



MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY OF ARMENIA

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EXPERT OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the IDC's application to assess, from the perspective of compliance with journalistic ethics, the dispute between Shushan Harutyunyan and "Armenpress" news agency due to the removal from "Armenpress" website of the article titled "*Reputation Management in Armenia: A Talk with Shushan Harutyunyan, Co-Founder of AxelMondrian*"

A. FACTS

1. On October 16, 2025, Shushan Doydoyan, the Secretary of the Information Disputes Council (IDC), applied to Media Ethics Observatory (MEO) with regard to the compliance of the piece titled "*Reputation Management in Armenia: A Talk with Shushan Harutyunyan, Co-Founder of AxelMondrian*" with the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists. The piece had been published on the website and Facebook page of "Armenpress" state news agency and was later removed. On behalf of the IDC, Doydoyan submitted the IDC Opinion on Shushan Harutyunyan's application and requested that MEO review Harutyunyan's application from the perspective of journalistic ethics.
2. In her application submitted to the Information Disputes Council, Shushan Harutyunyan stated that the piece published on July 24 was removed on July 26 from both "Armenpress" Facebook page and its website without any proper clarification. According to the complainant, 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." The complainant further highlighted that the piece contained no insult, defamation, hate speech or any other unlawful elements, but merely presented a professional opinion.
3. In its Opinion on the application, released on September 30, the Information Disputes Council addressed the legal aspect of the dispute. At the conclusion of the document, the IDC referred the issue of the dispute's ethical aspects to Media Ethics Observatory for review.
4. In her application to MEO, IDC Secretary Shushan Doydoyan drew attention to the fact that "Armenpress" provided justification for the decision to remove the piece in question only in the clarifications requested by the IDC. Prior to that, the decision to remove the piece had been taken without any clear and written substantiation, and without proper and timely notification to Shushan Harutyunyan and the public.
5. According to the above-mentioned clarifications, a cooperation contract was signed between "Armenpress" and "AxelMondrian," which remained in force until the emergence of the current dispute, after which it was

terminated.

B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS

II. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

... editors and journalists are obligated:

- 2.1. to the extent possible, specify the sources of 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;
- 7.5. not to publish materials containing hidden political advertising, and to separate materials presented for (free or paid) publication by groups supporting any party or candidate or produced at their request from other materials, or to make mention about it.

C. EXPERT OPINION

Media Ethics Observatory, **taking into consideration** the fact that:

- ✓ having examined - upon the proposal of the IDC - journalistic ethics circumstances of the application submitted by Shushan Harutyunyan,
- ✓ taking into account the fact that the Code lacks specific provisions defining ethical principles for pieces published on the basis of commercial contracts (paid advertising materials),
- ✓ nonetheless, relying on the general ethical rules, as well as the indirect relevance of other provisions of the Code - specifically, point 7.5 - to the case under consideration,

records the following:

- ✓ The piece in question was published under a contract signed on June 1, 2023, which failed to clearly define the rights and obligations of the parties in the event of potential disputes, particularly with regard to the removal or non-removal of the published content. To avoid further disputes, it is desirable that such contracts provide a detailed description of mechanisms for resolving potential disagreements.
- ✓ In cases where a publication is produced on the basis of a commercial contract, it is necessary to indicate this fact. This requirement derives from the principle set out in Section 2 of the Code, "*Integrity in Relations with Sources of Information*," and the imperative of proper public communication. This approach is particularly applicable to media outlets funded by public (state) resources.
- ✓ When modifying a pre-prepared piece, deciding on its publication or non-publication, as well as determining whether it should be removed, the editorial team must engage in close cooperation with the partner and reach a mutual agreement with them as the other party to the contract.
- ✓ "Armenpress" state news agency, following the publication of the piece in question under a bilateral contract, removed it as a result of disagreements with the interviewee regarding its content. Furthermore, the editorial office notified Shushan Harutyunyan in advance via Facebook Messenger of their intention to take down the

piece, but proceeded with its removal shortly thereafter without awaiting her response. MEO believes that in this situation, it would have been advisable for the editorial office to take reasonable additional actions to inform the recipient about this intention before removing the piece (for example, by awaiting a response, making a phone call or using other means) to ensure that the notification was actually received.

- ✓ Media outlets receiving public (state) funding must ensure the highest level of transparency in their decisions to maintain public trust and prevent any suspicions of arbitrariness.

Since “Armenpress” has neither joined the Self-Regulation Initiative nor has signed the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, this expert opinion is of an advisory nature. At the same time, MEO urges media outlets to develop and publish a clear editorial policy governing relations with interviewees, as well as the procedure for coordinating and modifying/removing the content published on a contractual basis, to avoid similar unpleasant situations with partners.

Based on the above, “Armenpress” has no obligation to publish this expert opinion; however, MEO would welcome such an initiative on the part of the agency.

*Adopted on December 16, 2025
by the following MEO composition:*

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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
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Nouneh SARKISSIAN, Managing Director of Media Initiatives Center

Suren DEHERYAN, Founding Editor of “Ampop.am”

Ashot MELIKYAN, Chairman of Committee to Protect Freedom of
Expression

Margarita MINASYAN, Director of “Tsayg” TV Company

Arsen KHARATYAN, Founder of “Aliq Media” news and analytical website

Arevik SAHAKYAN, Executive Director of “Factor TV”

Ara SHIRINYAN, Member of the Council of Public Broadcaster of Armenia

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

Anzhela STEPANYAN, Editor of Armavir “Alt” TV Company

[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 98 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.