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**IN RESPONSE TO THE APPEAL OF THE INFORMATION
DISPUTES COUNCIL**

ADVISORY OPINION OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the Antifake.am article “How much money the NGOs operating in Armenia have received in exchange for supporting the handover of Artsakh”

MEO Composition:

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On August 9, 2023, Media Ethics Observatory received the appeal of the Information Disputes Council (IDC) regarding the Antifake.am article (29.12.2020) titled [“How much money the NGOs operating in Armenia have received in exchange for supporting the handover of Artsakh”](#). The IDC sought MEO’s advisory opinion on the compliance of the piece with the principles of professional ethics.

Having reviewed the given publication from the perspective of the provisions outlined in the [Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists](#) and professional journalistic norms, MEO offers its observations and thoughts to the IDC.

In particular, MEO points out the following provisions of the Code, derived directly from internationally acknowledged principles of journalistic ethics:

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.

1.2 Clearly notify the audience about the cases when the editorial office received information of public significance, but has been unable to verify the facts after employing all the reasonable measures.

1.4 To clearly distinguish facts and information from opinion, comment and analysis.

1.5 To rely on accurate facts and trustworthy information when making analysis and comments.

1.6 To ensure that the reports, photo, video and audio materials correspond to the reality, the headlines derive from the content of the material, citations are not used outside of context, and correspondence of the personal data of ordinary citizens with public figures is not abused.

2.1 To the extent possible, specify the sources of information.

6.1 To encourage free exchange of opinions, regardless of any differences between those opinions and the editorial views.

MEO OBSERVATIONS

1. The article's headline presupposes an unquestionable starting point for the editors, asserting that NGOs operating in Armenia have received funds to support the handover of Artsakh. Yet, there is no proven link between the grants received by these organizations and their activities in relation to Artsakh or any other political issue. This is a violation of points 1.5 and 1.6 of the Code, as well as the fundamental norms of internationally acknowledged professional ethics.

2. The photo collage of the article depicts 4 individuals and the logos of 8 NGOs. By showcasing the images of well-known figures under the "supporting the handover of Artsakh" header, the piece prejudices the readers and creates a negative perception about them, stirring additional aggression among the readers against these figures and prompting them to perceive these individuals as supporters of the handover of Artsakh. This is also a violation of Provision 1.6 of the Code.

3. The piece cited information on grant amounts previously circulated, but with validity reasonably questioned on social networks and media. The authors of Antifake.am, in line with Provision 1.1 of the Code of Ethics, should have at least addressed those doubts, especially since referring to other available sources would have most probably revealed the reported untrue grant amounts.

4. Based on the above, MEO identifies sufficient grounds for recording bias in the piece and a violation of Provision 6.1 of the Code.

6. At the same time, taking into account Antifake.am's ambiguous status of a media entity, their non-involvement in the self-regulation initiative as such, as well as the inconsistency of the reviewed piece's timeline with the MEO procedures, this opinion provided to the Information Disputes Council is of purely advisory nature. The appropriateness of the MEO advisory opinion is conditioned by an important court precedent initiated in 2020 and analyzed by the IDC experts.

***Adopted on August 15, 2023
by the following MEO composition:***

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[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 76 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 June 25, 2023 general meeting of the media that joined the self-regulation initiative.