***REPORT***

***ON STATUS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ARMENIA AND VIOLATION OF RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF***

***2024***

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*The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression regularly submits to the public its reports on the working environment and issues of Armenian media and its personnel, on the status of the freedom of expression and the violations of the rights of media outlets and those of journalists. This report reflects the data of the first quarter of 2024.*

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

*- phone calls to CPFE “hot line”,*

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

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

*- materials from court cases with media involvement,*

*- materials disseminated by the partner journalist organization,*

*- publications by the media.*

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

***BRIEF SUMMARY***

In the first quarter of 2024, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression recorded **17** cases of various pressures on journalists and media and **41** cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information. One of the positive features of the period under review is that there was no case of physical violence against media representatives.

In contrast to this, the flow of lawsuits against media and journalists has increased. 12 such new lawsuits were filed in January-March, which is 3 more compared to the same period in 2023. 5 out of those 12 lawsuits were filed by state officials, 6 by business circles, and 1 by an ordinary citizen.

During the quarter, the above-mentioned 17 cases of pressure were also manifested by indecent treatment of journalists and cameramen, threats in the online domain, and obstruction of lawful professional activities, which are presented in the relevant sections of the report. 10 journalistic organizations issued statements regarding the most problematic cases.

The situation remains alarming in terms of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information. Although on February 7 this problem was discussed in the RA Government at the meeting organized by the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, which was attended by officials of state bodies and heads of journalistic and human rights non-governmental organizations, there is no improvement in practice. The problems of freedom of information registered during the first quarter were manifested by the unjustified rejection of the inquiries received by the state bodies, unnecessary delays in providing answers and violation of the terms and order stipulated by the law, by purely formal responses that do not correspond to the essence of the issues or bypass them. In some cases, the authors of the inquiries applied to the court with a demand to oblige them to provide information. During the months under review, 2 such lawsuits were filed.

From the point of view of ensuring the availability of official information, the initiative of the executive power to amend and modernize the Law on Freedom of Information was particularly noteworthy. Its new draft, which was developed by the RA Ministry of High-Tech Industry and posted on the e-draft.am website, received sharp criticism from journalistic and human rights non-governmental organizations at the beginning of the year. Although it was planned to make maximum use of modern technologies in this field through legislative amendments and addenda, which is certainly a positive approach, in terms of the right to freedom of information itself, that draft was evaluated in expert circles as retrogressive compared to the existing law. As a result, the Ministry reformed the bill and prepared a package, the basis of which is the draft of the new Law on Public Information. The latter is combined with draft amendments and addenda to a number of related laws, including the Law on Freedom of Information. From February 26 to March 12, that package was posted on the official e-draft.am website[[1]](#footnote-1). Many remarks and recommendations from expert circles have been submitted to the Ministry that authored the bills, and professional discussions are ongoing.

In the same period, works were also carried out in the direction of making amendments and addenda to the Law on Media and related laws. According to the Memorandum of Cooperation signed in April 2022, these works are jointly carried out by the NA Profile Committee, the Ministry of Justice and journalistic non-governmental organizations that have joined the Memorandum. The envisaged amendments are aimed at the dissemination of quality journalism, encouraging the establishment and development of the media self-regulation system based on the norms of professional ethics. The package has been submitted to the RA Government and will be sent to the National Assembly if approved.

***MEDIA ACTIVITIES ENVIRONMENT***

*In the first quarter of 2024, the socio-political situation in Armenia was relatively calm. There were no multi-thousand-member demonstrations and marches, other protest actions, which are usually combined with various clashes, as a result of which journalists and cameramen also suffer. Perhaps, the fact that there were no cases of physical violence against media representatives in January-March is also conditioned by the situation free from these confrontations. However, the high quantitative indicators of various other pressures on journalists and media, as well as violations of the right to receive and disseminate information, characteristic of the previous year, were preserved. The number of lawsuits filed against media and journalists also increased in the quarter under review.* ***12*** *new cases were registered, 3 more than in the same period last year.*

In total, the number of recorded pressures is **17**, which were also expressed by threats and insults directed at representatives of media, as well as obstacles to their lawful professional activities. Thus, on March 5, in the Yerablur Military Pantheon of the capital, when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan visited the grave of Vazgen Sargsyan, journalists and cameramen were forbidden to cover the ceremony there.[[2]](#footnote-2) The employees of the State Protection Service together with the police removed the media representatives from the area, with a reasoning that they were not accredited to cover the event. Journalists' attempts to film at least from a distance were met with harsh opposition by the power structures. In this regard, 10 journalistic organizations issued a statement and demanded from the RA Government staff to publicly explain the unjustified ban and to guarantee that such practices will not be repeated in the future, as well as to create favorable conditions for journalists when organizing any official event of public interest, subject to coverage, excluding any hindrance to their lawful activities.

The Department for Information and Public Relations of the Prime Minister's Office responded to this statement on March 15, noting that "the Prime Minister paid tribute to the memory of Vazgen Sargsyan, no interview was planned, the event was ceremonial, so the media were not informed about the visit to Yerablur. The visit was covered by the Prime Minister's Office, the message, video and photos were available to all media outlets." Thus, the reasoning of the power structures that the ban on coverage was due to the fact that the journalists did not have accreditation, which was not planned and not organized, was officially refuted. On the other hand, the concern was strengthened that the authorities often ignore the practices and traditions formed in the media field, applying unreasonable restrictions and hindering the lawful work of the media with harsh measures. In the end, it was predictable (it happens every year) that on March 5, the birthday of National Hero Vazgen Sargsyan, media representatives will come to cover the visit of the leading figures of the country and other officials to his grave. And instead of organizing all that in a civilized manner, a strict ban is applied.

Earlier, on February 20, President of Artsakh Samvel Shahramanyan and his bodyguards showed indecent behavior towards journalists in Yerablur Pantheon. The bodyguards particularly hindered the work of 24News website journalist Mary Manukyan and cameraman Asatur Aslanyan, which was accompanied by swearing. On the same day, Samvel Shahramanyan received the representatives of that media outlet, expressed regret and condemned the incident.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The journalistic community was also concerned about the fact that pressure was applied to Karine Simonyan, the correspondent of Lori and Tavush marzes of Liberty Radio Station.[[4]](#footnote-4) Thus, being in Yerevan, on March 29, she learned that her working camera was stolen from her Vanadzor apartment. According to the journalist, the camera was empty, no other items, no less valuable, were taken, and what happened was most likely due to her professional activity and could be an attempt to warn, intimidate and silence her. By the way, this is not the first case of putting pressure on Karine Simonyan. In this regard, 10 journalistic organizations issued a joint statement and demanded from the law enforcement officers to take seriously the facts of harassment against journalists performing their professional activities and to undertake all necessary measures to identify the culprits.

The period under review was also problematic in terms of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information. Often, in response to journalists' inquiries, state institutions require an additional 30-day period, and at the end of that period, they refuse to provide information. Violations of the terms of information prescribed by the law, as well as inappropriate and unclear answers to inquiries continue to be common. References to state secrets are abused, which conceal the fact that the information subject to publication is not provided.

It is important that after the publication of last year's CPFE report, a consultation was organized on February 7 with the participation of state bodies and heads of journalistic and human rights organizations at the initiative of the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff Arayik Harutyunyan. A number of issues were discussed, the overcoming of which can facilitate access to official data, especially for media. Nevertheless, the number of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information is quite high, amounting to 41.  
 In this regard, the legislative amendments proposed by the authorities and the processes related to them were noteworthy. In particular, the new draft of the Law on Freedom of Information, authored by the RA Ministry of High-Tech Industry and posted on the official website e-draft.am from December 19, 2023 to January 4, 2024, became the subject of heated debates and received sharp criticism from journalistic and human rights NGOs. According to the official interpretation, the adoption of the draft should contribute to the implementation of a unified policy in the field, as well as formation, development and modernization of the state information system, creating an opportunity for the digital transformation of the country's administration, economy and society. Meanwhile, according to journalistic and human rights organizations, the adoption of that draft could worsen the situation in the field of freedom of information and create legal grounds for rejecting inquiries for information addressed to the state bodies and complicating the provision of official data. The concerns of the expert circles were mainly due to the fact that, along with promoting the use of new information technologies by legislation, an attempt was made to introduce such legal regulations that would create unjustified restrictions and obstacles to receiving official data from state bodies.

As a result of discussions, including after a meeting held in the RA Government, which was attended by officials of state bodies and experts of civil society structures, the Ministry of High-Tech Industry revised its approach and prepared a draft of the new Law on Public Information, which was also attached to a number of related laws, including a package of draft amendments and addenda to the Law on Freedom of Information. From February 26 to March 12, it was posted on the edraft.am platform.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Experts see serious problems in this package as well. The majority of them, according to the Freedom of Information Center, is related to the role of the authorized body of public information. FOICA proposes to fundamentally revise the scope of this body's competences, because the supervisory functions are such that they contain risks of unlawful interference with the right to freedom of information. It should be noted that, according to the draft, the authorized body will operate under the Ministry of High-Tech Industry, through the Information Systems Agency of Armenia. According to FOICA, the functions of this body should mainly be ensuring the availability of information and control over its management, without affecting the right to freedom of information. In addition, one should refrain from defining the function of the authorized body to make decisions on access to information and especially on its restriction.

Journalistic and human rights organizations continue to be concerned about the concept of "restricted service information" introduced in the legislation on freedom of information and its use as a basis for rejecting inquiries for official data. As we mentioned in the previous reports, almost every document circulating in the state body can fall under it.

In the first quarter, the package of drafts to make amendments and addenda to the Law of Media and related laws was revised and submitted to the Government. Those works were carried out on the basis of the tripartite Memorandum on Cooperation adopted in April 2022, which was signed by the NA Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Justice and the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression on behalf of 10 partner non-governmental organizations. The international organization Freedom House also supported the process of drafting the bills.

With the proposed amendments, an attempt is made to modernize the Law on Media and align it with international standards. First of all, the new concepts of "journalist" and "media" are being defined, which is extremely important in this period of information technology development. In addition, the law will enshrine the recognition of the media self-regulation system by the state, and encourage the dissemination and development of quality journalism based on the application of norms of professional ethics.

The package also proposes amendments to Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code, regarding defamation and insult, in order to overcome the obstacles related to applying to extrajudicial bodies before filing a lawsuit, terminological changes are envisaged in the Law on Audiovisual Media, etc..

During the quarter, on several occasions, the expert community referred to the problems of the Public Broadcaster. Thus, on January 6, CPFE together with partner organizations issued a statement regarding the non-broadcast of the address of the Catholicos of All Armenians on the pre-New Year programme of the First Channel of the Public TV Company.[[6]](#footnote-6) According to the clarification of the Council of Public Broadcaster, a decision was made to broadcast the address in one of the most watched parts of the air, at the time set aside for official addresses, and according to that, the speech of the Catholicos should follow the speech of the RA President, who is the head of the state according to the Constitution. The Mother See expressed its disagreement with that format, and as a result the speech was not delivered. According to experts, it is difficult to consider the violation of established tradition as justified and substantiated, therefore, the announcement called on the Council of Public Broadcaster to show more prudence towards those traditions of activity that are extremely sensitive for society, and when changing them, to count on reliable studies and analyses, to initiate public and professional discussions on the expediency of making legislative changes to broadcasting New Year's addresses on the air of Public TV. There were also many other responses, according to which this problem was largely due to the recently strained relations between the authorities and the Mother See.

The heated debate between the Council of Public Broadcaster and the Director of the Public Radio became a reason for wide discussion in the press and social networks. On February 5, Director of Public Radio Company Garegin Khumaryan published an article[[7]](#footnote-7), with which he disputed some views expressed by the RA Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the radio, as well as criticized the work of the host who conducted the interview with the Head of the Government. On the next day, the National Assembly issued a statement regarding Garegin Khumaryan's behavior.[[8]](#footnote-8) According to the Council, the director evidently abused his authority and official position, used the reputation of Public Radio and the official website to present his opinion uncontroversially and to ensure maximum response. Meanwhile, the Council of Public Broadcaster applied to the Media Ethics Observatory, hoping to get an expert opinion on Garegin Khumaryan's actions. According to the observatory's opinion published on March 22, the wording used in the statement of the Council of Public Broadcaster ("evidently abused his authority and official position", etc.) are not adequate to the situation and do not contribute to the development of a culture of free exchange of opinions and debate in the public.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Observatory concluded that Khumaryan's comments and analyses are based on accurate facts and information, comply with the legal requirement of pluralism and freedom of exchange of opinions defined by the Code of Ethics. Meanwhile, the Observatory noted that Garegin Khumaryan published his opinion on the quality of the broadcast program in the "Society" section of the Public Radio website, not in the director's column dedicated to professional issues or any other relevant section. This fact may be perceived by the public as a manifestation of the radio station's director's political orientation regarding the issues discussed in the interview in question. To avoid such a perception, it would be beneficial if articles related to the content of Public Radio were published through a special column.

One of the notable events of the quarter was that from March 29, Television and Radio Broadcasting Network of Armenia blocked the broadcasting of the "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" and "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" programs broadcast on the "RTR-Planeta" TV channel in the territory of Armenia. Considering the large volumes of misinformation and hate speech spread by Russian TV stations on Armenian airwaves, we believe that such a solution was long overdue, because we are not dealing with journalism, but with propaganda, and the public, which uses the public multiplex, should stay away from all that. Moreover, it has nothing to do with restricting freedom of speech, just as the activity of Russian channels has nothing to do with freedom of speech and journalism.

We should remind that earlier, on December 20, 2023, the Commission on TV and Radio made a decision to suspend the license of Tospa Radio Company Editorial Office CJSC, which broadcasts the "Sputnik Armenia" radio program, for 30 days. The decision was related to the "Friday with Tigran Keosayan" program, in which the author allowed sarcastic expressions that humiliated the honor and dignity of the country and the people. By the way, on January 16 of this year, the Editor-in-Chief of Sputnik Radio Kirill Vyshinsky wrote a letter to the Chairman of the RA Commission on TV and Radio Tigran Hakobyan, expressing his regret about what happened.[[10]](#footnote-10) However, as further developments showed, the Russian propaganda media had not learned their lessons and continued their faulty activities.

On February 29, the international human rights organization Freedom House published the report "Freedom in the World 2024".[[11]](#footnote-11) Like last year, Armenia remained in the list of "partially free" states with 54 points. Among Armenia's neighbors, Georgia is also "partially free" and has 58 points. While the other three neighbors are "not free". Azerbaijan has only 7 points, Iran - 11, and Turkey - 33.

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

We report the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2024 according to the following classification by the CPFE:

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

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

The relevant sections of the report list the facts on the violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2024, as well as the developments related to the previous incidents.

***In total, there were 58 reported violations of the rights of journalists and the media in the first quarter of 2024. 17 were cases of pressure against the media and their personnel, and 41 were cases of violations of the right to receive and disseminate information. No cases of physical violence were recorded.***

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

**Quantitative Data on Violations in the 1st Quarters of 2023-2024**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of violations | 1st quarter of 2023 | 1st quarter of 2024 |
| Physical violence against journalists | **0** | **0** |
| Pressure on media outlets and their personnel | **17** | **17** |
| Violations of the right to receive and disseminate information | **48** | **41** |

**Lawsuits, Involving Media and Journalists in the 1st Quarters of 2023-2024**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Types of court cases | 1st quarter of 2023 | 1st quarter of 2024 |
| On the grounds of insult and slander | 9 | 12 |
| Economic and other disputes | 0 | 0 |

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

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

*During the first quarter of 2024, there was no case of physical violence against media personnel. Below we present the developments related to the past instances of use of violence in chronological order.*

**On January 5**, 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, including the aforementioned journalists, and negligently brought about severe consequences. (For details see CPFE’s reports for 2018-2023, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).  
 Court hearings on the case were also held on January 12 and 19, February 2, 23 and 29, March 1, 7, 15, 22 and 29. The next one was scheduled for April 12.

**On January 17,** 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. Criminal prosecution for some episodes of those events was terminated on the grounds that the statute of limitations for prosecution had expired.(For details see CPFE’s reports for 2018-2023 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Court hearings on the case were also held on February 12, and April 1. The next court hearing was scheduled for May 14.

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

*During 2024,* ***17*** *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 8,** the Court of General Jurisdicition of Yerevan ruled to rejecta former employee of the Judicial Acts Compulsory Enforcement Service Grisha Davtyan's lawsuit 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, filed on January 3, 2023, 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.[[12]](#footnote-12)  
 In the judgement, the court recorded that the plaintiff party failed to appear at the court hearings during the entire examination of the case, did not present arguments refuting the cited, provable facts, and did not present its own evidence. And the authors of the impugned publication did not allow violations and did not attribute actions to any natural person or state body that did not derive from the content of the indicated documents. In addition, the circumstance of causing any damage to the plaintiff has not been confirmed.

**On January 9,** a member of Alaverdi Council of Elders Simon Zakharov filed a lawsuit against ABC Media LLC in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan, demanding to publicly refute the defamatory information and pay compensation. The lawsuit was caused by a report published on the abcmedia.am website on December 13, 2023, entitled: "Simon Zakharov: the "Éminence Grise" of Alaverdi", according to which Zakharov took control of the activities of the Council of Elders, that he received education of a machinist and after a year of training, he performed surgeries in Alaverdi Medical Center, and in 2014 he was able to buy a plot of land in the city, on the bank of the river, by the decision of the Council of Elders, only for 13 thousand AMD.[[13]](#footnote-13) The claim was accepted for proceedings on January 22. A preliminary court hearing was held on March 18, the next one was scheduled for May 27.

**On January 9,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan returned the lawsuit filed by the "Armenian National Agrarian University" Foundation against Hraparak Daily LLC on December 20, 2023, due to inaccuracies. The lawsuit was demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and confiscation of a compensation sum.

The lawsuit was caused by the article entitled: "Electoral Chaos in the Agrarian University" published on November 22 of the same year in Hraparak newspaper and on the eponymous website[[14]](#footnote-14), where referring to the Rector's elections to be held at the University, the periodical 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.

The claim was filed again on January 26 of this year and was accepted for proceedings on February 7. As of March 31, a court hearing has not been scheduled.

**On** **January 9,** the Civil Court of Appeal upheld the defendan’t appeal on the case of *citizen Arusyak Mkrtchyan v. Zhoghovurd Daily Editorial Office LLC* against the judgement of the Court of First Instance, 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”.[[15]](#footnote-15) 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.

According to the decision of the Court of Appeal, the judgement was changed, the lawsuit was rejected. No other developments were recorded until the end of the quarter.

**On January 9,** as a result of the judge's self-recusal, a substition took place, and on February 6, the Civil Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the plaintiff's appeal on the case of *Alvina Gyulumyan, a former member of the Constitutional Court, v. Dareskizb Ltd., the founder of the Haykakan Zhamanak daily*.

We should remind that the lawsuit, demanding refutation of slander and a compensation, 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. The Court of First Instance rejected Alvina Gyulumyan’s lawsuit 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. On December 5, 2023, the court ruled to leave the claim without trial, because the notified plaintiff failed to appear at two successive court hearings. On December 27, the plaintiff appealed this decision in the Court of Appeal.

On March 11 of this year, the judge was replaced again, and on the 12th, the appeal was accepted for new proceedings.

**On January 10,** the Court of Cassation ruled to leave Garnik Isagulyan's appeal against the decision of the Court of Appeal dated August 30, 2023, on the case of *a journalist and anchor Nver Mnatsakanyan v. Hayeli Club and Garnik Isagulyan*, without trial.

We should remind that the lawsuit, with claims of apology and publication of the judgment in the media, 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.[[16]](#footnote-16)

By the judgement of August 16, 2021, the Court rejected Nver Mnatsakanyan’s lawsuit. However, the 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, 2023, 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. On April 25, Garnik Isagulyan went to the Court of Appeal, where his lawsuit was rejected on August 30. On October 18, 2023, he filed an appeal in the Court of Cassation.

**On January 10,** the plaintiff on the case of *citizen* *Erik Yeghinyan v. CMG LLC (the founder of Pastinfo news website)* challenged the judgement of the Court of First Instance in the Court of Appeal, which had rejected the lawsuit.

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”.[[17]](#footnote-17) (For details see CPFE’s reports for 2019-2023 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website). The plaintiff claimed the confiscation of 1 million AMD from the defendant in compensation for insult and defamation, obliging the defendant to apologize in writing and publish a refutation.   
 On February 9, the appeal was accepted for proceedings. No other developments have been recorded by the end of the quarter.

**On January 11,** 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 defamatory 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 online TV Company on December 21, 2021[[18]](#footnote-18) and January 15, 2022,[[19]](#footnote-19) according to which the plaintiff obtained construction permit through corruption transactions and that through him the former RA President Serzh Sargsyan wants to take over the building of the Armhydroenergy Project Institute which houses the office of the Political Scientists Union of Armenia.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 15.

A hearing on the second lawsuit was held on February 1, another one was scheduled for September 24.

**On January 12,** the Civil Court of Appeal partially upheld the defendan't appeal against the judgement ofthe Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan on the case of *Arthur Vanetsyan, former Head of the NSS and leader of the I Have Honor Faction 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*), which had partially granted the claim, the defendant was obliged to refute the impugned statements on H1 TV channel, pay 500,000 AMD as compensation for defamation, and 18,000 AMD as state duty.

We should remind that the lawsuit, demanding public refutation of the defamatory information and compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, 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”.[[20]](#footnote-20)

According to the decision of the Court of Appeal, the case was sent to the Court of First Instance for a new trial. On February 14, the plaintiff appealed against this decision to the Court of Cassation.

**On January 12,** the Civil Court of Appeal accepted for proceedings the plaintiff's appeal against the judgement of the Court of First Instance dated November 10, 2023, on the case of *the Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC v. 168 Hours LLC*, by which 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.

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.[[21]](#footnote-21) By the way, the lawsuit was in retrial. (For details see CPFE’s reports for 2021-2023, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

On March 29 of the present year, the appeal was upheld. The judgment of the Court of General Jurisdiction was overturned and the case was sent to the same court for a new trial.

**On January 12,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Grisha Tamrazyan, Advisor to the Rector of Brusov State University v. Public TV Company of Armenia CJSC*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory. The lawsuit, filed on January 5, 2023, 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 remotely cursed the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Vahram Dumanyan after the Rector's election.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 22.

**On January 16,** Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan filed a lawsuit against Angela Tovmasyan, president of the Hayeli club (founder of the hayeli.am website), demanding an apology for the insult, 1 million AMD in compensation and confiscation of 530,000 AMD as compensation for court expenses. The lawsuit was caused by Angela Tovmasyan's following statement about Alen Simonyan during the press conference with Ambassador Edgar Ghazaryan at the Hayeli club on December 25, 2023: "...He was running around under Khachatur Sukiasyan's feet, he was running under his feet like this, Alen was running around".[[23]](#footnote-23) On January 24, the claim was accepted for proceedings, the plaintiff's motion to apply an injunction, placing a freezing order on the defendant's property and funds in the amount of the claim, was granted. On March 1, the case was transferred to another court and accepted for proceedings on the 18th. A court hearing was scheduled for May 13.

**On January 16**, 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 monetary compensation.

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 Director of the CJSC Davit Papazyan published a Q&A talk, addressing the deal signed with Air Arabia company on July 14.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 10.

**On January 17**, 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 another company, after winning these tenders.

A court hearing was also held on February 21. The next one was scheduled for April 2.

**On January 17**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan v. V.I.V. Today and Tomorrow LLC, the founder of Ankakh.com news website, claiming compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit, filed on December 22, 2022, was caused by an article published on December 9 under the heading: “Are Alen Simonyan and Vahagn Khachaturyan Making Purchases with State Funds?”.[[25]](#footnote-25) 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.

A court hearing on the case was also held on February 26. The next one was scheduled for April 15.

**On January 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC v. journalist Tehmine Yenokyan*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and a compensation in the amount of 6 million AMD.

The lawsuit, filed on January 5, 2025, 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...".[[26]](#footnote-26) The CJSC representative first demanded a refutation from the journalist, which was not fulfilled, after which a lawsuit was filed in court.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 15.

**On January 23,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Veolia Jur CJSC v. the citizen of France and French military and investigative journalist of Armenian descent Leo Nikolian, Hayeli Club NGO (founder of 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, filed on **May 18, 2023**, was caused by Leo Nikolian's statements on May 2[[27]](#footnote-27) and 14[[28]](#footnote-28) 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."[[29]](#footnote-29)

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 21.

**On January 23,** the journalist of Hraparak Daily Liana Sargsyan tried to interview Artur Manukyan, a member of the Commission on TV and Radio, but the CTR President Tigran Hakobyan, intervened, forbidding him to give an interview. Moreover, he insulted the journalist, saying: "You are a despicable media outlet. I pity you. Who deceived you that you are a journalist?".[[30]](#footnote-30)

**On January 24,** RA Deputy Military Prosecutor Vahagn Muradyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against citizen Marianna Sahakyan and Factor Information Center NGO (founder of the Factor.am news website) with demands to refute defamatory information and pay compensation. The lawsuit was caused by a material published on the website on January 19, entitled: ""I Fear for My Life". The Woman Claims that the Prosecutor's Son Took 45,000 USD and Disappeared", according to which Marianna Sahakyan, the defendant in the case, was a victim of fraud, which she also accused the plaintiff of.[[31]](#footnote-31) Later, the website added a refutation in terms of the plaintiff in the article's postscript, but the trial continues. The lawsuit was accepted for proceedings on February 7. A court hearing was scheduled for April 17.

**On January 24,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *citizen Yurik Grigoryan v. Kentron TV Company - Multimedia Kentron CJSC*, demanding to publicly refute defamatory information and pay a compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on August 22, 2023, was caused by the July 23 edition of the "In the Footsteps of Crime" program of the Kentron TV Company, during which, according to the plaintiff, the presumption of innocence was violated; he 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?"[[32]](#footnote-32)

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 2.

**On January 24,** the plaintiff filed and appeal against the judgement dated December 12, 2023 on the case of *citizen Mariam Hovsepyan v. International Media Holding LLC (the founder of Lurer.com news website),* which 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 each, and the same amount as an attorney’s fee, as well as 43 thousand AMD as state duty.

We should remind that the lawsuit, with claims of public apology, refutation of defamation and payment of compensation, 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 on Lurer.com website on July 7.[[33]](#footnote-33)

On February 9, the plaintiff's appeal was rejected, as was his motion to reinstate the missed trial period. On March 6, another appeal was filed.

**On January 25,** citizen Anna Petakchyan filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Zhoghovurd newspaper editorial board LLC for publicly refuting the information considered defamatory. The lawsuit was caused by the following publication: "A group of Indians appealed to the law enforcement officers. They were beaten, starved and now they are kept in the hotel of the former MP", according to which the plaintiff exploits the Indians who came to Armenia.[[34]](#footnote-34) Later, on February 2, the plaintiff's lawyer refuted the news in the media. However, the lawsuit is in progress. It was accepted for proceedings on February 8. At the hearing held on March 6, the plaintiff's motion to terminate the case was examined, which was upheld on March 14 on the grounds that the plaintiff withdrew the claim.

**On January 30,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Ruben Khachatryan, the former Director of the Yerevan Zoo, v. citizen Manuk Manukyan (third party – Iravunk Media Ltd.),* claiming refutation of defamatory information and monetary compensation.

The lawsuit 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.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 22.

**On February 1,** Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against Datablog Ltd., demanding public refutation of factual information considered defamatory and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article, published on Blognews.am website owned by the Ltd. on December 28, 2023, entitled: "Trotsenko will Rob Syunik with a an Expatriate's Logic, and Aro Doing PR will have to Explain to the Residents of Syunik why They Have neither a Mine nor Health",[[36]](#footnote-36) where it is mentioned that ZCMC plunders the subsoil, employees receive astronomical salaries at the expense of people's health.

On February 13, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing was scheduled for April 19.

**On February 8,** the same plaintiff filed another lawsuit against the same defendant, demanding refutation of the factual information considered defamatory, and payment of another 6 million AMD in compensation for the violated rights.

This lawsuit was caused by the article published on the website Blognews.am owned by the Ltd. on January 11, entitled: "Tight-Lipped Jhanyan and His Owners do not Clarify How and under What Conditions the RA Government Made a Deal with ZCMC and in Return Received 15% of ZCMC Shares."[[37]](#footnote-37) In essence, the website accused Vardan Jhanyan, Deputy Director of the CJSC, and other officials of creating an ecological disaster that harmed people's health, as well as non-transparent activities of ZCMC. On March 4, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings, a court hearing has not been scheduled.

**On the same day**, another lawsuit was filed against the same media outlet with the same claim. In this case, the cause of the lawsuit is the article published on the Blognews.am website owned by the Ltd. on January 9, entitled: "Margaryan Aro, Doing PR for Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine, Who Ravaged the Subsoil of Armenia, Unceasingly Covers up the Crap Eaten by His Leaders."[[38]](#footnote-38) The website accused ZCMC of wrecking the subsoil and nature, destroying the health of the population, and carrying out looting. "The subsoil of Armenia should not be a spot of overindulgence for any foreigner; no foreigner has a right to openly plunder the subsoil of Armenia and to get rid of any responsibility, throwing some bones." On March 7, the claim was accepted for proceedings, a hearing has not been scheduled.

**On February 25,** Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC again filed a lawsuit against Datablog Ltd. in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan with demands to refute the defamatory data and to confiscate 6 million AMD for the violated rights. This time the lawsuit was caused the article published on the same site on January 25, entitled: "ZCMC is Methodically Destroying the South of Armenia. Who will Catch the Thief's Hand?".[[39]](#footnote-39) On March 7, the claim was accepted for proceedings, a hearing has not been scheduled.

In the lawsuit filed **on February 29,** the same plaintiff demands from the same media outlet to refute the information considered defamatory and to pay 3 million AMD in compensation for the violated rights. The lawsuit was caused by the statements published on the Blognews.am website on January 31, entitled: "Instead of Taking Note of the Alarms in the Media about the Environmental Disaster Created by the Artsvanik Tailings Dump and Taking Measures, the Management of the ZCMC is Brazenly Issuing Statements." On March 27, the claim was accepted for proceedings.

**On February 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the "Yerevan State University" Foundation v. Hraparak Daily LLC, the founder of the Hraparak.am website*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory, and confiscation of a compensation for defamation.

The lawsuit, filed on January 30, 2023, was caused by the article published on the website on December 30, 2022, entitled: "A Financial Deficit has Arisen in YSU".[[40]](#footnote-40) YSU demanded a refutation, which was published with certain comments, but it did not satisfy the plaintiff, and the latter applied to the court.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 22.

**On February 5,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *lawyer Tigran Yegoryan v. Zhoghovurd Newspaper Editorial Board LLC and Union of Journalists of Armenia NGO*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity.

The lawsuit, filed on November 2, 2022, 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.[[41]](#footnote-41) In particular, the announcement stated that the editorial office had reasonable suspicion that the plaintiff and especially lawyer Yegoryan were pursuing the goal of harming the newspaper.

On March 11, 2024, the case was transferred to another court, on the 27th, it was accepted for proceedings, a hearing was scheduled for June 11.

**On February 6,** the Court of General Jurisdication of Yerevan continued the trial on the case of *Lara Aharonyan, Head of the Women's Resource Center NGO, v. Hayeli Club and Live News Media LLC*, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity in the amount of 2 million AMD.

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

The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for May 20.

**On February 7,** the Court of Cassation rejected to accept for proceedings the plaintiff’s appeal on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. the Commission on TV and Radio.*

We should remind that this lawsuit was filed on December 21, 2022, 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.)

On February 22, 2023, 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 plaintiff appealed to the Court of Cassation on November 16, which returned the appeal on December 13. On January 17 of the present year, the cassation appeal was filed again.

**On February 8**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *the Deputy Mayor of Yerevan (currently Mayor) Tigran Avinyan v. 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, filed on April 13, 2023, 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.”[[42]](#footnote-42) 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.  
 The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for May 7.

**On February 8,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular 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 30, 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.[[43]](#footnote-43)

According to the judgment published on February 29, the lawsuit was partially upheld: the court obliged the defendant to publish a refutation, pay 100 thousand AMD as pecuniary compensation and 23 thousand AMD as state duty compensation. As of March 31, there is no information on the appeal of the judicial act.

**On February 9**, the defendant on the case of *citizen Larisa Harutyunyan v.* *Shark LLC* (the legal entity representing 5 TV) appealed to the Civil Court of Appeal against the judgement of the Court of First Instance, which 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.

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”.[[44]](#footnote-44)   
 On March 1, the defendant's appeal was returend. It was filed again on March 28.

**On February 9**, the Civil Court of Appeal ruled to partially uphold the plaintiff's appeal against the judgement of the Court of First Instance on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund* CJSC v. *Hraparak Daily LLC and Hrant Bagratyan, former Prime Minister of the RA*, which had rejected the lawsuit.

We should remind that the lawsuit, demanding refutation of information discrediting business reputation and monetary compensation, 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.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The Court of Appeal ruled to overturn the judgement regarding the claim against Hraparak Daily LLC and to send it for a new trial in its entirety, and to leave the judgement unchanged regarding the claim against Hrant Bagratyan. On March 15, the defendant appealed the decision of the Court of Appeal to the Court of Cassation.

**On February 12,** the Civil Court of Appeal ruled to uphold the defendant’s appeal against the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction dated June 2, 2023, on the case of *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Hraparak Daily LLC,* which upheld the lawsuit partially. The Court of Appeal overturned and amended it, rejecting the lawsuit in its entirety. It should be mentioned that the lawuit, filed on June 21, 2019, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity and reputation through defamation and insult, was caused by a June 19, 2019 article, entitled: “Pashinyan Showed a Yellow Card to Hayk Sargsyan”[[46]](#footnote-46), where the plaintiff is portrayed as a "new-Sashik", an odious figure in My Step faction, known for a series of scandalous stories.

By the way, judge Nora Karapetyan, attached to the decision of the Court of Appeal, expressed a special opinion, specifically stating: "...I cannot agree that it is justified for the media to label a person odious, and I have a deep conviction that this expression is rightfully an insult and violates the honor and dignity of a person."

**On February 13**, the Court of Appeal replaced the judge 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*, and the defendant's appeal was accepted for proceedings on February 16.  
 We should remind that the lawsuit, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor and dignity, 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.

With the judgment dated April 27, 2023, the court partially upheld the claim. The defendant filed an appeal against the judgement in the Court of Appeal. By the decision of March 11, the appeal was partially upheld, the judgement was overturned, the case was sent to the same court for a new trial.

**On February 13,** 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.

On March 14 of the present year, the case was transferred to another court. The next court hearing was scheduled for May 10.

**On February 13,** the Civil Court of Appeal replaced the judge on the case of *Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC v. Pastinfo LLC*, and the plaintiff’s appeal was accepted for proceedings on the 16th.

We should remind that the lawsuit, claiming a refutation of the information discrediting the business reputation and a payment of monetary compensation, 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.[[47]](#footnote-47) On April 11**,** 2023, the Court of General Jurisdiction rejected the lawsuit, and the plaintiff filed an appeal.   
 The implementation of the judicial act on the case was scheduled for May 13.

**On February 13,** the Civil Court of Appeal replaced the judge on the case of the *NA MP Hayk Sargsyan v. Irates newspaper and the eponymous electronic website*, the appeal was accepted for proceedings on the 16th.

The lawsuit, demanding compensation for slander and insult, 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”.

On October 6, 2023, 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, 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 February 15,** 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 13, 2022, was caused by an article, published on Hraparak.am website on August 10,[[48]](#footnote-48) which stated that upon a request from the Ministry of Defence, News.am refuted a news story on an unpleasant event, featuring the Minister.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 25.

**On February 19**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *the former Mayor of Yerevan Hrachya Sargsyan and the former Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Hayk Hovhannisyan v. 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, filed on April 6, 2023, 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?”.[[50]](#footnote-50) According to the newspaper, the acquisition of Chinese buses for Yerevan was accompanied with corruption practices with the involvement of the co-plaintiffs.

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 21.

**On February 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Khachatur Sukiasyan v. Armday.am LLC, the founder of Armday.am*, demanding a public apology, refutation of information considered defamatory, as well as payment of compensation.

We should remind that the lawsuit, 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”[[51]](#footnote-51) with a link to an unidentified Telegram channel.

On March 13, the court ruled to reject the claim on the basis that there is no evidence in the case that the Armday.am website is operated by Armday AM LLC.

**On February 20,** at the Yerablur Military Pantheon, the President of Artsakh Samvel Shahramanyan and his bodyguards showed indecent behavior towards 24News journalist Mary Manukyan and cameraman Asatur Aslanyan.[[52]](#footnote-52) The latter were carrying out professional activities, filming the visitors to Yerablur on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the Artsakh Movement. One of the bodyguards cursed the journalist and the cameraman, and also pushed the latter. Later, Shahramanyan expressed his regret about incident.

**On February 22,** Iravunk.com news website wrote that it has been a month since the Head of NewsMedia.am news agency, journalist Gayane Zargaryan has been attacked on various social networks, with death threats, defamatory, false information, hate propaganda and accusations that the journalist is an agent of international significance.[[53]](#footnote-53)

**On February 25,** Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against TERT AM LLC, with demands to publicly refute the factual information considered defamatory, and to pay 2 million AMD in compensation for the violated rights. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on Tert.am website on January 24, entitled: "The Tailing Dumps of Artsvanik, Operated by ZCMC, Probably Pollutes Villages and Rivers, Damages Agricultural Lands: Environmentalist".[[54]](#footnote-54) On March 18, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. So far a hearing has not been scheduled.

**On February 26,** 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”[[55]](#footnote-55) and “A Teacher in Vanadzor Received 12 Million AMD for Forced Idle Time”[[56]](#footnote-56) which were published on the aforementioned website on October 4 and December 5, 2013, respectively. (For details see the annual reports of CPFE for 2016-2023 in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

Hearings on the case were also held on March 4 and 25, another was scheduled for April 12.

**On February 27,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan v. the president of the Hayeli club, journalist Anzhela Tovmasyan*, demanding an apology for the insult and payment of a compensation. The lawsuit, filed on October 26, 2023, 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".[[57]](#footnote-57)   
 The next court hearing was scheduled for May 14.

**On February 28**, the case of *Styopa Safaryan, the former Chairman of the Public Council, v. LiveNews correspondent Taguhi Aslanyan* was transferred to another court and was accepted for court proceedings on March 11.

The lawsuit, demanding public apology for statements of insult and 1 million AMD in compensation, 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…”[[58]](#footnote-58). 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 scheduled for May 2 of the present year.

**On February 28,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Lyova Abrahamyan, Head of Sarukhan Community in Gegharkunik Marz, v. Narine Hasratyan, a reporter at the Haykakan Zham news website*, claiming refutation of the information discrediting honor, dignity and business reputation

The lawsuit, filed on February 13, 2019, 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.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 28 of the present year.

**On March 1, the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the plaintiff's appeal against the judgement of the Court of First Instance 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), by which the lawsuit had been rejected.**

**The lawsuit, demanding public refutation of defamatory information and a compensation, filed on April 4, 2022, was caused by an article entitled: “The Director of Alaverdi MC - the Monopolist of the “Death” Business”[[60]](#footnote-60) published on the Civilnet.am news website on March 14.**(For details see CPFE’s reports for 2022-2023, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

As of March 31, the decision of the Court of Appeal has not been appealed.

**On March 4**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the new trial on the case of *NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan (currently NA Speaker) v. Iravunk Media Ltd.,* and the burden of proof has been redistributed.

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. (For details see CPFE’s reports for 2020-2023, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 15.

**On March 4,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a preliminary court hearing on the case of *Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum Combine CJSC v. Oragir Media LLC*, demanding to publicly refute the information considered defamatory and to pay a compensation.

The lawsuit, filed on October 17, 2023, 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."[[61]](#footnote-61)

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 22 of this year.

**On March 4,** the defendantson 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*, the defendants appealed to the Court of Appeal against the judgement of the Court of First Instance dated October 3, 2023, regarding the partial upholding of the claim, according to which a refutation should be published, 200 thousand AMD should be paid in compensation for defamation and 150 000 AMD as an attorney's fee in favor of the plaintiff.

The lawsuit, filed on July 13, 2020, was caused by an article, entitled: "Who are the Sponsors of "Guardians of the Revolution"?"and published on the aforementioned website on June 22[[62]](#footnote-62), where, referring to its own sources, the website wrote that the previous day the members of the "Guardians of the Revolution" initiative together with the NA Deputy Speaker Alen Simonyan were in one of the restaurants in the Ashtarak Gorge, after drinking a few glasses of alcohol they started an argument with the guys sitting at the next table, which was also attended by Alen Simonyan.

On March 20 of this year, the judge on the case was replaced.

**On March 5,** 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?”.[[63]](#footnote-63) 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.

The next court hearing on the case was scheduled for June 25 of this year.

**On March 5,** when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan visited the grave of Vazgen Sargsyan in the Yerablur Pantheon of the capital, the work of journalists there was hindered. State Protection Service officers pushed journalists and cameramen out of the area with the police on the grounds that they were not accredited to cover the event.[[64]](#footnote-64) Journalists' attempts to film at least from a distance were met with harsh opposition by the representatives of the power structures. In this regard, 10 journalistic organizations issued a condemning statement.[[65]](#footnote-65) In response, Armen Khachatryan, the Head of the Department for Information and Public Relations of the Government, informed the CPFE and other colleagues in a letter that the event was ceremonial, no interview was planned, the media were not informed about the visit, but the department filmed the ceremony and provided it to the editorial offices. Meanwhile, according to the CPFE, the information of the state body cannot completely replace the media's coverage, let alone serve as a basis for restricting the activities of journalists.

**On March 5,** the "Yerevan State University" Foundation filed a lawsuit in the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan against 24News.am LLC (the founder of the 24News.am website), demanding to publicly refute the information considered defamatory and to confiscate 1 million AMD as compensation. The lawsuit was caused by the article published on the mentioned website on February 5, entitled: "Pashinyan has a Folder of Compromising Information about YSU Rector. Corruption Scandal is Brewing" with a link to the Russian Telegram channel TOGARMA.[[66]](#footnote-66) In particular, the article states that YSU Rector is the author of corruption schemes, besides, he is trying to prevent Gagik Ghazinyan, Dean of the Faculty of Law, from being re-elected at all costs.

On March 15, the claim was returned. No other developments have been recorded by the end of the quarter.

**On March 7,** 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 impugned speech 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.

The next court hearing was scheduled for August 14 of this year.

**On March 15**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan ruled to reject the lawsuit filed by Deputy Head of the Shirak Marz Investigative Department Hovhannes Poghosyan against 168 Hours Ltd. and journalist Gohar Savzyan, demanding to refute the defamatory information and pay a compensation. The grounds for rejection were the statute of limitations.

The lawsuit was filed on April 3, 2023, and 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”.[[67]](#footnote-67) 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 court also ruled to confiscate 100,000 AMD as an attorney's fee from Hovhannes Poghosyan in favor of 168 Hours Ltd..

**On March 18,** by the decision of the Court of General Jurisdiction of Armavir Marz, provincial ALT TV company was involved as a third party in the court case of *Armavir Regional State College Director Angin Arshakyan v. pedagogues Susanna Margaryan and Karine Harutyunyan*. The lawsuit was filed on September 12, 2022, demanding compensation for the damage caused to honor, dignity, business reputation and the right to privacy of personal and family life. It was caused by a report prepared by ALT TV Company on September 2, 2022, entitled: "The Staff of Armavir Regional State College Demands the Resignation of the Director", which was shown during the "Zham" news program of Armenia TV Company and posted on the alttv.am website of ALT TV Company.[[68]](#footnote-68) The next court hearing was scheduled for May 15.

**On March 19**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan terminated the proceedings on the case of *businessman Davit Yeremyan v. Datablog Ltd. (the founder of Blognews.am website)*, as the plaintiff withdrew the claim.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on June 23, 2023, claiming public refutation of the information considered as defamatory, an apology for insult and confiscation of compensation. It was caused by a news piece, published on the website on May 12 with reference to Armeniannews.Info Telegram channel, under the heading: “‘Businessman” Yeremyan Davo has Gone off-Limits”[[69]](#footnote-69), 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.[[70]](#footnote-70)

**On March 18,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of*Armenian National Interests Fund CJSC and the Chairman of the Company's Board of Directors Tigran Avinyan v. 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, filed on March 16, 2023, 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.[[71]](#footnote-71) By the way, the plaintiffs did not provide the information requested by the website on that subject.

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 22 of this year.

**On March 19,** the Court of Cassation upheld the defendant’s appeal on the case of *Mher Derdzyan v. 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.[[72]](#footnote-72) The plaintiff demands a public apology and 1,5 million AMD compensation for insult and slander. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2019-2023 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 in the Court of Appeal. The appeal was rejected twice, due to deficiencies in the documents, and the defendant applied to the Court of Cassation.

**On March 22,** the Civil Court of Appeal partially upheld both the plaintiff’s and the defendant’s appeals against the judgement of the Court of First Instance on the case of *citizen Arthur Vardanyan v.* *168 Hours Ltd*. *and citizen David Pirumyan,* which had partially upheld the lawsuit. David Pirumyan was obliged to apologize and pay state duties, and both parties at the same time were obliged to pay 100,000 AMD each, as attorneys' reasonable fees.

We should remind that the lawsuit, with claims of obligating the defendant to apologize, refute the defamatory information and confiscating a compensation, 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.[[73]](#footnote-73) 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”.

The Court of Appeal ruled to send the case for a retrial.

**On March 22,** the Civil Court of Appeal rejected the appeal against the judgemet on the case of *Vardan Badasyan (the father of the former RA Minister of Justice Rustam Badasyan. Comment by CPFE) v. Alternative NGO Co-Chair Narek Mantashyan and News.am, Analitik.am, 168.am, Iravunk.com, Blognews.am, Alternativ.am, Ipress.am news websites*, regarding 168 Hours Ltd. and Iravunk Media Ltd..

We should remind that on January 4, 2023, the lawsuit was rejected regarding the two media outlets on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. 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. It was caused by articles on the above-mentioned websites, according to which Vardan Badasyan assigned positions for money during his previous activities.[[74]](#footnote-74)

A new procedure has been initiated regarding the other media outlets. This year, a court hearing was held on February 26, and on March 18, according to the court judgement, the lawsuit was partially upheld. Narek Mantashyan was obliged to publish a refutation on the mentioned media platforms, as well as on his Facebook page, to pay the plaintiff 300,000 AMD as compensation for defamation. As of March 31, no appeal has been filed against the judgement.

**On March 26**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a 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, honor and business reputation.The lawsuit, filed on August 10, 2021, was caused by the June 30 issue of Ditaket program, 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.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 22 of this year.

**On March 27**, the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a regular court hearing on the case of *Hraparak Daily* LLC *v.* *Media Initiatives Center* *NGO*, demanding public refutation of the information considered defamatory and a compensation. The case is examined twice in the Court of First Instance. The Court of Appeal upheld the defendant's appeal against the judgment of the Court of General Jurisdiction, overturned it and sent the case for a retrial. 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. (For details see CPFE’s annual reports for 2021-2023, in the *Reports* section on khosq.am website).

The next court hearing was scheduled for October 3 of this year.

In the morning of **March 29**, Karine Simonyan, the correspondent of Lori and Tavush marzes of Liberty Radio Station, being in Yerevan, learned that her working camera was stolen from her Vanadzor apartment. According to the journalist, the camera was empty, no other items, no less valuable, were taken, and what happened was most likely due to her professional activity and could be an attempt to warn, intimidate and silence her. In this regard, journalistic organizations issued a statement.[[76]](#footnote-76)

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

*In the first quarter of 2024, the CPFE recorded* ***41*** *facts on the violation of the right to receive and disseminate information. In only* ***2*** *cases a lawsuit was filed with the court, demanding provision of official information. The facts recorded during the period under review, as well as the new developments related to the events from past periods are presented below in chronological order.*

**On January 3,** Sputnik Armenia news agency applied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with an inquiry for information about the violations registered in the Republic on New Year's Eve. On January 15, with a delay, the agency replied that they need an additional 1 month to answer, but they did not provide an answer.

**On January 15,** the same media outlet applied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, requesting information on the driver's licenses of persons who lost their upper or lower limbs after the 44-day war in Armenia in 2020 and subsequent military operations. No response was received within the terms prescribed by the law, nor was it informed about the need for additional time.

**On February 19,** Sputnik Armenia applied to Armen Ghazaryan, Head of the Migration and Citizenship Service of the RA Ministry of Internal Affairs, with an inquiry related to the problems of registration of the RA citizens going to Russia. The response was provided with a delay - on March 25, after multiple calls, and a generic, vague response was given.

The following inquiries of the **Fip.am** fact-checking platform, addressed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, remained unanswered:

**On January 9,** an inquiry was sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with a request for information on the number of criminal cases (initiated criminal proceedings) initiated in 2017 under the Article of Illegal Enrichment of the RA Criminal Code, the number of involved indictees, the number of cases sent to court with an indictment, and the number of sentences entered into force.

With another inquiry sent **on the same day,** the website wanted to find out whether the Ministry of Internal Affairs has any information regarding the ban on the operation of any vehicle based on sub-clause 6 of clause 6 of the RA Government Decision No. 955-N dated 2007.

The inquiry sent to the same government agency **on January 11** referred to the number of vehicles on the balance sheets of the state bodies of the Republic of Artsakh as of September 20, 2023 and, if so, how many of them are currently under the management of the RA state bodies.

With the inquiry sent **on February 20,** the website wanted to know what actions had been taken to rectify the software issues mentioned in the Road Control Armenia application (the types of violations are not specified) since December 26, 2023, and what demands were submitted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the service organization.

**On January 11,** Pastinfo.am received the answer to the inquiry dated January 3, sent to the Investigative Committee on December 26 last year. The inquiry referred to 32 Armenians repatriated from Azerbaijani captivity on December 13, 2023. A number of clarifications important for the media were missing in the response to the inquiry, in particular, related to the torture of the prisoners of war, as well as their abduction. Accordingly, **on January 22, 2022,** the media again sent a written inquiry to the same structure. Again, no clear answer was given to this inquiry. The Investigative Committee reported that they responded to the inquiry earlier. The inquiry was sent for the third time **on January 30.** This letter has gone completely unanswered.

**On January 15,** Factor TV sent an inquiry to the Judicial Department to find out the budget of the film "Delayed Justice and Judicial Corruption. When and How will It End".[[77]](#footnote-77) Having the requested information, the state agency did not provide it to the editorial office, but published it on its Facebook page, thus violating the media's right to prepare and publish exclusive material.

**On January 16,** the Civil Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan terminated the proceedings on the case of the Freedom of Information Center v. Civil Contract Party, on the grounds of approving the settlement agreement concluded between the parties.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 4, 2023, demanding provision of the list of donations received during the party's fundraising evening.

The defendant party was obliged to provide the requested information and pay a state fee in the amount of 20,000 AMD.

**On January 17,** the Freedom of Information Center sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports to find out whether the agency published the 2023 annual statistics on inquiries for information received during the year, in accordance with Article 7, Part 3, Clause 11 of the RA Law on Freedom of Information. FOICA also asked to clarify whether the Ministry used the uniform statistics template developed by FOICA. The agency responded within the specified time, but in terms of content, it was not complete, they did not address some of the issues at all.

**On the same day,** FOICA also applied to the Ministry of Finance **with the same question.** The latter provided an incomplete answer. It was not mentioned whether it published annual statistics, the link to the statistics was not provided (although it is published on a monthly basis on the website of the Ministry) and the question regarding the application of the FOICA template was not addressed.

**On January 19,** the organization addressed the SRC with the same question, the answer of which was assessed as incomplete. The committee did not respond to the question about the annual statistics, provided a link to the monthly reports, and did not respond to the question about the application of the FOICA template.

**On the same day,** an incomplete answer was received to the inquiry addressed to the Urban Development, Technical Standards and Fire Safety Inspectorate **on the same issue.** That body provided only a link to the statistics of inquiries received by the media and did not respond to the question regarding the use of the FOICA template.

**On January 18,** CivilNet.am journalist Gevorg Tosunyan sent an inquiry to Yerevan Municipality regarding the consequences of the collapse of a part of the Tsitsernakaberd highway and its restoration. The answer from the Municipality was received on March 4, late and incomplete. Not all questions were answered clearly.

**On March 4,** the journalist sent another inquiry to the Municipality regarding the reconstruction of yards and replacement of parking lots. The reply was received with a delay, on March 12, and again incomplete.

**On January 22,** the news website Oragir.News sent an inquiry to the Investigative Committee, asking them to answer whether the relevant inquiries were made to the states and organizations with the technical capabilities of satellite filming or observations in the criminal case initiated in connection with the explosion of the fuel warehouse near Stepanakert on September 25, in order to provide Armenia with materials obtained from the scene of the incident.[[78]](#footnote-78) Belatedly, on February 7, the website received the response letter of the Investigative Committee dated January 29, according to which it is not possible to provide information, as it contains materials that are not subject to publication.

**On January 24**, the RA Administrative Court held a court hearing on the case of *Investigative Journalists NGO, the founder of Hetq.am online periodical, v. the RA Ministry of High-Tech Industry*.

By the lawsuit, filed on June 5, 2023, 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.

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 4, 2024.

**On January 24,** FOICA sent an inquiry to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting to provide information about the specific position of the RA Government on the issue of Artsakh in its foreign policy agenda, and whether the issue of the right to self-determination of the Artsakh Armenians and the issue of security guarantees for returning to Artsakh are included in the document of negotiations with Azerbaijan. FOICA also requested to provide information about which issues and problems related to Artsakh and Artsakh Armenians are presented for primary discussion by the RA Government on international platforms and in diplomatic relations with other states. The reply letter was provided with a delay, on February 6, but it did not essentially answer any questions. In the letter, there was only one generic idea that these issues are the focus of attention of the MFA. **On the same day,** the center sent an inquiry to the Investigative Committee, requesting to provide information about what is the stage of the criminal proceedings regarding the explosion of the gasoline warehouse in the adjacent area on the Stepanakert-Askeran road on September 25, 2023, and present information on the possible reasons and the RA or Artsakh officials involved in the criminal proceedings. The inquiry was not answered, and FOICA sent a second inquiry, to which the Investigative Committee provided an answer within the specified time, presenting a reasonable refusal.

**On the same day,** in a letter addressed to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the center requested to provide information regarding the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Artsakh and, if possible, their transfer to the Republic of Armenia during and after the 44-day war unleashed by Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020. The organization also requested to be informed where the property of cultural value brought from Artsakh to the RA is kept, and whether it is considered possible to transfer such property left in Artsakh to the RA. The answer was timely, but incomplete. The requested information about moving the property to Armenia and the property was missing.

**On February 2,** another inquiry was sent to MoESCS on this topic, the answer to which was also incomplete.

**On January 28,** Hetq.am online periodical wrote that the Ministry of Defense is again refusing to provide information under the guise of military secrecy.[[79]](#footnote-79) Having received information about the 87662 aircraft from a number of open sources, the website tried to verify them from the RA official bodies as well. The State Property Management Committee reported that it does not have any data on it. The Ministry of Defense gave a similar answer. And the clarifying question, whether the "Yak-40" is registered as a military aircraft, remained unanswered. The website notes that it took more than 1 month for the Ministry of Defense to refuse the answer, which has already become a common practice in the case of this state body. Often the release of information is denied under the guise of state/military secrecy, but that short answer is given only a few weeks after the inquiry.

**On January 30,** Infocom.am news website sent a written inquiry to the administrative head of Shirakamut Village of Lori Marz to get information about the infrastructure of the community. On February 14, with a delay, the website received a letter, according to which, in order to receive the requested information, one should first apply to Spitak Municipality, after which the questions will be answered per the Mayor's demand. Later, due to the issue becoming out of date, the media outlet did not apply to the community hall again.

**On February 1,** the same website sent a written inquiry to Yeghegnadzor Municipality to get information about the community's infrastructure. The answer was provided on February 9, in violation of the 5-day term prescribed by the law.

The Corruption Prevention Commission also responded to the inquiry of the same media in violation of the term prescribed by the law. On February 20, the editorial board applied to the institution, requesting the names of the MPs whose declarations were recorded. In terms of content, the Corruption Prevention Commission gave a proper answer, but in violation of the term, on February 28. Belatedly, on March 12, the answer to **the March 5** inquiry with the same content was also provided. On February 8, the website sent an inquiry to the Water Committee of the RA MTAI with a request to provide the list of settlements with drinking water in the RA in json format. **On February 28,** with a delay, a letter was sent, according to which the committee does not have the requested information.

**On the same day,** the website sent a written inquiry to Gazprom Armenia, requesting to provide the names of settlements with gas supply. After the end of the 5-day period, the media outlet contacted the company, and they informed that they did not receive the inquiry. The answer to the inquiry sent for the second time on February 13 was provided with a delay, on February 23.

**On February 13,** Infocom.am sent a written inquiry to Aghvan Vardanyan, MP of the NA "Armenia" faction, in order to get clarifications on the inconsistencies in the latter's declaration. Not receiving a response within the 5-day period prescribed by the law, the editorial board contacted him by phone, and he refused to answer the questions.[[80]](#footnote-80)  
 **On February 16,** the website addressed the same request to Civil Contract faction MP Karen Sarukhanyan. After the 5-day period expired, they called the MP, and the latter demanded another 30 days for an answer. Even after the expiration of that term, the inquiry remained unanswered despite additional calls.

**On February 21,** the website addressed Taguhi Ghazaryan, another MP of the Civil Contract faction, with the same inquiry. On February 28, her assistant informed by phone that there is no problem with Ghazaryan's declaration and there is no need to answer the inquiry.

Tatevik Gasparyan, Civil Contract faction MP, did not respond either to an inquiry with the same content sent **on February 28.**

**On February 1,** Aravot.am news website wrote that it sent an inquiry to the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports Zhanna Andreasyan, requesting to provide information about the pedagogues who, according to official information, proposed changing the subject "Armenian History" to "History of Armenia". The MoESCS replied that the agency is not authorized to disclose the names of these specialists.[[81]](#footnote-81) "The latter can speak publicly with their own consent and initiative." Earlier, the website addressed the Press Secretary of the RA Prime Minister Nazeli Baghdasaryan **with the same question** and requested the data of these teachers in order to have the opportunity to interview them and listen to their substantiations, but the Press Secretary did not provide it either and said that she checked with the Prime Minister that the proposal to revise the subject was brought forward in various formats and private conversations.

**On February 5,** the defendant on the case of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, applied to the Court of Appeal, challenging the judgement of the Court of General Jurisdiction, by which the lawsuit, filed on March 1, 2023, obliging to provide an answer to the inquiry, was upheld.

We should remind that the NGO requested that the Ministry 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 December 27, the court judgement obliged the Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide complete information.

**On February 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, v. Public TV Company CJSC*, demanding an answer to the inquiry. The lawsuit was filed on August 11, 2023, as 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. The next court hearing was scheduled for June 5.

**On February 12,** the news website Oragir.News sent a written inquiry to the Higher Education and Science Committee, asking for an explanation regarding the news that Rustam Sahakyan, Rector of Vanadzor State University, was given the title of professor by the SCC through falsification of official documents. No response was received.[[82]](#footnote-82)   
  
 **On February 15,** the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of the Fip.am website, filed a lawsuit in the Administrative Court against Arshak Arshakyan, the Head of the Human Resources Management Department of the RA Ministry of Internal Affairs, demanding to bring him to administrative liability on the basis of the violation of Article 189.7 of the Code on Administrative Offenses. The lawsuit was caused by the rejection of the response to the inquiry addressed to the government agency on January 8. In the inquiry, it was requested to provide the working time calculation sheet of the Minister of Internal Affairs for December, 2023. The claim was accepted for proceedings on February 23. A court hearing was scheduled for May 29.

**On February 15,** the founder of Fip.am website filed another lawsuit in the Administrative Court against the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, demanding to provide information. This inquiry referred to the clarification of the rejection of the previous inquiry, which also remained unanswered. On January 22, the plaintiff applied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, requesting to be informed on the basis of which provision of the RA Law on Freedom of Information the provision of information was refused. On February 20, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings; a court hearing was scheduled for July 3.

**On February 20,** Hetq.am online periodical sent an inquiry to the RA Central Bank to find out whether the fact that Ruben Vardanyan is in prison in Baku will be taken into account by the Central Bank in any way for the approval or rejection of the sale of 90% of Ameriabank shares, and whether the consent of Ruben Vardanyan, as a shareholder, is not mandatory for organizing the sale of the bank's shares. CB gave evasive answers to the two mentioned questions.[[83]](#footnote-83)

**On February 23,** Hetq.am online periodical wrote that it sent an inquiry to the National Security Service and the Ministry of Defense about the Czech citizen who crossed the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and was arrested by the Azerbaijani military. The media outlet inquired through which part of the border the citizen crossed, which security agency was in charge of that part of the border, how did that citizen manage to cross the inter-positional minefield, is the Armenian side involved in the case of the return process of the Czech citizen from Baku and finally, is that person related to the European Union Observation Mission in Armenia?[[84]](#footnote-84) Both agencies gave the same answer that they have no information about the border crossing by the Czech citizen. However, the Ministry of Defense previously requested an additional 30-day period to answer the questions of the editorial board and as a result refused.

**On February 29,** the Administrative Court of Appeal replaced the judge on the case of *Investigative Journalists NGO (founder of the Hetq.am news website) v. the National Assembly (the third party: the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Armenia)*, and on March 29, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings.

We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on December 14, 2021, with a claim of providing information. The media outlet did not receive answers to the following questions: who is served by each of the 43 vehicles of the National Assembly, and how much is the expense of each of them? Afterwards, the media applied to a court.

On June 30, 2022, according to the court judgement, Alen Simonyan was obliged to provide the requested information. In addition, it was decided to charge him 80,000 AMD as an attorney's fee and 8,000 AMD as a state duty.

The defendant challenged the judgement in the Court of Appeal. The next court hearing was scheduled for September 12.

**On March 6,** 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 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, filed on August 30, 2023, 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.

The next court hearing was scheduled for September 12.

**On March 14,** Gohar Hakobyan, a journalist of Aravot newspaper, applied to the Provincial Government of Aragatsotn to clarify the widespread rumors that the heroes' glory corners were removed from the schools of the marz. A little later, information refuting the news was spread on the Facebook page of the Provincial Government. In this way, the order established by the law was violated, according to which the person in charge of the information must respond to the inquiry in the same way in which the inquiry was received. In addition, with this approach, the Provincial Government deprived the media of the opportunity to receive the requested information first and prepare an exclusive publication.

**On** **March 14**, the Administrative Court held a regular court hearing on the case of *Union of Informed Citizens NGO, the founder of Fip.am website, v. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, claiming to oblige the latter to provide the information requested from the agency on October 20, 2022. The inquiry was about the assistance, expected 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 September 24.

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

**On January 10,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan accepted for proceedings thelawsuit filed by Hraparak Daily LLC against MP Artur Hovhannisyan on December 25, 2023, 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.[[85]](#footnote-85) A court hearing was scheduled for April 2.

**On January 3,** on the same occasion, Zhoghovurd newspaper editorial office LLC also filed a lawsuit against the MP, with demands to refute the publicly made statement and oblige him to apologize, to compensate the damage caused (in the amount of 4 million AMD). On January 17, the lawsuit was accepted for proceedings. A court hearing was scheduled for April 4.

**On January 29,** the Court of General Jursidcition of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of*168 Hours Ltd. and journalist Gohar Svazyan v. 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 honor, dignity and business reputation.

The lawsuit, filed on July 14, 2023, 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.[[86]](#footnote-86)

A hearing on the case was also held on March 5, and on the 25th, the court ruled to reject the lawsuit. The basis is the fact that the case did not prove that it was Ashot Davinyan who made the impugned post.

**On January 30,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan continued the retrial on the case of *News AM LLC v. Styopa Safaryan*, demanding a compensation for the damage caused to business reputation.

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.[[87]](#footnote-87) On July 15, 2022, the lawsuit was partially upheld. The court obliged the defendant to refute the impugned statements on his personal Facebook page. The defendant filed an appeal in the Court of Appeal, which was partially upheld, the judgement of the Court of First Instance was overturned, and the case was sent to the same court for a retrial.

The next court hearing was scheduled for June 6 of this year.

**On February 1,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Tavush Marz (Ijevan residence) held a regular court hearing on the case of *Aravot.am news website journalist Hripsime Jebejian v. citizen Khazhak Tananyan*, with the demand to protect honor and dignity from publicly expressed insults.

The lawsuit, filed on August 28, 2023, was caused by the remarks addressed to the journalist on the Internet.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Court hearings on the case were also held on March 19 and 21, the next one was scheduled for April 3.  
  
 **On February 7,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Yerevan held a court hearing on the case of *Ani Gevorgyan, editor of the Newday.am website, v. citizen Lala Bernetsyan*, with the demand to protect honor and dignity from publicly expressed insults. The lawsuit, filed on August 28, 2023, was caused by the campaign against the journalist on social networks, in the form of insults, threats, and calls for physical reprisals, started after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's press conference on July 25.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The next court hearing was scheduled for April 18.

**On February 20,** the Court of General Jurisdiction of Kotayk Marz (Abovyan residence) continued the court hearing on the case of the same plaintiff against citizen Diana Martirosyan, with demands to protect honor and dignity from publicly expressed insults and confiscate 400 thousand AMD in compensation.

This lawsuit was filed on October 13, 2023, and was caused by the attack of Diana Martirosyan on Ani Gevorgyan, which was accompanied by insults and threats, on September 11, during the Yerevan Council of Elders election campaign.[[90]](#footnote-90)

The next court hearing was scheduled for May 7 of this year.

**On February 13,** the Administrative Court held a court hearing on the case of *Armenian Second TV Channel LLC v. the 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 oblige it to adopt a decision on granting the license. We should remind that the lawsuit was filed on January 5, 2023. The next court hearing was scheduled for July 12 of this year.

**On March 5,** a judge was replaced in the Administrative Court of Appeal in another case involving the same plaintiff against the same defendant. This lawsuit was filed on August 6, 2021, demanding to recognize LLC as the winner in the licensing tender for the use of the capital broadcasting slot in the public multiplex and oblige it to make a decision on granting the license. On January 12, 2023, the Administrative Court ruled to terminate the case, against which the plaintiff filed an appeal in the Court of Appeal.

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

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3. [**https://infocom.am/hy/article/124246**](https://infocom.am/hy/article/124246) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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7. [**https://hy.armradio.am/archives/549094?fbclid=IwAR2El045QC3VK3YuQTtcBKw-OFFkr0383CkDuxWh22q9u4Ty43FgcdlzHys**](https://hy.armradio.am/archives/549094?fbclid=IwAR2El045QC3VK3YuQTtcBKw-OFFkr0383CkDuxWh22q9u4Ty43FgcdlzHys) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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84. [**https://hetq.am/hy/article/164512**](https://hetq.am/hy/article/164512) [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXwgJH0KASU&t=592s**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXwgJH0KASU&t=592s) [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
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88. [**https://www.aravot.am/2023/07/28/1358203/**](https://www.aravot.am/2023/07/28/1358203/) [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. [**https://www.aravot.am/2024/02/07/1398511/**](https://www.aravot.am/2024/02/07/1398511/) [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSHJT2LY\_J0**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSHJT2LY_J0) [↑](#footnote-ref-90)