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JUDGMENT OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding RA NA Deputy Taguhi Ghazaryan's complaint against the piece "Without Exceptions for CC Deputies, It's Not a True Law: Examining Taguhi Ghazaryan's Non-Creative Work," published on "Zhoghovurd" daily

A. FACTS

- On May 24, 2024, Taguhi Ghazaryan, Deputy from the RA NA "Civil Contract" faction, submitted a complaint with Media Ethics Observatory, seeking an assessment of the compliance with the norms of journalistic ethics in an [article](#) titled "Without Exceptions for CC Deputies, It's Not a True Law: Examining Taguhi Ghazaryan's Non-Creative Work". The article was published in "Zhoghovurd" daily and republished on May 14, 2024 on Armlur.am website, run by the same daily.
- After accepting the complaint for review, MEO examined the documents and references provided. In particular, the article in question claimed that Taguhi Ghazaryan, along with her parliamentary duties, engaged in additional paid work, which is considered a violation of law and could lead to the revocation of her parliamentary mandate. To support this assertion, the article referenced a special award granted to T. Ghazaryan for her work in digitizing, editing and providing new interpretations of archival materials throughout the year. The author of the publication also reminded that deputies are only allowed to engage in paid scientific, pedagogical, and other creative work, arguing that the award in question "does not contain any creative elements." The article concluded by mentioning that an attempt was made to contact Deputy Taguhi Ghazaryan regarding the aforementioned issues, but she did not respond to the journalist's calls.
- On May 16, 2024, Taguhi Ghazaryan addressed the article in a Facebook [post](#), stating that she had applied to the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC) to find out whether the violation of the incompatibility requirement highlighted in the article had any basis. She had requested the CPC to issue an appropriate decision on the matter. Additionally, Ghazaryan mentioned that she had not received payment for some of the works listed in the article, and for another work she had consulted with the CPC in advance and obtained a decision confirming it as creative work. In her post, T. Ghazaryan detailed other pedagogical and creative works, noting that she received payment for some while others were unpaid. "Should it be determined that I violated the compatibility requirement in any way, I am ready to take full

responsibility and immediately eliminate the problems. However, if no violation is found, I am not going to sue the media for spreading defamation or seek compensation. My only expectation is that journalists and the media will continue to cover this issue in good faith and will correct the errors they have made, if any,” said Deputy Ghazaryan.

- In a [post](#) made on May 22, Taguhi Ghazaryan shared the letter received from the CPC in response to her inquiry, confirming that no legal violation was found in the above-mentioned actions of the Deputy, as she was not paid for some of the work performed, and that other work was classified as creative, which is permitted by law.
- On May 24, MEO Coordinator reached out to “Zhoghovurd” daily to present the essence of the complaint. Knar Manukyan, the editor-in-chief, responded with clarifying letters, mentioning specifically that prior to publishing the article, the author had tried multiple times to contact Taguhi Ghazaryan, but she hadn’t responded, as was often the case before. On May 23 and June 4, the media reached out to the CPC and received their assessment regarding a number of points mentioned in the article. The daily expressed readiness to publish a new article based on the obtained data. “Zhoghovurd” daily was also ready to listen to Deputy Taguhi Ghazaryan and publish her comments both in the daily and on the website.
- Complainant Taguhi Ghazaryan took note of the daily’s above-mentioned position, awaiting in any case the MEO judgment regarding the compliance of the article with ethical norms.

B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS

I. RA Law “On Public Service”

Article 31, Paragraph 1: Public servants and persons holding public positions may not hold a position not related to their status within other state or local self-government bodies, or any position within commercial organizations, or engage in entrepreneurial activities, or perform any other paid work, except for scientific, educational and creative work.

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. The demand for refutation has to be presented within a one month period following the day of publication of the information subject to refutation.

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

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

- 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;
- 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 JUDGMENT

After reviewing the complaint and obtaining further clarifications from the parties, MEO states that:

- The piece “Without Exceptions for CC Deputies, It's Not a True Law: Examining Taguhi Ghazaryan's Non-Creative Work,” published in “Zhoghovurd” daily and on ArmLur.am violated Article 1.1 of the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists (*“Prior to publishing, to check the accuracy of information from any source, not to conceal or distort facts”*). Despite the editorial team's assurance that they attempted to obtain a comment on the issue from Taguhi Ghazaryan before publishing the article, the claims in the article could have also been verified prior to the publication through official clarifications from relevant state agencies, in particular, the Corruption Prevention Commission - a thing done only after the publication of the article and Taguhi Ghazaryan's Facebook posts on the matter. Judging by the content of the article and other facts, there is no indication that an early publication was urgently necessary. Hence, the journalist had the chance to allocate more time to verifying the accuracy of the facts.
- Nevertheless, MEO appreciates the readiness of “Zhoghovurd” daily to present Taguhi Ghazaryan's viewpoint, alongside the clarifications provided by the CPC on the issue.
- If, as MEO was informed, the media was ready to prepare a new publication based on the newly revealed facts, they could have done so without awaiting the MEO's judgment, potentially rendering such a judgment unnecessary. Nevertheless, MEO calls on all those individuals who believe that their rights have been violated in press publications to utilize legal opportunities, starting with contacting the editorial office to demand a refutation or a response.
- 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.
- Since the article in question published in “Zhoghovurd” daily and on ArmLur.am was subsequently republished in the “Press Review” sections of a number of news portals, MEO urges these media to inform their audiences about this judgment as well.

***Adopted on June 27, 2024
by the following MEO composition:***

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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
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Levon BARSEGHYAN, Founder and Head of “Asparez” Journalists’ Club

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Karineh HARUTYUNYAN, Director of “Regions TV” Website

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