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**EXPERT OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY
ON THE COMPLAINT BY
THE COMMISSION ON TELEVISION AND RADIO
REGARDING THE REPORTS BROADCAST DURING
THE JUNE 20, 2021 "AZAT LURER" PROGRAM OF
"FREE NEWS" TV COMPANY**

A. FACTS

On June 30, 2021, Media Ethics Observatory received the appeal of the Commission on Television and Radio regarding the reports of "Azat Lurer" program broadcast on June 20, 2021, at 17:28:57-17:47:39, on "Free News" TV company.

The Commission expects to receive the MEO position on the actions of the journalist and the media during the above-mentioned audio-visual program.

During the program, on the voting day of the 2021 RA NA Snap Elections the journalist in a live broadcast interfered in the electoral process in one of the polling stations, arguing aggressively with the proxy of one of the candidates or making remarks to the chairman of the electoral commission, etc.

On October 30, 2020, "Free News" joined the Media Self-Regulation Initiative of Armenia by signing the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists.

Nevertheless, "Free News" has not joined the [Memorandum on Coverage of the 2021 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly](#), which was approved by the members of the Media Self-Regulation Initiative participating in the annual general meeting held on May 14-16, 2021 in Dilijan. Following the approval the Memorandum was published on the YPC website and is open for signing.

On July 16, 2021 MEO initiated an online discussion of the appeal.

B. ETHICAL NORMS

I. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

7. Integrity In Covering Elections And Referendums

7.1. To be tolerant in respect of all parties and candidates.

II. Memorandum on Coverage of the 2021 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly

C. We pledge on the days of silence and voting to:

- avoid live interviews and inquiries as much as possible so that no careless expression, unintentionally uttered word or mistake be considered as campaigning and violation of the law;
- in an interview with an observer, clearly mention which organization he/she is accredited from;
- urge journalists covering the voting not to engage in debates at the polling stations with the commission chairman and members, observers, proxies, voters, and not to interfere in the electoral process;
- immediately inform the chairman of the commission, law enforcement bodies, the CEC and the public about the impediments to the legitimate professional activities of journalists.

C. EXPERT OPINION

Media Ethics Observatory

appreciating that

- the Commission on Television and Radio continues to support the highlighting and strengthening of the media self-regulation initiative in the country with the expectation of receiving the position of the Media Ethics Observatory;

taking note of the fact that

- having joined the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, the TV company has not signed the Memorandum on Coverage of the 2021 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly, and therefore, has no direct obligation to comply with the provisions thereof;

recalling that

- the provisions of the Memorandum derive from the provisions of the Code and are intended to promote balanced and appropriate media coverage during elections;
- during the pre-election period there were many precedents when journalists, without clear need, persisted in getting answers to their questions from the participants of various events, as a result of which conflict situations, including use of violence, were created. The latter are recorded in a number of

statements of journalistic organizations;

states:

1. No obvious violations of the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists have been found in the report in question. At the same time, it contained some contradictions with the approaches of the Memorandum on Coverage of the 2021 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly, which is worthwhile to assess to emphasize the importance of developing the media self-regulation mechanisms.

MEO has decided

- based on the above, to develop an expert opinion;

- although “Free News” TV company has joined the self-regulation initiative and is obliged to publish the MEO judgments but not the expert opinions related to it, to call on the media to publish the main provisions of this document, which can help prevent similar disputes, which have currently become common.

MEO urges:

- The broadcast media to follow their air, to pay particular attention to live reports, and in case of violation of the rules of professional ethics by journalists in them, to take reasonable measures, right up to interrupting the live broadcast and informing the audience about what happened with an edited video material.

- To sign and comply with the Memorandum on Coverage of the 2021 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly, since the proper implementation of the rules will contribute to a balanced and adequate coverage of the elections - one of the most important events for the state.

- The members of the self-regulation initiative, taking into account the above-mentioned incidents, to amend the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, incorporating special norms on preconditions for provocation, proper behavior in tense, conflict situations. And in the 7th (“Integrity in Covering Elections and Referendums”) section of the Code, to include some provisions, based on the recommendations of the Memorandum on Coverage of the 2021 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly.

Adopted at the MEO July 29, 2021 session

by the following MEO composition:

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[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 69 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