

September 30, 2025

OPINION

On the Information Dispute Between Shushan Harutyunyan and “Armenpress” News Agency

Facts

On July 24, 2025, *Armenpress* news agency (armenpress.am) published a piece titled “Reputation Management in Armenia: A Talk with Shushan Harutyunyan, Co-Founder of AxelMondrian.” Two days later, on July 26, it was removed from the agency’s website and Facebook page. This decision was made by the director of *Armenpress* following a consultation with the editorial team.

In her application submitted to the Information Disputes Council, Shushan Harutyunyan highlighted that she considered the removal of the piece to be “censorship by a public authority, since *Armenpress CJSC* was established by the RA Government, with the authorized representatives of the company’s founding entity being the Chief of Staff to the RA Prime Minister, the Press Secretary of the RA Prime Minister, and the Director of the “Center for Public Relations and Information” SNCO.” According to the applicant, the piece was removed without any substantiated reasoning and in breach of the principle of freedom of journalistic activity as stipulated by Article 4 of the Law “On Mass Communication.” “We express our concern, given that the piece contained no insult, defamation, hate speech or any other unlawful elements, but merely presented a professional opinion,” the applicant noted.

The IDC reached out to *Armenpress* for some clarifications, and in response, the agency’s director informed that the piece had been removed “due to interference by Ms. Shushan Harutyunyan during its preparation and publication.” Specifically, it was highlighted that prior to its release, Shushan Harutyunyan had voiced objections to the draft prepared by the agency’s correspondent, which had been sent to her in advance for approval. Following this, Shushan Harutyunyan presented the agency with a new version of the piece, authored by herself. However, the agency’s editor contacted their correspondent, pointing out that the version proposed by Shushan Harutyunyan was “far from the interview genre.” The correspondent then revised the text, converting it into a Q&A format, after which the piece was published on July 24.

Shortly afterward, Shushan Harutyunyan requested *Armenpress* to publish her version of the piece. Following a decision by the editor, her version was published. The next day, on July 25, during a meeting of the editorial team, the agency's director decided to remove the publication from the news website. As clarified to the IDC, the head of *Armenpress* had informed Shushan Harutyunyan about her decision in a written form via Messenger, and about half an hour thereafter, the publication was removed from the platform. The director added that she had intended to invite Harutyunyan to the agency to personally present the reasons for her decision, but following Shushan Harutyunyan's public attempt to attach a "political overtone" to the issue through her Facebook post, she found it pointless to proceed.

The Information Disputes Council also requested clarification from Shushan Harutyunyan. The latter stated that the issue had not been discussed with her in advance prior to the removal of the piece, and that even after the publication was actually taken down, she was not given any reasoning or substantiation. According to Harutyunyan, a week after the removal of the piece, she sent an e-mail to *Armenpress* notifying the agency that she intended to exercise her right to disseminate the publication on other publicly accessible platforms. She subsequently made a Facebook post on the matter, pointing out that *Armenpress* had one week to substantiate the removal of the piece.

Commenting on the genre of the disputed piece, Shushan Harutyunyan argued that the text did not constitute an interview, but rather a professional opinion. In her communication with the IDC, the agency's director similarly noted that the controversial text, despite being structured in a Q&A format, did not correspond to the classical understanding of the interview genre.

The parties also informed that their cooperation was based on a contract signed on June 1, 2023, a copy of which (excluding the section containing commercial secrets) was submitted to the IDC by Shushan Harutyunyan. Neither the applicant nor the director of *Armenpress* objected to the IDC reviewing the contract. Shortly after the removal of the piece, the contract between the parties was terminated. In their clarifications to the IDC, neither party referred to any provision of the contract that had been violated as a result of the above-mentioned actions.

Conclusion

In her application submitted to the IDC, Shushan Harutyunyan requested an opinion on whether the agency's decision to remove the publication constituted censorship or violated the guarantee of freedom of journalistic activity as prescribed by Article 4 of the Law "On Mass Communication."

The IDC considers that the fact that *Armenpress* unilaterally removed the publication from its news website and that the agency's founder is the RA Government cannot automatically

indicate that censorship took place. The purpose of censorship is to suppress the right to freely disseminate information and ideas, and to prohibit pluralism. Meanwhile, in her explanation submitted to the IDC, the director of *Armenpress* stated that the publication had been removed from the website because the agency found it unacceptable that the piece, originally prepared as an interview, had been modified and presented in a different form, notably in two versions, and Shushan Harutyunyan had interfered in the editorial team's decision regarding which version should be published. According to the director, this contradicted the agency's editorial policy and could have set a dangerous precedent.

In general, the decision regarding which pieces should be published and which should not lies solely with the media, and the refusal of editorial offices to publish submitted articles or other texts cannot necessarily be interpreted, in every case, as an act of direct or hidden censorship. In particular, the claim that censorship occurred in the given dispute is clearly irrelevant. On the contrary, the agency's decision falls within the scope of the right to freedom of those engaged in media activities, as guaranteed by paragraph 1 of Article 4 of the Law "On Mass Communication." In this context, the IDC further observes that the addressee of the aforementioned Article 4 is not Shushan Harutyunyan, but the outlet and journalists, and that by removing the piece it had published on its platform at its own discretion, the agency did not violate any provision of the said law. In any event, such an action is not prohibited.

In her verbal explanations, the applicant admitted that the piece in question was not an interview. The agency also pointed out that the removed piece was "far from the interview genre." Under the RA Law "On Copyright and Related Rights," copyright applies to an interview (Article 12), where both the interviewer and the interviewee are recognized as co-authors. Therefore, in this case, neither *Armenpress* nor Shushan Harutyunyan can claim protection against infringement of any right under that law, such as the author's personal non-pecuniary rights, particularly the rights of revocation, integrity of the work, and protection against distortions and modifications.

Given that the parties to the dispute have been cooperating under a contract signed on June 1, 2023, it is logical and lawful to consider their disagreements within the framework of client-performer relations. However, the examination of the contract showed that it does not contain any provisions regulating the removal of publications. In such circumstances as well, the regulation set out in paragraph 1 of Article 4 of the Law "On Mass Communication" regarding the freedom of those engaged in media activities and journalists prevails.

Nevertheless, the IDC believes that in the context of contractual cooperation the parties are expected to resolve their disagreements and issues through dialogue, negotiation, and the achievement of mutual concessions and consensus, while showing a respectful attitude toward each other. In this regard, the following questions arise: if the agency had informed Shushan Harutyunyan in advance via Messenger about its decision to remove the piece, to what extent was it justified to proceed with the removal only half an hour after the message was sent? Was that timeframe reasonably sufficient for the partner to be informed and react?

And if no prior notification had been provided at all, how consistent is this approach with the principles of cooperation and professional norms? Or, are the arguments of the head of *Armenpress* regarding the decision not to present the reasons for the removal of the piece to Shushan Harutyunyan—and possibly also to the readers—well-founded? However, these issues fall primarily within the domain of professional ethics and are beyond the scope of legislative regulation. Hence, the IDC refers the determination of these issues to Media Ethics Observatory and intends to submit an appropriate application to that body.

Information Disputes Council

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