



**ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԶԱՆԳՎԱԾՍՆԻՆ ԵՐԱՏՎՈՐԻԾՅԱՆ ՄԻԳՐԱՆԵՐԻ ԷԹԻԿՍԻ
ԴԻՏՈՐԴ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ**

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EXPERT OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding RA Prime Minister Chief of Staff Arayik Harutyunyan's complaint against the piece titled "Rectors Are a Disgrace to the Republic: Arayik Harutyunyan's "Love" Led to Vanadzor Rector's Promotion to Professor," published on Oragir.news website.

A. FACTS

- On February 13, 2024, Arayik Harutyunyan, Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister, submitted a complaint to Media Ethics Observatory regarding an article titled "Rectors Are a Disgrace to the Republic: Arayik Harutyunyan's "Love" Led to Vanadzor Rector's Promotion to Professor," published on February 10 on Oragir.news website. Quoting his own sources, the author of the article claimed that the Supreme Certifying Committee (SCC) granted Vanadzor State University Rector Rustam Sahakyan the title of professor in 2020 by falsifying official documents and violating procedures, allegedly following instructions from Arayik Harutyunyan, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. Additionally, the article quoted Smbat Gogyan, the then head of the SCC, who claimed an inability to recall the process from 4 years prior, yet maintained there had been no pressure from the ESCS Minister on his decision-making.
- The complainant highlighted that the article contained blatantly false and defamatory information about A. Harutyunyan, i.e. himself, asserting that during his tenure as ESCS Minister, he never issued any instructions or unlawful directives regarding the recognition of academic titles. According to the complainant, the author of the publication failed to make any effort to verify the accuracy of the information with either him or the Prime Minister's Office. Arayik Harutyunyan requested MEO to provide an assessment both to the practice and the article, as well as to issue a refutation demand to the media.
- After reviewing the complaint, MEO reached out to the editorial office of Oragir.news and obtained clarifications from Gevorg Emin-Teryan, the website's editor-in-chief. Emin-Teryan informed that regarding other pieces related to Arayik Harutyunyan, they had made multiple attempts to contact him or his representatives for comments, but without success. Therefore, Emin-Teryan stated that they saw no point in attempting to seek clarification for this specific piece.
- The editor-in-chief of the media confirmed their readiness to

consider publishing a refutation on the website upon receiving an appropriate request from Harutyunyan or his representative. Furthermore, they offered to provide a platform, in any format, for Arayik Harutyunyan to present his perspective.

- Following the decision made at the April 2 online session, MEO additionally reached out to the representative of Arayik Harutyunyan, presenting the above-mentioned viewpoint of the editorial office of Oragir.news and offered its support in facilitating communication for the purpose of publishing a response.
- Arayik Harutyunyan's representative declined the offer to engage with Oragir.news in any format and informed that on April 3 he had written to the editors, demanding a refutation. In response, another article was published on April 9 on the website, essentially rejecting the demand for a refutation. The rejection was justified by citing the expiration of the one-month period stipulated by law for submitting a refutation demand.
- Following the publication of the article in question on February 12, Oragir.news submitted a written inquiry to the present leadership of the SCC, seeking a comment on the issue. This circumstance was mentioned in another article on the topic, titled "The Windbag Professor of Lori Valley: 3 Persons, 2 Crimes from Vanadzor University." According to Gevorg Emin-Teryan, as of now, they have not received any response from the SCC.

B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS

RA Law "On Mass Communication"

Article 8.1. An individual retains the right to demand that a media entity refute any factual inaccuracies within their information dissemination that violate the individual's rights, should the media entity fail to substantiate the accuracy of those facts.

Article 8.5. In addition to seeking a refutation, an individual has the right to demand the publication of a response.

[Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists](#)

... editors and journalists are obligated:

Article 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;

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

1.6. To ensure that the reports, photo, video and audio materials correspond to the reality, the headlines derive from the content of the material, citations are not used outside of context, and

correspondence of the personal data of ordinary citizens with public figures is not abused;

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;

2.3. To avoid the use of covert and secret methods of obtaining information, except when traditional open methods do not ensure receipt of information of public interest. The need for such methods must be explained and justified in the actual publication.

C. MEO EXPERT OPINION

MEO, having examined the complaint and obtained additional clarifications from the parties, states:

- MEO lacks sufficient tools and capacities to undertake an investigation in order to verify the accuracy of the information outlined in the article in question. Consequently, MEO is unable to issue a demand for refutation to the media. MEO advised the complainant to directly engage with Oragir.news, seeking a refutation/response in accordance with the provisions of the MC Law.
- Oragir.news has violated the articles outlined in Part B of the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, due to the following reasons:
 - The editorial team of Oragir.news failed to check the accuracy of the information obtained from their sources prior to publication. Moreover, they did not make an effort to seek a comment from Arayik Harutyunyan or his office. Despite the editor's explanation citing previous unsuccessful attempts to obtain comments from Harutyunyan on other matters, it is essential in journalistic practice to try to obtain comments from individuals discussed in an article, providing them with an opportunity to respond.
 - The piece fails to outline the author's (editor's) process for verifying the accuracy of the information, leaving the audience without a clear understanding of the methods employed.
 - The headline of the article does not align with its content.
 - The information provided in the piece originates from anonymous sources, yet it neglects to clarify the reasons behind the source's desire for confidentiality (personal, professional safety, etc.). Additionally, the publication does not sufficiently justify why the confidentiality of these sources is essential.
- MEO would welcome the readiness of the media to provide a

platform for Arayik Harutyunyan to publish a response and could offer its expert support in assessing the appropriateness of the content of the response in terms of legal and ethical standards. However, the editorial team chose not to contest or acknowledge the suitability of the response's content, opting instead to reject its publication, citing the expiration of the legally stipulated period for a refutation. Furthermore, they seized the opportunity to nearly entirely republish provisions that raise concerns from the standpoint of responsible journalism. MEO views this as an even clearer display of Oragir.news' disrespect for principles of professional ethics.

***Adopted on April 11, 2024
by the following MEO composition:***

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[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 76 as of today. In its judgments MEO is guided by the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, adopted on March 10, 2007 and revised at the June 25, 2023 general meeting of the media that joined the self-regulation initiative.