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**EXPERT OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY
ON THE LAWSUIT OF
BUSINESSMAN KHACHATUR SUKIASYAN AGAINST
YEREVAN.TODAY AND SEVERAL OTHER NEWS WEBSITES
(In addition to the opinion of the Information Disputes Council on
the Same Lawsuit)**

A. FACTS

1. On July 8, 2021, the Information Disputes Council applied to Media Ethics Observatory to study the latter's June 30, 2021 opinion released in connection with the lawsuit filed by businessman Khachatur Sukiasyan against Yerevan.today and several other news websites. The IDC suggested to discuss it and present an expert opinion on it from the point of view of journalistic ethics.
2. On March 25, 2021, Yerevan.today published the following [piece](#) about businessman Khachatur Sukiasyan:

Beware: Khachatur Sukiasyan's petrol ruins cars. [Dejavu](#):

Famous oligarch Khachatur Sukiasyan (nicknamed Grzo), who is in fact the oligarch of Nikol Pashinyan's family, has recently acquired the "Ran Oil" company. It seemed that in the conditions of a non-growing market, he would create serious competition, steal customers from other companies operating in the field, thus increasing the appetite of his and Pashinyan's avid families. However, a unique paradoxical situation has been created in the market of petrol and diesel. The reality and paradox lie in the fact that during this period, almost all competitors (Flash, CPS, Max oil) have recorded an unprecedented increase in customers. The thing is that Sukiasyan Grzo, upon taking control of the company, began to import low-quality fuel at an extremely low price, as a result of which the engines of customers' cars break down after a short time. This information is rapidly spreading among drivers, they are massively refusing the service of Ran Oil petrol stations. Sukiasyan and Pashinyan do not care that the drivers' cars break down, they collect their income quickly, from wherever they can, as long as Nikol is the Prime Minister.

The businessman considered some factual data presented by the media as

slander and appealed to the court, demanding to oblige the media to publicly deny the factual data considered to be slander and to pay compensation.

3. Khachatur Sukiasyan filed lawsuits with similar content against [News.am](#), [Asekose.am](#), [Armday.am](#), [Yerkir.am](#), [168.am](#) and [Pastinfo.am](#).

4. The IDC initiated a discussion of this lawsuit.

5. The legal proceedings of the case are still in progress.

6. Meanwhile, the IDC concluded that the media did not present the content of the piece based on facts and data. At the same time, the Council noted that “at the moment of publication of the article, Khachatur Sukiasyan had not yet submitted a public bid to engage in political activities, while later he was elected RA National Assembly deputy from the ruling faction, and in the new situation the court proceedings may be considered from a different perspective, i.e. in the context of pressure on the media by a representative of authorities”. The IDC urged the businessman to withdraw his lawsuits and use extrajudicial mechanisms to resolve the information disputes.

B. ETHICAL NORMS

I. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

1. Accuracy and Impartiality

1.1. Prior to publishing, to check the accuracy of information from any source, not to conceal or distort facts, and not to publish obviously false information;

1.2. clearly notify the audience about the cases when the editorial office received information of public significance, but has been unable to verify the facts after employing all the reasonable measures;

1.3. to demonstrate a responsible approach to the dissemination of information taken from social networks or new media, to be sure to mention whether it is verified, reliable, or subject to further verification;

1.4. to clearly distinguish facts and information from opinion, comment and analysis;

1.5. to rely on accurate facts and trustworthy information when making analysis and comments.

2. Integrity in Relations with Sources of Information

2.1. To the extent possible, specify the sources of information;

2.2. to the extent possible, avoid using confidential sources of information and, before promising to keep the source of information confidential, always justify that decision. However, if the provision of information is conditioned upon keeping the source confidential, never to disclose the source.

6. Integrity in Relations with the Public

6.2. To be ready to meet with persons or representatives of organizations who

feel offended or defamed by a certain publication, and provide an opportunity of response for all those against who criticism and accusations have been made in the publications.

C. EXPERT OPINION

Media Ethics Observatory

having discussed

the appeal and relevant opinion of the Information Disputes Council on the lawsuits filed by businessman Khachatur Sukiasyan against Yerevan.today, as well as News.am, Asekose.am, Armday.am, Yerkir.am, 168.am and Pastinfo.am;

admitting the fact that

the piece addresses an urgent issue of public significance;

highlighting that

in such cases it is more important to choose the right genre and relevant tools of publication;

states:

1. The media did not clearly position in terms of genre the piece in question re-published from “Dejavu” Telegram channel, presenting rumors and gossip as reliable information, without facts, references.
2. There is confusion between the news and its commentary, as the editorial staffs have not clearly separated them in the publication.
3. Investigation could be an appropriate genre for the publication of this type of information, which would provide data and comments by the affected drivers, relevant experts, NGOs involved in the protection of drivers' rights, and representatives of government agencies responsible for overseeing the fuel market.

ALTHOUGH, according to the MEO Regulations, the publication of an expert opinion is not mandatory for the media, including the members of the self-regulation initiative, Media Ethics Observatory urges to publish the current opinion, which could help prevent similar disputes that have currently become common.

Joining the call of the IDC to withdraw the lawsuits and use extrajudicial mechanisms to resolve information disputes, MEO urges RA NA deputy Khachatur Sukiasyan in the future to use the right of denial and response to the extent possible before going to court.

***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