



## ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԶԱՆԳՎԱԾՍՆԻԿԻՆ ԵՐԱՏՎՈՐԻԾՆԱՆ ՄԻԳՈՇՆԵՐԻ ԷԹԻԿՍԻ ԴԻՏՈՐԴ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ

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### EXPERT OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the complaint of journalist Lia Sargsyan about the conduct of Tigran Hakobyan, Chairman of the Commission on Television and Radio, during their interaction after the January 23 session of the CTR

#### A. FACTS

- On January 29, 2024, journalist Lia Sargsyan submitted a complaint to Media Ethics Observatory. According to Sargsyan, after the conclusion of the Commission on Television and Radio session on January 23, she attempted to interview Artur Manukyan, a member of the CTR. At that moment, she was approached by the CTR Chairman Tigran Hakobyan. Upon learning that Sargsyan represented “Hraparak” daily, Hakobyan prohibited Artur Manukyan from giving the interview. Afterwards, according to the complainant, Tigran Hakobyan started shouting, specifically saying, “You're not a journalist... who fooled you into thinking that? You are a trash-tier media... You are a lovely woman, mind your own business... She showed up with that pretty face and is now trying to provoke.”
- In her complaint, Lia Sargsyan provided the video recording of the described incident, requesting MEO to review the situation and evaluate Tigran Hakobyan's conduct. Lia Sargsyan emphasized that she was appealing to MEO as a journalist, without any authorization or assignment from her employer, the leadership of “Hraparak”, for taking this action.
- After examining Lia Sargsyan's complaint, MEO reached out to the CTR Chairman Tigran Hakobyan, seeking clarification. The latter specifically mentioned that during the decision to suspend the license of “Tospa” radio company, the broadcaster of the Russian state-owned “Sputnik-Armenia”, there had been tension among the members of the CTR, including himself, as they tried to resist various pressures. At the same time, Hakobyan stated that some Armenian media, including “Hraparak” daily, had attempted to escalate the tension by accusing the CTR of displaying “anti-Russianness”, and publishing several articles that contained groundless assertions and insults against Hakobyan himself and the structure under his leadership.
- Tigran Hakobyan provided MEO with relevant excerpts from the articles mentioned, citing them as the basis for his attitude towards “Hraparak”. Additionally, he claimed that following the described incident, since January 23, the newspaper had

orchestrated “bacchanalia” against him, further solidifying his and his colleagues’ perception of “Hraparak” daily.

- Tigran Hakobyan noted that he had prohibited CTR member Artur Manukyan from giving an interview to the “Hraparak” journalist, by using his status as a friend.

## **B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS**

### **RA Constitution, Article 29: Prohibition of Discrimination**

Discrimination based on sex, race, skin color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion, world view, political or other views, belonging to a national minority, property status, birth, disability, age, or other personal or social circumstances shall be prohibited.

### **RA Law “On Public Service”**

**Article 21.1.** The integrity system shall include the principles of conduct of public servants and persons holding public positions and rules of conduct deriving from them.

**Article 25.1.** Public servants and persons holding public positions shall demonstrate conduct appropriate for their position. They shall demonstrate a well-mannered attitude towards all persons they interact with in the course of exercising their powers.

### **RA Law “On Mass Communication”**

**Article 4.1.** Implementers of media activity and journalists shall operate freely in compliance with the principles of equality, legitimacy, freedom of speech (expression) and pluralism. Conducting his/her legitimate professional activities a journalist, as a person performing a social duty shall be protected by the RA legislation.

**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.

### **RA Law on “Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women”**

**Article 6. Part 1.** Direct and indirect gender discrimination shall be prohibited in all spheres of public life.

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

... editors and journalists are obligated:

**6.1.** to encourage free exchange of opinions, regardless of any differences between those opinions and the editorial views;

**6.3.** to admit mistakes and to be ready to correct them;

## **MEO [Regulations](#)**

**4.10.** MEO examines the information disputes with the participation of those officially engaged in the field of information, releases a statement or prepares and publishes an expert opinion, if necessary.

### **C. MEO EXPERT OPINION**

- Despite “Hraparak” daily expressing its reluctance to engage with the Media Self-Regulation Initiative and MEO in the past, MEO initiated an examination of Lia Sargsyan’s complaint related to an issue that had emerged during the execution of her professional duties, viewing it solely as an individual complaint of a journalist, without representation from any specific media and,
- having studied the RA legislation, along with the widely recognized norms of international law pertinent to the case and the norms outlined in the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists,
- emphasizing the importance of relations built on mutual respect and constructive cooperation between representatives of state institutions and journalists,
- having analyzed the video provided by the complainant, as well as the clarifications of the CTR Chairman Tigran Hakobyan and the accompanying articles published in “Hraparak” daily, along with the comments from other CTR representatives present during the incident,

### **MEO states that:**

- Tigran Hakobyan had the opportunity to protect himself and the good reputation of the institution headed by him from public insult and defamation through extra-judicial and/or judicial means envisaged by RA legislation, in particular, by using the right to refutation and response.
- The resentment provoked by the discussed articles published in “Hraparak” does not justify the unrestrained behavior of the CTR Chairman, nor the remarks containing elements of discrimination towards Lia Sargsyan personally, especially considering that her previous publications had not provided grounds for such a treatment.
- During the incident, Lia Sargsyan showed a certain level of persistence, the necessity of which could be debated from a professional standpoint. In any case, this should not have become a basis for the violation of ethical rules by an individual holding a high public position, as well as the requirement of the RA Law “On Public Service” (to demonstrate a well-mannered attitude towards all persons they interact with in the course of exercising their powers).
- In light of the situation involving the attempted interview with the CTR member Artur Manukyan, and potential similar occurrences, it is advisable for CTR members to adhere to clear (documented) rules of public communication, the development and implementation of which is an urgent necessity.

- The CTR Chairman's public regret for the emotional outburst could have been the best solution to the incident, at the same time serving as a positive example for other officials and potentially preventing the further escalation of the dispute in the public arena. However, this did not happen.
- MEO is hopeful that the incident and this expert opinion will prompt the representatives of the RA state structures to draw appropriate conclusions for public communication.

#### **D. SPECIAL OPINIONS**

- Two MEO members expressed a special opinion about the complaint. One member believed that the case should not have been accepted for consideration, arguing that even though the journalist had filed the complaint independently without consulting her media's leadership, she had still been assigned to cover the January 23 session of the CTR by "Hraparak" daily, which in principle, does not acknowledge the MEO activities, having publicly stated this position. Therefore, according to this special opinion, the review of the complaint of "Hraparak" journalist could not have any positive significance or importance for that media.
- The other MEO member, offering a special opinion as well, also considered that the complaint should not have been reviewed.

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

**Gnel NALBANDYAN**, Chief Editor of "Newmag" Publishing House

**Ruben BABAYAN**, Director, Professor

at Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography

**Boris NAVASARDIAN**, Honorary President of Yerevan Press Club

**Davit ALAVERDYAN**, Chief Editor of "Mediamax" news agency

**Vigen SARGSYAN**, Chairman of the Commission on Professional

Ethics of Yerevan Press Club

**Karineh HARUTYUNYAN**, Executive Director of Gyumri "GALA" TV

Company

**Levon BARSEGHYAN**, Founder and Head of "Asparez" Journalists'

Club

**Ara SHIRINYAN**, Chairman of the Council of Public Broadcaster of

Armenia

**Narineh AVETISYAN**, Executive Director of Vanadzor "Lori" TV

Company

**Ara GHAZARYAN**, Lawyer

**Ashot MELIKYAN**, Chairman of Committee to Protect Freedom of

Expression

**Anzhela STEPANYAN**, Editor of Armavir “Alt” TV Company  
**Nouneh SARKISSIAN**, Managing Director of Media Initiatives Center  
**Shushan DOYDOYAN**, President of Freedom of information Center

*[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.*