



ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԶԱՆԳՎԱԾՍՆԻԿԻ լրատվության միջոցների էթիկայի
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**EXPERT OPINION OF
MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY
ON THE COMPLAINT BY IZABELLA SARGSYAN AND
LARA AHARONIAN
AGAINST “ARARAT” TV COMPANY**

Izabella Sargsyan and Lara Aharonian, Co-Chairperson of Women’s Resource Center, filed a complaint to Media Ethics Observatory against “Ararat” TV company. The program of “Countdown” cycle entitled “Soros Foundation: a Threat to Armenia” and aired on September 27, 2017 was the subject of the complaint.

According to the authors of the complaint, the program “(...) along with other issues, touched upon the laws on preventing domestic violence and prohibiting discrimination. Not only did the program guest disseminate obviously false information, but also the program author took a clearly biased stance, failing to distinguish his own position from that of the guest. We believe that the TV company grossly violated the principles of journalistic ethics and impartiality”.

On October 9, 2017, MEO, guided by point 5.8 of its Regulations (complaints related to the Code of Ethics violations by media not being a member of the self-regulation initiative may only be considered upon the consent of the media), submitted a letter to the “Ararat” leadership to firstly receive their consent, and secondly to learn about the position of the editorial staff of the TV company. The “Ararat” leadership did not respond. This opinion has been drawn up governed by point 5.9 of the Regulations, which reads as follows: “In the absence of the consent of the respective media as envisaged under point 5.8, MEO retains the right to express an opinion with regard to the violation of the Code by the media, notifying the latter about that.”

A. Facts

1. Hayk Ayvazyan, Head of “Luys” Information-Analytical Center, was the guest of [September 27, 2017 program](#) of “Ararat” TV “Countdown” cycle (host - Artak Muradyan).

- The program is published on YouTube and entitled “Soros Foundation: a Threat to Armenia”.

- At the beginning of the program host Artak Muradyan says: “We are going to talk about non-governmental organizations, international organizations and international foundations: what activities they implement, whether there is danger in these activities, what threats and challenges they pose for Armenia, the Armenian people and our set of values in general: it turns out that there are such and they are not few (...)” (min. 0:17-0:40).

- min. 2:31, the guest states: “Open Society Foundation in Armenia is engaged in (...), has two targets of activities: one is the propaganda of perversion and the process of its legalization (*MEO*: the host reacts by “Um-hum”), they finance a number of organizations engaged in advocating homosexuality (...). Second, they finance certain organizations, which try to destabilize the domestic political situation in Armenia in times of distress faced by the country, and lead to clashes.” The host does not object.

- min. 8:16, the host: “Next, you have noted that it is the destruction of core values of the traditional family. How is this done? Where is this done? Who is doing this?”

- min. 16:20, the guest says: “Children taken to a shelter are handed to same-sex couples for adoption, are sexually exploited, are used as donors of sexual organs (...).” And then: “According to official data, in Germany (...) in 2011 “Jugendamt” agency alienated from families 38,500 children, and in 2016 this number reached 84,000.” The host does not attempt to verify the source of information.

- min. 21:11, the host: “Next thing you point out as a risk, as a challenge, as a threat, is the destabilization of the domestic political situation. That is, specifically, Open Society Foundation-Armenia sourcing from Soros Foundation, threatens the domestic political stability, destabilizes the situation. Right? How? (...)”

- min. 21:30, in response to the question, the guest notes: “Last year, during the capture of Police patrol-guard service regiment, Head of Women’s Resource Center Lara Aharonian started spreading leaflets on the Internet, which were guidelines for taking actions against the police (...). We detected and compared them with the leaflets used during the coup d’état in Ukraine (...)”

2. The same spirit and targets were present also in the [September 7, 2017 program](#) of the same “Countdown” cycle, which hosted Hayk Nahapetyan, Coordinator of “For the Sake of Sovereignty Restoration” Initiative. Again, the same allegations were made against Open Society Foundations-Armenia and the organizations it finances, particularly against “Asparez” Journalists Club, Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly Vanadzor Office. To note, the same person, Hayk Nahapetyan, was hosted also in the [November 15, 2017 program](#) of the same cycle entitled “Who Is Instructing the Students and From Where Do the Anti-Government Winds Blow?”

B. Legislative and Ethical Norms

I. RA Law “On Mass Communication”

Article 4. Guarantees of the freedom of speech in the sphere of the media

1. Implementers of media activity and journalists shall operate freely in compliance with the principles of equality, legitimacy, freedom of speech (expression) and pluralism.

II. RA Law “On Television and Radio”

Article 49. The selection of licensees

1. When selecting a licensed entity, the National Commission shall consider the following:

(...)

4. ability to promote pluralism;

(...)

6. professional capacities of the staff.

III. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

1.3. To clearly distinguish facts and information from opinion, comment and analysis.

5.2. Not to promote in any way ethnic or religious hatred and intolerance, or any discrimination on political, social, sexual, and language grounds, exclude hate speech.

C. Conclusion

Media Ethics Observatory affirms that it is not the first time that “Countdown” program cycle of “Ararat” TV company touches upon the activities of non-governmental organizations funded by international institutions and foundations. Yet, the programs on this subject usually host persons with a negative attitude towards the above-mentioned organizations and their activities. It should be noted that such programs have not hosted representatives of the discredited organizations and no counter-opinions have been expressed. Hence, the principle of pluralism has been violated.

The program, against which the complaint has been brought, violates the principles of impartiality and fairness: the host, in essence, agrees with all the statements of the guest, whose speech does not distinguish facts from opinion; moreover, own opinion is misrepresented as an irrefutable fact.

The principle of accuracy has been violated. The guest quoted questionable data from other countries (for example, “Children taken to a shelter are handed to same-sex couples for adoption (...)” - see *the “Facts” Section*) and the host does not request mentioning the sources of information. The same principle has been violated when presenting allegations regarding applicant Lara Aharonian: “Last year, during the capture of Police patrol-guard service regiment, Head of Women’s Resource Center Lara Aharonian started spreading leaflets on the Internet, which were guidelines for taking actions against the police (...)” (see *the “Facts” section*). The host confirms the statements as if they are true.

MEO considers that the program also contained propaganda elements against non-governmental organizations. The title “Soros Foundation: a Threat to Armenia” of the program published on YouTube leaves an impression that it was meant not to reveal the truth, contribute to a comprehensive discussion, but to discredit NGOs and to form a negative

public opinion about them. MEO finds such practice unacceptable.

Media Ethics Observatory calls on the leadership of “Ararat” TV company:

- to be guided by the principles of pluralism, fairness and impartiality;
- to exercise the commitment to promote pluralism undertaken during the television broadcasting licensing competitions and to invite to programs on such subjects also people with contrary opinions;
- to respect the principle of accuracy. Make sure to verify from the speakers presenting questionable data the concrete sources that could prove the accuracy of information;
- to endeavor to ensure that the facts presented during the TV programs be distinguished from opinions and comments, and that the presented opinion and groundless argumentation are not misrepresented as irrefutable facts.

***Adopted at the December 13, 2017 MEO session
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[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 46 as of today. In its judgments MEO is guided by Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, adopted at the self-regulation body’s meeting on March 10, 2007, and revised on May 16, 2015