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EXPERT OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the complaint by RA NA Deputy Lilit Minasyan to assess the compliance of information published in several media with the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

A. FACTS

- On May 30, 2024, RA NA Deputy Lilit Minasyan (“Civil Contract” faction) submitted a complaint with Media Ethics Observatory regarding information published about her on various news portals. The complaint specified that a piece with identical content published on May 25, 2024 on Yerkir.am, Lurer.com, Ankakh.com, Hayeli.am, Armday.am, Iravunk.com, and 168.am was a direct reproduction of a post by Facebook user Sargis Zelveyan. The post claimed that Lilit Minasyan, along with two other deputies from the “Civil Contract” faction possessed citizenship of another country alongside their RA citizenship, which is prohibited by the RA Constitution. *“As per the information provided to us, CC deputies started “obtaining” passports from 2021. Those accusing Reverend Bagrat of holding Canadian citizenship ignore the fact that he was granted this citizenship by the Canadian government due to his position as the spiritual pastor of the Armenian Community in Canada. These deputies have dual citizenship not with the USA, France, but with European countries, particularly those that have a visa-free regime with Turkey. Having received this information, we now want the CC deputies to either refute or confirm its accuracy,”* the post read. It also included the series and numbers of the passports from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan allegedly belonging to the mentioned deputies. According to Lilit Minasyan's complaint, this information was false and politically motivated. It was highlighted that the leader of the opposition movement, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan, had also mentioned this information in his public speech, countering the claims from his opponents that he was ineligible for the position of RA Prime Minister because of his dual citizenship. Deputy Minasyan expected MEO to assess the compliance of the publications with the norms of journalistic ethics.
- Upon reviewing the complaint, MEO reached out to the mentioned media via e-mail, presenting the essence of the complaint and requesting their clarifications or position. None of the media replied to the MEO Coordinator's e-mails.
- In further correspondence, Lilit Minasyan informed that she had written to the media demanding a refutation, and would take into account the MEO expert opinion when deciding whether to defend her rights in court.

B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS

I. RA CONSTITUTION

Article 48, Paragraph 2. Everyone who has attained the age of twenty-five, has held citizenship of only the Republic of Armenia for the preceding four years, has been permanently residing in the Republic for the preceding four years, has the right of suffrage and has command of the Armenian language, may be elected as a Deputy of the National Assembly.

II RA Law “On Mass Communication”

Article 8: Right to Refutation and Response

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.

5. Along with refutation, a person has the right to demand publication of a response.

III Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

... editors and journalists are obligated:

- 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;
- 4.1. to respect and protect the human right to private life, including respect to personal and family life, residence, property, health condition, correspondence. Only public interest or protection thereof can justify publication of information regarding the privacy of high rank officials, public figures, and individuals aspiring to power or public attention;
- 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;
- 6.3. to admit mistakes and to be ready to correct them.

C. MEO EXPERT OPINION

After reviewing the complaint by Lilit Minasyan against several media, MEO states:

- The media mentioned in the complaint, without checking the accuracy of the facts, replicated the post by Facebook user named “Sargis Zelveyan” on their platforms, which contradicts the norms stipulated by points 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 of the [Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists](#).
- In addition to the above-mentioned issues, these media also ignored the principle of inviolability of private life as stipulated by point 4.1 of the Code, by publishing passport data, regardless of whether they were fake or real.
- The media also left Deputy Lilit Minasyan's public Facebook post on the issue unanswered, and did not reply to the MEO Coordinator's e-mails. Thus, they acted contrary to the principles of professional ethics outlined in points 6.2 and 6.3 of the Code.
- MEO calls on all those individuals who believe their rights have been violated in press publications or they have been defamed to first exercise their right to refutation and response, as stipulated by Article 8 of the RA Law “On Mass Communication” and to immediately contact the editorial offices responsible for the contentious publications.
- MEO calls on the media to disseminate this expert opinion using their available platforms.

***Adopted on July 9, 2024
by the following MEO composition:***

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Vigen SARGSYAN, Chairman of the Commission on Professional Ethics
of Yerevan Press Club

Boris NAVASARDIAN, Honorary President of Yerevan Press Club
Ruben BABAYAN, Director, Professor
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Ara GHAZARYAN, Lawyer

Ashot MELIKYAN, Chairman of Committee to Protect Freedom of
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Anzhela STEPANYAN, Editor of Armavir “Alt” TV Company

[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 82 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 May 18, 2024 general meeting of the media that joined the self-regulation initiative.