

August 19, 2025

## OPINION

### On the Information Dispute Between Zhoghovurd Daily Reporter Sona Grigoryan and Deputy Arsen Torosyan

#### Facts

On July 9, 2025, Media Ethics Observatory (MEO) was approached by *Zhoghovurd* daily reporter Sona Grigoryan, who applied for an expert opinion regarding a dispute that had emerged between her and Deputy Arsen Torosyan. MEO initiated a review of the application and is going to publish its position on the matter, guided by the [Code](#) of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists. At the same time, MEO applied to the Information Disputes Council (IDC), expecting an analysis of the legal aspects of the issue and a conclusion in that regard. Relying on this request, the IDC examined the dispute and presents this opinion.

According to available facts, *Zhoghovurd* daily reporter Sona Grigoryan contacted Deputy Arsen Torosyan via Facebook Messenger, requesting his comment on information received by the editorial office. Specifically, Grigoryan asked whether it was true that the parents of several missing servicemen had come across Torosyan near the Government building as he was leaving a meeting with the RA Prime Minister, indicating in her message that, *“two of the parents grabbed Arsen Torosyan by the collar, lifted him off the ground, and said, ‘You are a liar, you are a Turk, because you have made a mess of our children’s DNA tests.’”* Arsen Torosyan told the journalist that he refused to respond to the question from *Zhoghovurd* daily and that he would have responded if the inquiry had come from another media. However, during the course of the correspondence, the deputy remarked concerning the details shared by the journalist, stating that *“the daily was either supplied with false information, or it invented the false information itself, as is often the case.”* On the same day, Arsen Torosyan [shared](#) his correspondence with Sona Grigoryan on his Facebook page regarding the issue, accompanied by the following remark: “Waiting for another wave of insults from this media.”

The following day, Sona Grigoryan [published](#) her information in *Zhoghovurd* daily and on *ArmLur.am* website under the headline *“Arsen Torosyan Dragged*

*by Collar Near Government Building: The CC Deputy Runs Away,*” accompanied by Arsen Torosyan’s photo.

20 days after that publication, Arsen Torosyan revisited the topic on his Facebook page, posting a [video](#) that, in his view, proved that the information reported by the media was untrue.

## Conclusion

The main issue raised in the application submitted by journalist Sona Grigoryan to the experts is the extent to which Arsen Torosyan’s actions were lawful (specifically, his publication and commentary on information received by *Zhoghovurd* daily for verification ahead of the media’s own publication and without prior consultation with the editorial office), and whether in this case he may have violated parliamentary ethics.

Upon examining the facts of the dispute and assessing them against the relevant legislative regulations, the IDC found no violation of legal norms in this regard. Individuals are free to independently decide whether or not to publish information that has come to their possession (including the time and place of publication), especially if that information relates to themselves, and moreover, there is an issue of protecting one’s honor and dignity.

Nevertheless, in this dispute, Arsen Torosyan’s conduct and approach raise concerns under paragraphs 2.6 and 2.8 of Article 3 of the RA Law “On Guarantees of the Activities of a National Assembly Deputy,” which stipulate that NA deputies must contribute to the cultivation of trust and respect for the National Assembly through their activities and, among other duties, demonstrate respectful attitude towards journalists. The requirement for such an attitude derives from the fundamental principles of courtesy and respectfulness of the public service, as prescribed by Article 25 of the RA Law “On Public Service”. From the very beginning of his correspondence with Sona Grigoryan, Arsen Torosyan displayed a discriminatory attitude, remarking: *“If you were a journalist from another newspaper, I would have replied,”* thereby effectively categorizing the media into “friends” and “foes.” This approach not only fails to contribute to overcoming the polarization present in the Armenian media landscape, but, on the contrary, exacerbates this vicious phenomenon, ultimately leading to a decline in public trust and respect for the National Assembly. Furthermore, this discriminatory attitude runs counter to the principle of objectivity enshrined in the system of public service integrity, pursuant to Article 27 of the RA Law “On Public Service”.

Without in any way challenging the deputy’s right to give an interview or comment—or to decline to do so—the IDC highlights that such refusals should, in any case, be reasoned and made understandable to both journalists and the public. This is also an integral part of respectful treatment. Yet, in his subsequent correspondence concerning the information dispute, Torosyan continued to demonstrate a neglectful attitude and tone towards the media and its representative, which also stands in contradiction with the requirement set forth in the aforementioned legal provision.

From a legal perspective, another noteworthy aspect is the video posted by Deputy Torosyan on his Facebook page, which was most likely taken from the surveillance cameras installed for the security of the RA government building. Here as well, questions emerge, particularly regarding the legality of obtaining the recording, and the completeness of the video presented. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the dispute under review is private in nature, and the video from a surveillance camera of a facility subject to state protection—classified at minimum as an official secret—was most probably obtained by exploiting one’s official and political position and bypassing the procedures prescribed by law—a practice, which is impermissible.

The IDC deems it necessary to also address the piece published in *Zhoghovurd* daily and on *ArmLur.am*. While Sona Grigoryan did not seek an expert opinion on it in her application, its analysis is important, as the dispute under review was largely conditioned by its content. In her article, the author used expressions containing **factual data**, which were disseminated **publicly** via media, and from the standpoint of public perception, objectively **tarnish** an individual’s dignity. Consequently, such expressions can be qualified as defamation, unless their veracity is proven by the journalist, pursuant to paragraph 3 of Article 1087.1 of the Civil Code. In this case, the journalist substantiated her claims by referring to certain sources she did not want to reveal. It is beyond dispute that journalists have the right not to disclose their sources under Article 5 of the RA Law “On Mass Communication,” a provision that was given a broader interpretation by the Constitutional Court’s decision DCC-1234. According to this interpretation, publishing information that tarnishes the dignity of an individual does not amount to defamation if the person who publicly shared the factual data is able to prove that reasonable measures were taken to determine their authenticity and soundness, while ensuring that the information was presented in a balanced manner and in good faith.

This protection, enshrined both in the RA legislation and international law, is otherwise termed in legal writings and judicial practice as “fair comment” and is applied in cases where the piece published is of major public significance and interest. This principle allows the journalist to err in cases where delaying a publication could damage the public interest in urgently receiving that information. Otherwise, if a thorough verification of all the facts were required by the journalist in such situations, the news piece could lose its timeliness and significance, lapse into irrelevance, and fail to serve the public’s right to receive information.

Guided by this principle, the IDC determines that in this particular case, although the published piece was of interest to the general public, its dissemination was not so pressing to deprive the journalist of the necessary time to check the facts. Even if the piece had been disseminated a few days later—or even after a longer delay—the public would not have encountered any significant informational problem.

A key point in this dispute is that Sona Grigoryan contacted Arsen Torosyan to verify the authenticity of the information that had come to the editorial office’s possession, who responded (albeit in an insulting tone) that the information was false, but the journalist did

not incorporate that response (which effectively constituted a refutation) in the piece. On the contrary, without referencing any other reliable source, she chose the following headline: *“Arsen Torosyan Dragged by Collar Near Government Building: The CC Deputy Runs Away.”* This approach fails to comply with the principles of “fair comment” and indicates the author’s bias and intention to belittle the person.

Bringing together the points outlined above, the IDC concludes that the piece published in *Zhoghovurd* daily and on *ArmLur.am* contained defamatory expressions that tarnished Arsen Torosyan’s dignity. The contrary may be claimed if the journalist succeeds in proving the veracity of the information contained in the article. The information published about Arsen Torosyan was not conditioned by an overriding public interest either in its context or in its content, and the journalist should have taken additional reasonable measures to check the authenticity and soundness of the data available to her.

At the same time, the IDC concludes that in the course of his interaction with the journalist, the NA deputy displayed conduct that is incompatible with the principles of respectfulness and objectivity forming part of the integrity system prescribed by the RA Law “On Public Service,” the latter of which is also reflected in the aforementioned provisions of the RA Law “On Guarantees of the Activities of a National Assembly Deputy.”

## **Information Disputes Council**

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