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JUDGMENT OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the complaint of the Commission on Television and Radio against several remarks made by host Gnel Sargsyan during “FreeNews” TV Company’s May 21 and 25, 2024 issues of “Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan” program

A. FACTS

- On May 31, 2024, Media Ethics Observatory received the complaint of the Commission on Television and Radio (CTR). The CTR requested MEO’s position regarding the remarks made by Gnel Sargsyan, the host of “Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan,” during the May 21 and 25, 2024 issues of the program. The CTR included the links of those remarks in the complaint: [FreeNews TV \[2024-05-21T18 45 00..2024-05-21T18 45 40\].ts](#) and [FreeNews TV \[2024-05-25T00 52 40..2024-05-25T00 53 40\].ts](#).
- The CTR considers the following expressions of the host to be problematic: *“In the 21.05.2024 issue, between 18:45:10 and 18:45:34, host Gnel Sargsyan says: “... Your dashnaks, you guys came by giving in, running away during the war. And there was that one guy who posted a photo from the positions, like Reverend Bagrat had gone there to see him or something. Our spiritual general, he shared something like that—yeah, that same spiritual general who, together with that Pegov from WarGonzo kept showing our border positions to the Turks.” “In the 25.05.2024 issue, between 00:52:49 and 00:53:35, host Gnel Sargsyan says: “... It is obvious that the Mother See, meaning the Catholicos, is also echoing the language of Galstanyan and his movement and they’re obviously backing it. When we tried to get the specific position of the Catholicos through the Mother See, our written request went unanswered, and they never picked up the phone. The Mother See is out of reach. Garegin B of Mother See is available only for Dog and Kocharyan. For those two, the phone’s always on. And let me tell you another thing: they are ready to launch their movement together, with a prayer session somewhere.”*
- After reviewing the complaint, MEO requested the CTR to provide links to the full episodes to get a complete picture of the expressions voiced. The CTR provided the links to those programs.

B. MEO JUDGMENT

After reviewing the CTR complaint and examining the videos in question, MEO states:

- While there is no formal violation of the provisions of the [Code](#) of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists by the host in the segments highlighted by the CTR, his remarks came dangerously close to crossing that line.
- The host, with a disdainful expression on his face, aggressive gesticulations and preceptorial tone, openly expresses his contempt for those figures whose political views differ from his own. The host targets some non-pro-government figures, blending his personal opinion and value judgments about them (which are acceptable) with language that discredits their personality, actions and ideas—behavior that is inconsistent with media values. Through his overall behavior, the host displays aggression towards those who do not have the opportunity to respond within the same program, given the rules of that TV format (television monologue).
- The host's speaking style is bullying and aggressive, the intonation is dismissive and intolerant, the facial expression and mimicry are filled with hatred, and his voice, nearly shouting, carries a sense of warning and is charged with disgust towards those he disapproves of.
- When sharing his views and evaluations, Gnel Sargsyan communicates his ideas in a manner that is inconsistent with the standards of journalism: he uses uncivil vocabulary, incorporates elements characteristic of criminal subculture, and makes derogatory remarks about those he dislikes. This is inconsistent with media values.
- Such behavior from a host on the air, widespread particularly in post-Soviet Russian TV, and labeled by terms like 'media killer' or 'telekiller', was characteristic of aggressive propaganda platforms. This is the worst example of what is known as 'opinion journalism.'
- After receiving the CTR complaint against the above-mentioned programs, as well as considering a number of informal, verbal concerns, complaints and indignation expressed to the MEO members regarding the program and its host, MEO (by random selection) reviewed several issues of "Free Talk with Gnel Sargsyan" program. In the near future, MEO will release a special public statement regarding this matter.

MEO reminds that the media that have signed the Code acknowledge the authority of MEO to review the compliance of their actions and publications with the provisions of that Code. They express their readiness to publish the specific parts extracted from the Media Ethics Observatory judgments that relate to violations of the Code, without adding any editorial remarks. They also commit to notifying MEO by providing a link to the particular publication.

***Adopted on August 9, 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, Director of “Regions TV” Website

Narineh AVETISYAN, Executive Director of Vanadzor “Lori” TV Company

Ara GHAZARYAN, Lawyer

Ashot MELIKYAN, Chairman of Committee to Protect Freedom of
Expression

Nouneh SARKISSIAN, Managing Director of Media Initiatives Center

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.