote-181) Not receiving an answer in essence, the website repeated the inquiry **on July 31**, but after waiting for 30 days, it did not receive a reply. **On September 1**, Infocom.am wrote that it also sent a written inquiry to the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Human Rights Defender's Office regarding the same issues.[[182]](#footnote-182) Although they sent a response from the RA MFA, it was incomplete and did not contain information on the issue. And the HRD staff presented the works they performed within the framework of the powers defined by the law.

 **On July 26,** the Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on the case of *the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, v. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, demanding to oblige the government agency to provide the information, requested on October 20, 2022. The inquiry referred to the expected support from the CSTO for the purpose of protecting the RA borders on September 13, 2022. The lawsuit was filed on November 14, 2022.

The next court hearing was scheduled for March 14, 2024.

 **On July 28,** Irakanum.am news website wrote that it sent an inquiry to Levon Hovhannisyan, the Acting Mayor of Yerevan, asking him to provide information on who owns the "Coffelav" mobile vendor, as well as the permission to trade in the area.[[183]](#footnote-183) The Municipality did not give any clear answer to these two questions.

 **On August 1,** Radio Liberty correspondent Karine Simonyan reported that Vanadzor Municipality did not respond to her written inquiry about how many employees it has, how many people got bonuses and whether the bonus also applied to the employees of the institutions under the Municipality.[[184]](#footnote-184)

The head of the legal department gave the following answer to the journalist under the signature of the Acting Mayor: "Go open the staff list, see how many employees we have. In the decision on awarding bonuses, it is written who we awarded." Meanwhile, the official was obliged to provide clear references.

 **On August 7,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting to provide information on whether there is any mechanism or procedure by which the Republic of Armenia can recognize the legal act of another state or union in its territory (for example, to recognize sanctions (acts on sanctions) imposed by the US or the EU on Russia enforceable in the RA). The response was provided with a delay, on September 13.

 **On August 9,** the journalist of the Infocom.am website, Lusine Manvelyan, sent an inquiry to the office of the Civil Contract Party, asking to provide the list of donations collected during the fundraising evening organized ahead of the Council of the Elders elections, according to the names of the donors. On August 15, they promised to answer the question in a reply letter, without specifying particular dates. On August 18, the editorial office asked to send a proper answer, indicating a clear deadline for providing the requested information. No answer was received.

The journalist presented the problem to the Freedom of Information Center, and **2 more times, on August 23 and September 11,** FOICA sent the same inquiry. In both cases, no response was received, and on December 4, FOICA filed a lawsuit against the Civil Contract Party, demanding to oblige them to provide information. The claim was accepted for proceedings on December 14. The publication of the judicial act was scheduled for January 16, 2024.

 **On August 11,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Public TV Company CJSC, demanding an answer to the inquiry. The plaintiff did not receive the answers to the following questions: why an interview was taken from exactly one of the deputy mayors, Tigran Avinyan, before the Yerevan Council of the Elders elections, and whether Public TV Company will provide the opportunity for a similar interview to the mayoral candidates of other political forces.

According to the decision dated August 18, the lawsuit was forwarded to the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, because "CJSC is not an entity endowed with public authority, the plaintiff's claim is not open to the court." On August 25, the case was received in that court, and on September 8 it was returned due to existing document inaccuracies.

 On October 2, the Union of Informed Citizens filed a new lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction with the same claim, it was returned on October 12 due to document inaccuracies, and on the 26th, it was filed again. On November 7, the lawsuit was returned again and on December 1, it was refiled. By the end of the year, no other developments were recorded on the case.

 **On August 14,** the website Fip.am applied to the Civil Contract Party, asking to provide the list of physical and legal entities who donated money during the fundraising campaign they carried out on July 31. The information was not provided.

On October 2, the Union of Informed Citizens filed a lawsuit against the Civil Contract Party, demanding to receive that information. On October 10, the claim was returned due to document inaccuracies, on the 26th it was filed again, on November 6 it was returned, on the 15th it was filed again.

 **On August 14,** the online periodical Hetq.am wrote that it sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense to find out whether the SU-25 fighter aircrafts have been modernized or not. The Ministry of Defense refused to provide information, making reference to law regulations on state and military secrets.[[185]](#footnote-185) Meanwhile, the website writes that some information about the relevant contract has already been officially reported. "Actually, it turns out that announcing the signing of a contract for the modernization of SU-25s is not a military secret for the Ministry of Defense, instead it is a secret to announce whether the attack aircrafts have finally been upgraded or not... This way of working has already become common for the Ministry of Defense, when, in order to avoid answers to questions that cannot be considered a military or state secret, reference is made to those legal regulations."

 **On August 15,** the Factor.am news website applied to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Vahe Ghazaryan, asking whether the Deputy Mayor of Yerevan Tigran Avinyan did not violate traffic rules by driving a GAZelle car serving as public transportation, and what steps the police has taken in that direction.[[186]](#footnote-186) There was no response from the agency. The editorial office has repeatedly inquired about the fate of the request and always received the same answer: "the response is in progress". And later it was found out that Avinyan was fined. Thus, the media was deprived of the opportunity to receive and publish exclusive information.

 **On August 23,** the news website Infocom.am sent inquiries to RA universities to find out what percentage of lecturers are engaged in research along with teaching.[[187]](#footnote-187) First, it has become known that the universities either do not have the necessary data, or they have it, but they do not want to provide it, or they do not have it and they do not want to get it. Therefore, the website decided to talk to the officals of the individual universities. The representatives of National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia and Russian-Armenian University refused to be interviewed.

 **On August 25,** Fip.am website sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the violations of the driver of the vehicle belonging to the police by the surveillance center of the electronic video recording systems of the police. The agency informed that it would provide an answer within 30 days, but it did not do so.

 **On August 28,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the SRC, requesting to provide data on how many washing machines were imported to the RA in 2022 and 2023, and how many were exported during the same period. The answer was incomplete.

**On August 30,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the staff of the RA Supreme Judicial Council, the Judicial Department and the General Secretary of the RA Ministry of Defense, Hamlet Batikyan, with the demand to bring Hamlet Batikyan to administrative liability under Article 189.7 of the RA Code on Administrative Offenses. The lawsuit was triggered by the fact that the RA Ministry of Defense did not provide the information about how many cases were investigated in court from September 27 to December 31, 2020 and from January 1 to April 3, 2023, under the article of desertion, how many lawsuits were upheld and how many were rejected.

On September 6, the lawsuit was returned, as no claim was filed to the judicial department of the Supreme Judicial Council staff, which was named as the defendant. On September 15, the lawsuit was filed again, but against one defendant, Hamlet Batikyan, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defense. The case was accepted for proceedings on September 22.

A court hearing was scheduled for March 6, 2024.

**On August 30,** the same website filed another lawsuit against the Ministry of Defense, with the demand to oblige it to give an exhaustive response to the inquiry. This time, the agency did not provide information on how much money the Republic of Armenia spent on acquiring weapons in 2008-2022.

The claim was accepted for proceedings on September 7. A court hearing was scheduled for January 16, 2024.

  **On August 31,** the news website Oragir.News wrote that it sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to find out whether they fined the Deputy Mayor Tigran Avinyan for driving the last GAZelle of public transport without the appropriate driver's license class.[[188]](#footnote-188) "In this case, by your requested information... the privacy of an individual's personal life will be violated, therefore the requested information is not subject to provision," the response of the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated.

"On the one hand, the police is fighting against unlawfulness, on the other hand, by not publicizing the information about imposing a fine on the violation of a politician, it encourages this phenomenon," the website commented.

 **On September 5,** the Freedom of Information Center applied to the Ministry of Economy, requesting to provide additional data on the export of dual purpose goods. The answer was incomplete.

 **On September 5,** the Lurer.com news website sent an inquiry to the Urban Development, Technical and Fire Safety Inspectorate regarding the activities of the Charlotte Cabaret night club located on Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan.[[189]](#footnote-189) They responded to the inquiry with a delay, on September 14, and only after the reminder letter. However, the answer was incomplete. The website sent another inquiry **on September 15**, to which the inspectorate did not respond at all.

 **On September 5,** Hetq.am online periodical wrote that it sent a written inquiry to Armen Melikbekyan, the president of the Football Federation of Armenia, and asked for information about the bids of the participants in the Abovyan stadium construction tender, and the procedure for selecting the winner.[[190]](#footnote-190) They also asked to give an opportunity to get acquainted with the tender documents. However, the editorial office did not receive an answer. Attempts to get information from Hayk Karapetyan, Head of the FFA Public Relations and Press Unit, were also unsuccessful; Armen Melikbekyan did not answer the calls either.

 **On September 7,** Sputnik Armenia news website wrote that a month ago, it sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia, asking them to answer whether after September 2022 Azerbaijan made any advances in the direction of Jermuk, if it deployed new positions in that area, and how many square kilometers of territory are under Baku's control.[[191]](#footnote-191) The Ministry of Defense answered only the first question.

 **On September 20,** the Administrative Court of Appeal held a trial on the appeal filed by the plaintiff against the judgement of the First Instance Court on the case of *the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, v. the RA Prime Minister's Office*, by which the claim was rejected.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 27, 2021, demanding to oblige to provide the full list of questions and the media and organizations that authored them for the Prime Minister's Facebook press conference held on November 23, 2021, sent to the email address press@gov.am.
 On October 12, the Court of Appeal ruled to uphold the appeal partially, to fully overturn the judgement of the First Instance Court and to terminate the proceedings of the administrative case in its entirety, because there was a basis for rejecting the acceptance of the claim defined by Article 80, Part 1, Clause 4 of the Administrative Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia, that is, a claim had been filed by a person who clearly did not have the right to do so. The decision entered into legal force.

 **On October 2,** the Armlur.am news site reported that on August 3, it wrote to the office of the Civil Contract Party, asking for information about the donors of the CC Party fundraiser held on July 31 at the Dvin restaurant complex.[[192]](#footnote-192) After all the reminders, the inquiry remained unanswered.

**On October 6,** the Asparez.am website wrote that it sent an inquiry to Gyumri community chief Vardges Samsonyan, asking him to inform which community owned museums had safety rules, whether money was allocated to the museums to ensure these rules, etc..[[193]](#footnote-193) It took about 1.5 months from Gyumri Municipality to answer these questions. As a result, the response to the inquiry was incomplete and very generic.

**On October 14,** the same website wrote that it sent an inquiry to Tegh Municipality of Syunik Marz about the budgets and needs of catering companies in kindergartens, community kindergartens, and the number of children who do not attend these institutions.[[194]](#footnote-194) No answer was received.

In relation to the same questions, the responses from **Yeghegnadzor**[[195]](#footnote-195) and **Ijevan**[[196]](#footnote-196) communities were incomplete.

 **On October 13,** Pastinfo news website, recalling the statement of the former Minister of Defense Arshak Karapetyan that he had reliable information that the Head of the Government, fearing for his seat, asked Azerbaijanis to arrest Ruben Vardanyan and not allow him to come to Armenia, wrote that in this regard, he sent an inquiry to the RA Prosecutor's Office.[[197]](#footnote-197) The website wanted to find out whether criminal proceedings had been initiated on the case of Pashinyan's apparent state treasonous actions or not. Initially, the Prosecutor's Office did not respond to the verbal inquiry, asking to send it in writing, but the written inquiry was also not answered.

 **On October 16,** Infocom.am news website applied to the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Armenia, requesting to provide the agreement on the cooperation and mutual assistance between the Prosecutor's Offices of the NKR and the RA in 2008, which is no longer available on the official website of the Artsakh Prosecutor's Office. The Prosecutor's Office left the inquiry unanswered within the 5-day period defined by the law, and on November 9, sent a letter that essentially did not contain the answer to the inquiry.

The media also applied to **the RA police,** requesting to provide information on what steps were being taken to find the detainees and convicts who were displaced from Artsakh and were at liberty in the RA. The police offered to apply to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, noting that the provision of the required information is beyond the scope of their powers. Meanwhile, a few days later, RA Police Chief Vahe Ghazaryan published answers to a number of questions related to the topic in the National Assembly in response to the questions of the MPs.[[198]](#footnote-198)

**On October 16,** the media outlet requested the Ministry of Economy with a written inquiry to provide a list of factories engaged in the production of grape-based alcoholic beverages in Armenia, as well as information related to the decline in grape prices and the creation and operation of the Grape Registry. A response was received with a delay, after numerous phone call reminders on October 26.

**On November 20,** the website tried to find out how many economic operators benefited from the loan interest subsidy program provided by the Government for the purpose of procurement of agricultural raw materials, with an inquiry addressed to the same agency. This time, too, the response to the inquiry was received later than the set dates, on December 1.

**On October 19,** the Sputnik Armenia news site asked the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan whether his family members traveled to Strasbourg with state funds and how much the Government delegation's visit cost. There was no response to the inquiry.

**On November 8,** the website sent an inquiry to the RA President's Office, requesting information on how many people were granted citizenship and how many were pardoned in 2021-23. No answer was received.

**On November 16,** the inquiry of the same website sent to the Minister of Defense Suren Papikyan referred to the participation of the RA Armed Forces in the CSTO military exercises and the lost positions of the RA Armed Forces in the area of Black Lake. The answer was given with a delay, on December 27.

**On November 1,** the Factor.am news website sent a written inquiry to the Ministry of Defense to find out how many modular army barracks of Italian production had been purchased, whether they had already been installed and were in operation.[[199]](#footnote-199) 6 days after receiving the inquiry, the Ministry responded that there is a need for additional study to provide the information, and more than a month later, on December 20, they announced that the requested information was not subject to publication and could not be provided, citing the fact that it was confidential. In other words, the Ministry of Defense needed more than a month to find out that the requested information was a state and service secret.

**On November 7,** 168.am news website sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia to find out whether the agency tried to find common ground with those organizations that operate in the logic of the "Nation-Army" idea, such as VOMA. No response was received.[[200]](#footnote-200)

**On November 28,** the news website Hayastan.news sent a written inquiry to the RA Government regarding the formation of the Foreign Intelligence Service, its structure, and existing staff positions[[201]](#footnote-201). The response was given with a delay, on December 20, and was incomplete.

**On December 4,** Pastinfo news website sent a written inquiry to the Anti-Corruption Committee regarding the criminal case related to former officials Mher Sedrakyan and Gagik Beglaryan.[[202]](#footnote-202) As a result of the media outlet's inquiries, in the end, a short answer was received, which was incomplete: there was no mention of the course or fate of the criminal case.

**On December 5,** Hetq.am online periodical wrote that in Vagharshapat Municipality, questions about construction permits and developers are a sensitive subject. The website has been trying to get information from the municipality for about a month about the buildings being built for commercial purposes. Verbal questions were avoided, and the deadline for providing answers to written inquiries was being tried to be extended as much as possible. "Furthermore, during this time, there was a leak from the municipality regarding our inquiry, and the developers tried to prevent the publication of the article. Probably, it is for this purpose that the municipality provided the answers late, hoping that they will come to a "consensus", the website wrote.[[203]](#footnote-203)

 **On December 6,** the Armenpress news agency applied to the Ministry of Environment with an inquiry to provide information about the legislative amendments that will come into force on January 1, 2024, and about the launching programs. There was no response from the government agency.

**On December 15,** Armlur.am news website wrote that the Football Federation of Armenia left unanswered its written inquiry as to whether MP Sisak Gabrielyan traveled to Zagreb with the funds of the FFA to participate in the Croatia-Armenia football match.[[204]](#footnote-204)

 **The following inquiries of the Fip.am fact-checking platform remained unanswered:**

The inquiry sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs **on November 27,** regarding the number and outcome of car collisions in Yerevan during 2018-2023. The inquiry addressed to the same agency **on December 13,** with which the website tried to find out when the police contract with the towing service providers in Yerevan ended, and at what stage was the signing of a new contract or the procedure for a new purchase.

**On the same day,** another inquiry was addressed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs about Fortuner car with license plate number 155 CO 61. In particular, who paid for the transport of the vehicle to Yerevan by tow truck? If the police, then a photocopy of the relevant handover-acceptance act was requested.

The inquiry sent **on December 14,** by which the website requested information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, about the records made due to violations of the amount of light transmittance of the windows of vehicles or the order of driving with the front windshield covered with a film.

Another inquiry sent **on the same day** to the Anti-Corruption Committee, in which the website wanted to know whether the criminal case, in which the Head of the Goris Division of the Syunik Regional Department of Police was arrested, was initiated based on the report of another law enforcement agency, or whether it was fully disclosed by the Anti-Corruption Committee employees.

The inquiry sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs **on December 28** regarding the bodies which are allocated special cheques marked "Not subject to inspection".

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

 **On January 5,** Armenian Second Television Channel LLC filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Commission on TV and Radio, with the demand to recognize the LLC as the winner in the licensing tender for the use of the capital broadcasting slot in the public multiplex and oblige it to adopt a decision on granting the license.

After being returned several times due to inaccuracies, on September 6, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was scheduled for February 13, 2024.

 **On January 12,** the Administrative Court ruled to terminate the case according to the lawsuit filed on August 6, 2021 by the Armenian Second Television Channel LLC against Commission on TV and Radio, demanding to recognize the LLC as the winner in the licensing tender for the use of the capital broadcasting slot in the public multiplex and obligate it to make a decision on granting a license.

On March 1, the plaintiff filed an appeal against the termination decision to the Court of Appeal, which was accepted for proceedings on June 9. A court hearing was scheduled for February 9, 2024.

**On February 6,** Armenian Second Television Channel LLC filed another lawsuit against the Commission on TV and Radio, demanding to recognize the company as the winner in the licensing tender 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 held on October 25. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On February 9,** a regular court hearing was held on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. Commission on TV and Radio*, demanding to recognize the absence of the legal relationship to impose a fine of four hundred times the minimum wage specified in Article 57, Part 22 of the Law "On Audiovisual Media" on the LLC, mentioned in the drawn up but not signed Decision No. 85-A of the Commission on TV and Radio dated June 13, 2023. The lawsuit was filed on August 2, 2022.

 On October 16, 2023, the lawsuit was upheld, on November 10, the defendant filed an appeal, which was returned on the 28th, on December 8, it was filed again and on the 18th, it was accepted for the proceedings. The publication of the judicial act was scheduled for June 11, 2024.

**On February 21,** the Administrative Court held a regular 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 legal relationship 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 proceeds and the formation opening to the state regulatory body.

According to the judgment dated March 15, the lawsuit was rejected. On April 20, the plaintiff filed an appeal, which was accepted for proceedings on May 11. Trial was scheduled for April 25, 2024.

**On July 28,** Armenian Second TV Channel LLC filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the RA Compulsory Enforcement Service to recognize the lack of legal relationship to terminate the enforcement proceedings No. 09483309, as a result demanding to oblige the RA Commission on Television and Radio to prohibit the implementation of the tender for filling one slot of the republican broadcast in the public multiplex. On August 7, the lawsuit was returned to eliminate the inaccuracies, on the 14th, the plaintiff appealed this judgement to the Court of Appeal, and on September 25, the latter rejected the appeal. On November 1, a new claim was filed, which was accepted for proceedings on the 9th. The plaintff's motion to suspend the execution of the administrative act was rejected.

**On September 28,** the Administrative Court continued the trial on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC* *v. the Commission on TV and Radio*, demanding to recognize the absence of the legal relationship to impose an administrative penalty on the TV company in connection with the advertisement of “Shiraz Brandy” of Proshyan Brandy Company and to oblige the plaintiff to return the sum of the penalty in the amount of 200,000 AMD paid in advance. The lawsuit was filed on February 18, 2022. The lawsuit was upheld by the judgment made on October 18, 2023. The defendant applied to the Court of Appeal on November 20, where the appeal was accepted for proceedings on December 13. A court hearing was scheduled for January 17, 2025.

**On January 16,** the defendanton the lawsuit, filed by Huasber CJSC (the founder of Yerkir Media TV company) in 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.

 On June 7, the defendant's appeal was returned, on the 22nd, it was filed again, on the 23rd, it was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for February 6, 2025.

 **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 to 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 claim was rejected, on the 22nd, the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal, where the appeal was upheld on April 6, and the decision of the Administrative Court to reject the acceptance of the claim was abolished. However, on July 28, the court again decided to return the claim, because in this case, the claim mentioned in the lawsuit was not presented to the defendant in advance, or at least there was no proof of it. Nevertheless, Yerkir Media returned to the air on June 30, and the Commission on TV and Radio announced a licensing tender for the use of the Republican broadcasting slot in the public multiplex. The basis for this decision was the March 17 decision of the court on the case VD/2112/05/21 (H2 v. the Commission on TV and Radio), which rejected the claim, repealed the applied injunction (that is, prohibiting the Commission on TV and Radio to conduct a Republican broadcast slot tender in a public multiplex until the judicial act that essentially resolves this case enters into force).

 **On June 9,** the Administrative Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the plaintiff’s appeal against the judgement of the First Instance Court on the case of *Husaber CJSC v. the Commission on TV and Radio*, by which the lawsuit was rejected. This time the matter was the lawsuit filed on August 31, 2022, claiming to annul the decision of the Commission on TV and Radion dated August 17. By that decision the Commission imposed a fine on Husaber CJSC in the amount of 500-fold of the minimum wage for the violations of the Law “On Audiovisual Media” and the Law “On Advertising”. On December 21, 2022, the lawsuit was rejected, and the plaintiff applied to the Court of Appeal.

A court hearing on the case was also held on November 21. No other developments were recorded.

**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+ online 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 andMELTEX LLC applied to the Court of Cassation.

**On March 29,** at the meeting of the authorized representatives of the shareholders of Armenpress state CJSC, a decision was made to stop the printing of the Republic of Armenia daily newspaper and the Russian-language newspaper Respublika Armenia. The reason is the low level of cost efficiency. It was decided to stop printing these newspapers from June 1, 2023, and to direct the freed financial resources 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.

 **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.[[205]](#footnote-205)

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. The defendant filed an appeal in the Court of Appeal.

On August 4, the case was accepted for new proceedings, a hearing was held on September 14, the next one was scheduled for January 30, 2024.

**On April 11,** theCourt of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Shark LLC (the founder of the Channel 5 TV company) v. the National Assembly MP Khachatur Sukiasyan*, with claims to oblige him to publicly refute the information considered as defamatory and pay monetary compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on November 25, 2022, was caused by an incident that happened in the National Assembly on November 7. During a briefing with journalists, Khacahtur Sukiasyan shouted at Channel 5 TV reporter Arpi Sukiasyan, did not let her finish the question, then referred to the media's political patronage, linking it to the Second President of the Republic of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, and called the latter a thief, a bandit, who was engaged in looting: “You should join your owner and bring the billions back, you have no right to be called a media outlet...”.[[206]](#footnote-206)
 A hearing on the case was also held on July 6, and the claim was rejected by the judgement made on July 21. The court found that the plaintiff did not present any evidence that "Channel 5" television company belongs to him, that the statements made against the said television station are aimed at the specific plaintiff and defame his honor, dignity and business reputation.

On September 18, the plaintiff appealed to the Court of Appeal, where the case was accepted for proceedings on November 3. No other developments were recorded by the end of the year.

**On April 25**, the defendant on the case of *the same plaintiff v. MP Artur Hovhannisyan* again filed a cassation appeal against the decision of the Court of Appeal, by which the appeal was partially upheld, and Artur Hovhannisyan was obliged to apologize and pay 230,000 AMD, out of which 200,000 AMD as the attorney’s fee and 30,000 AMD as a state duty.

The lawsuit was filed on October 23, 2020, with demands to publicly apologize and pay monetary compensation for the expressions considered as insults. The lawsuit was caused by the statements, made by the MP on his Facebook page about the TV company on October 6. "What are you up to on Channel 5/5 TV? Even Ilyush and haqqin.az are softer in their use of language", then: "Perhaps our compatriots at Channel 5 were offended by my comparison with haqqin.az, but I am sure that they understood very well what I meant. And today there is absolutely no need to try to speak from the position of the victim and resort to provocations." On May 24, 2021, the court ruled to reject the claim. The plaintiff appealed the judgement in the Court of Appeal, where it was overturned and the case was sent for a new trial.

The cassation appeal brought by Artur Hovhannisyan against the decision of the Civil Court of Appeal was rejected. Acceptance of the second cassation appeal proceedings was also rejected on May 3.
 **On July 10,** a regular court hearing was held on the case of *the same plaintiff v. the NA MP Vladimir Vardanyan*, with demands to refute the information considered defamatory and to pay a compensation. We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on November 16, 2022, and was caused by the MP's words to the TV company during a briefing at the National Assembly on October 18: "The worse for your channel, the better." According to the media outlet, the MP targeted journalist Karine Mangasaryan.[[207]](#footnote-207)
A hearing on the case was also held on October 5, 2023. The next one was scheduled for January 26, 2024.

**On May 24,** Amnesty International human rights organization announced that at least 13 Armenian public figures, including journalists and human rights defenders, were targeted by Pegasus spyware. The spyware was used since November 2020 to December 2022. The phones of two journalists from Radio Liberty, namely Karlen Aslanyan and Astghik Bedevyan, were infected with Pegasus spyware. According to the source, the phones of two journalists were infected in the period of April-May 2021, when they were covering the consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the emerging domestic political crisis.

**On July 14,** 168 Hours Ltd. and journalist Gohar Svazyan filed a lawsuit against citizen Ashot Davinyan, demanding to apologize for the insult, refute the defamatory information, oblige him to publish the refutation text, as well as confiscate a compensation for the damage caused to his honor, dignity and business reputation.

The lawsuit was caused by the post made on Ashot Davinyan's Facebook page on June 10, addressed to the journalist and the media, in response to the article, entitled : "The Person at the Epicenter of the Sex Scandal has been Appointed General Coordinator-Manager of the College and Training School under Shirak State University" published on the 168.am website owned by the LLC on June 9.[[208]](#footnote-208)

On July 26, the court ruled to return the lawsuit due to insufficient payments made. The plaintiff challenged this decision in the Court of Appeal on August 7. On August 30, the appeal was rejected. On September 8, a new lawsuit was filed, which was accepted for proceedings on October 30. A hearing on the case was held on December 18. The next one was scheduled for January 29, 2024.

**On August 28,** the journalist of "Aravot.am" Hripsime Jebejian filed a lawsuit in the court of general jurisdiction of Tavush region against the citizen Khajak Tananyan, demanding to protect his honor and dignity from a publicly expressed insult. The cause of the lawsuit is the expressions addressed to the journalist on the web, which we submited to in the section "Pressure against mass media and journalists" of the report. On September 8, the case was accepted for proceedings, a court session was held on December 14, the next one was scheduled for February 1, 2024.
 **On August 31,** Hripsime Jebejian filed another lawsuit with the same demand and on the same occasion to the court of general jurisdiction of Kotayk region against citizen Diana Martirosyan. On September 15, this case was admitted to proceedings, on November 30, the burden of proof was distributed. A court hearing was scheduled for March 19, 2024.
 **On October 13**, Ani Gevorgyan, the editor of the "Newday.am" website, also filed a lawsuit against the same defendant, claiming to protect honor and dignity from publicly expressed insults and to confiscate 400,000 drams in compensation. The reason for the lawsuit is Diana Martirosyan's attack on Ani Gevorgyan on September 11, during the Yerevan Council of Elders election campaign, which was accompanied by insults and threats.
On October 24, the claim was returned to correct the deficiencies, it was submitted again on November 16, and on the 28th, it was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for February 20, 2024.

**On December 20,** the Commission on TV and Radio made a decision to suspend the license of Tospa Radio Company Editorial Board CJSC, which provides audio media service, for 30 days. The latter broadcasts the Sputnik Armenia radio program. In another decision, the Commission fined the company. The first decision is related to the program Friday with Tigran Keosayan, in which the author "allowed sarcastic expressions that humiliate the honor and dignity of the country and people", and the fine refers to the authorial program of former MP Arman Abovyan, entitled Abovyan Time. According to the Commission on TV and Radio, there are claims that "spread panic, and are not based on verified and reliable sources". According to the Commission, the company violated several provisions of the RA Law "On Audiovisual Media".

**On December 25,** Hraparak daily LLC filed a lawsuit against MP Artur Hovhannisyan with demands to publicly refute the defamatory information, as well as to pay compensation for the damage caused to the business reputation. The lawsuit was caused by the statement of the defendant from the NA podium on December 15, according to which some media, in particular, Zhoghovurd, Hraparak newspapers, and Asekose.am can publish an article for money. (We referred to the statement in the "Pressures" section of the report).

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

**On December 31,** the address of His Holiness Supreme Patriarch was not broadcast on the pre-New Year broadcast of the First Channel of the Public TV Company, contrary to the established tradition. The approach that the Public TV Company planned to use, i. e. to broadcast the address of the Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II in one of the most watched segments of the air, at the time set aside for official addresses, is difficult to consider justified and substantiated. As it became known later, the Mother See expressed its disagreement with that format.

According to independent experts, this is the result of the existing tension between the Government and the Armenian Apostolic Church, has a political pretext and elements of censorship related to the content of the Catholicos' address. 9 journalistic organizations issued a statement in this regard.[[209]](#footnote-209)

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1. [**https://khosq.am/2023/08/28/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-110/**](https://khosq.am/2023/08/28/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-110/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [**https://khosq.am/2023/07/12/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-107/**](https://khosq.am/2023/07/12/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-107/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [**https://khosq.am/2023/07/28/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-109/**](https://khosq.am/2023/07/28/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-109/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [**https://www.aravot.am/2023/07/30/1358607/**](https://www.aravot.am/2023/07/30/1358607/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [**https://khosq.am/2023/12/12/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-114/**](https://khosq.am/2023/12/12/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-114/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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175. [**https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/03/20/mn19h8bhf/1550356?fbclid=IwAR3Bf5LYC6-VwIBqffpwTjPqnMw6UHlvu1ZSuQL59QYOOXyXPtky3zHBjq8**](https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/03/20/mn19h8bhf/1550356?fbclid=IwAR3Bf5LYC6-VwIBqffpwTjPqnMw6UHlvu1ZSuQL59QYOOXyXPtky3zHBjq8) [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. [**https://www.facebook.com/narine.kirakosyan.5/posts/pfbid02T6h5E9634Uuz1uFc2ZXguYC7ppyXoP1cBrGMzU8To6LVUZvjseqyaZDjbo2JnxZYl**](https://www.facebook.com/narine.kirakosyan.5/posts/pfbid02T6h5E9634Uuz1uFc2ZXguYC7ppyXoP1cBrGMzU8To6LVUZvjseqyaZDjbo2JnxZYl) [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. [**https://www.facebook.com/100068554087037/posts/pfbid02EWCJ691yM9G4Xe9686c1jx2X98UFuATBuQ5LiLWRZkJ6nn1GuNfhN6DjXSV11ac7l/?mibextid=Nif5oz**](https://www.facebook.com/100068554087037/posts/pfbid02EWCJ691yM9G4Xe9686c1jx2X98UFuATBuQ5LiLWRZkJ6nn1GuNfhN6DjXSV11ac7l/?mibextid=Nif5oz) [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. [**http://www.foi.am/hy/IDC/item/2400/**](http://www.foi.am/hy/IDC/item/2400/) [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. [**https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/08/22/fwuf2usnp/1626843**](https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/08/22/fwuf2usnp/1626843) [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. [**https://oragir.news/hy/material/2023/07/18/85597**](https://oragir.news/hy/material/2023/07/18/85597) [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. [**https://infocom.am/hy/article/108935**](https://infocom.am/hy/article/108935) [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. [**https://infocom.am/hy/article/110344**](https://infocom.am/hy/article/110344) [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. [**https://www.iravunk.com/?p=261360&l=am**](https://www.iravunk.com/?p=261360&l=am) [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. [**https://www.facebook.com/karine.simonyan.9/posts/pfbid0JLoUpvABUmyu1ob1Ay2eNGgxsBKyMBuuf9TdHJu4H5GpeewrqyXzuZ699niPUnGfl**](https://www.facebook.com/karine.simonyan.9/posts/pfbid0JLoUpvABUmyu1ob1Ay2eNGgxsBKyMBuuf9TdHJu4H5GpeewrqyXzuZ699niPUnGfl) [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/159007**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/159007) [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. [**https://factor.am/699409.html?fbclid=IwAR0HbUwHcwZVI-yMkzzLl35\_ex3cCdNgzDasrB2InsHlyzDcxG-aEkz436M**](https://factor.am/699409.html?fbclid=IwAR0HbUwHcwZVI-yMkzzLl35_ex3cCdNgzDasrB2InsHlyzDcxG-aEkz436M) [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. [**https://infocom.am/hy/article/108950**](https://infocom.am/hy/article/108950) [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. [**https://oragir.news/hy/material/2023/08/31/89111**](https://oragir.news/hy/material/2023/08/31/89111) [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. [**https://lurer.com/?p=533505&l=am**](https://lurer.com/?p=533505&l=am) [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/159744**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/159744) [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. [**https://armeniasputnik.am/20230907/adrbejany-jermuki-hatvatsum-aveli-qan-70-km-taratsq-e-verahskum-voch-pashtvonakan-tvjalner-65452490.html**](https://armeniasputnik.am/20230907/adrbejany-jermuki-hatvatsum-aveli-qan-70-km-taratsq-e-verahskum-voch-pashtvonakan-tvjalner-65452490.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. [**https://armlur.am/1303714/**](https://armlur.am/1303714/) [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. [**https://asparez.am/tangaran-hakahrdehayin-hy/**](https://asparez.am/tangaran-hakahrdehayin-hy/) [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. [**https://asparez.am/tegh-hamaynq-hy/**](https://asparez.am/tegh-hamaynq-hy/) [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. [**https://asparez.am/hac-yeghegnadzor-hy/**](https://asparez.am/hac-yeghegnadzor-hy/) [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. [**https://asparez.am/ijevanmankapartez-hy/**](https://asparez.am/ijevanmankapartez-hy/) [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. [**https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/10/13/eb8vs4wa9/1653859**](https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/10/13/eb8vs4wa9/1653859) [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. [**https://infocom.am/hy/article/115675**](https://infocom.am/hy/article/115675) [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. [**https://factor.am/726648.html?fbclid=IwAR3UUAyO8X6CE7oyzgvYPX2aNYcnmUwdfpUwsQTNVYyUzF7mbvWiaoUkdvw**](https://factor.am/726648.html?fbclid=IwAR3UUAyO8X6CE7oyzgvYPX2aNYcnmUwdfpUwsQTNVYyUzF7mbvWiaoUkdvw) [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. [**https://168.am/2023/12/02/1966404.html**](https://168.am/2023/12/02/1966404.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. [**https://hayastan.news/am/post/14514**](https://hayastan.news/am/post/14514) [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. [**https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/12/19/jyxfpdwm/1687495**](https://www.pastinfo.am/hy/news/2023/12/19/jyxfpdwm/1687495) [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/162586**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/162586) [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. [**https://armlur.am/1325558/**](https://armlur.am/1325558/)  [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. [**https://www.armdaily.am/?p=61205&l=am**](https://www.armdaily.am/?p=61205&l=am) [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. [**https://youtu.be/ZWCSWaMrtaI**](https://youtu.be/ZWCSWaMrtaI) [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O71RnqSICM&t=108s**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O71RnqSICM&t=108s) [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. [**https://168.am/2023/06/09/1885505.html**](https://168.am/2023/06/09/1885505.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. [**https://khosq.am/2024/01/06/%d5%b0%d5%a1%d5%b5%d5%bf%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%a1%d6%80%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%a9%d5%b5%d5%b8%d6%82%d5%b6-116/**](https://khosq.am/2024/01/06/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-116/) [↑](#footnote-ref-209)