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MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

STATEMENT

ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN

THE RA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AND

THE PUBLIC TELEVISION OF ARMENIA

MEO Composition:

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On December 28, 2021, the RA Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan appealed to the Public Television and the Council of Public Broadcaster, demanding clarifications over not covering the ombudsman's publications in "Lurer" ("News") programme.

The Council of Public Broadcaster has issued an official clarification on the matter. Human rights activist Zaruhi Hovhannisyanyan also appealed to Media Ethics Observatory regarding some of the formulations of that clarification. However, prior to that appeal, MEO had already initiated the discussion, hence we believe that Zaruhi Hovhannisyanyan may also get the answers to her questions in this statement.

MEO has already touched upon the relations between the Human Rights Defender and the Public Television by releasing an [expert opinion](#) in this regard on July 12, 2021 at the request of the Public Television. However, recent developments show that the problem has not been resolved, and has even intensified, thus, MEO decided on its own initiative to once again address the contradictions between the two public institutions.

At the January 17, 2022 online session MEO delegated its members Boris Navasardian, Nouneh Sarkissian and Shushan Doydoyan to meet with the members of the Council of Public Broadcaster and the executive management of the Public Broadcaster, with the expectation of receiving their position on the issue.

In addition to the meeting, MEO also reviewed the official [clarification](#) of the Public Broadcaster's Council.

Based on the results of the study of the positions of the parties, Media Ethics Observatory states:

1. The conflict between two important public institutions, the Human Rights Defender and the Public Television, which from time to time becomes acute, is

worrying and unacceptable. MEO once again emphasizes that the contradictions between these institutions can be resolved not through mutual accusations, but through discussions in a partnership atmosphere.

2. Media Ethics Observatory takes note of the statistics on the coverage of ombudsman's activities, as well as the clarifications of the Public Broadcaster Council and executive management that they have tried to reach a verbal agreement on the ombudsman's activities' coverage, which, however, has not further become a basis for joint work.

3. Nevertheless, MEO believes that the part of the Public Broadcaster's clarification, which reads "Many state and public institutions in Armenia deal with human rights issues, such as the courts, the police, social security structures, inspection bodies, human rights NGOs, etc. All this is also covered by "Lurer", and it is obvious that the ombudsman's activities are not the only ones in the context of human rights protection", unnecessarily puts a sign of equality between the independent institution for human rights protection and state structures, as well as between the ombudsman and NGOs. Each of these structures has its functions, and the reference to the activities of one of them does not replace the coverage of the activities of the other.

4. As for the clarification by the members of the Council of Public Broadcaster that instead of the ombudsman's statement on a specific border situation, the explanations of the RA Ministry of Defense were presented, MEO believes that, based on the principle of comprehensive coverage, the MoD clarification could be presented only after the ombudsman's statement. Otherwise, it turns out to be a refutation without the piece, which is refuted.

5. Taking note of the Public Broadcaster management's comment that they have the right to choose which source to quote, and refraining from interfering with the media's editorial policy, MEO also recalls the professional journalistic norm of taking into consideration information from different, especially two official sources. At the same time, it does not release the media from the obligation to verify the facts from a third source in case of conflicting information or to check the facts on its own, especially when it concerns people's destinies.

6. Also, reluctant to interfere with the editorial independence of the Public Broadcasters, MEO, anyway, proposes to consider the possibility of signing a memorandum of cooperation between the Human Rights Defender and the Council of Public Broadcaster, which would include the principles and regulations on coverage of the ombudsman's office activities. MEO is ready for a consultative engagement in the development of such a memorandum, if the parties deem it expedient.

7. MEO acknowledges that the Public Broadcaster may, at its discretion, decide which of its programme cycles should cover a certain institution. Nevertheless, MEO proposes the management of the Public Television and the ombudsman's office to consider the issue of having a special programme covering the activities of the Human Rights Defender and broadcasting it on a certain regular basis.

8. Attaching importance to the impersonalized attitude of public institutions towards each other and the solid and efficient cooperation among them, MEO would consider an interview with Human Rights Defender Arman Tatoyan, who is soon to leave office, as a positive step to overcome the accumulated

problems. The programme should be dedicated to the six-year activities of Arman Tatoyan, be free from mutual accusations and unnecessary aggression and should refer only to the activities of the ombudsman.

Adopted at the MEO February 2, 2022 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