

ANNUAL REPORT

2018



**UNION OF INFORMED
CITIZENS**



OUR MISSION

Union of Informed Citizens is a non-governmental organization aimed at increasing the level of public awareness regarding important issues. Our objective is to reduce disinformation and its impact on formation of public opinion and decision making.

Our mission is to increase the level of public awareness in sectors of public and social significance, which, we believe, is the main and integral element of democratic society. We also believe that in that way we can decrease the level of corruption in Armenia.

We take measures to build capacities of journalists in Armenia. Moreover, we conduct journalistic activities, particularly, fact-checking activities.

The publications of “Union of Informed Citizens” mainly refer to foreign policy and related issues, democratic values and institutions, economy, elections, as well as citizens’ rights in some sectors. Our analyses are republished by other media outlets. We were mentioned more than 2 thousand times in the media in 2016, and the animated videos prepared by us have several million views on YouTube, Facebook and other social networks.

Together with its partners, Union of Informed Citizens NGO fights to improve the quality of elections in Armenia both through election observation on the voting day and influence on the processes taking place before the elections.

We are guided by the principle of promotion of democratic values when preparing materials of any type. We do not under any circumstances justify aggressive wars, human rights violations as well as crimes against humanity and nature.

We do not represent interests of any political party or any other group.

Our organization intends to become one of the best centers that will promote the evidence-based formation of public opinion and decision-making.

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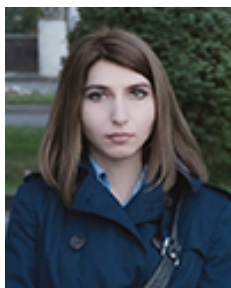
Financing



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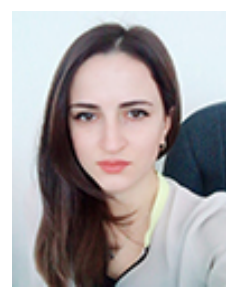
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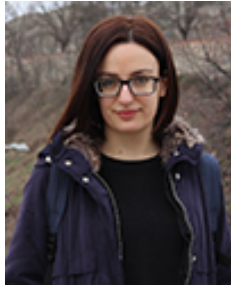
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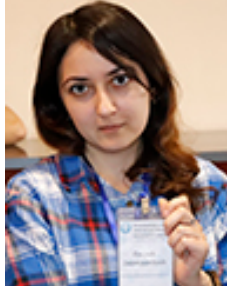
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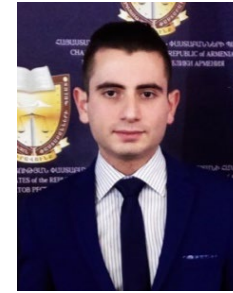
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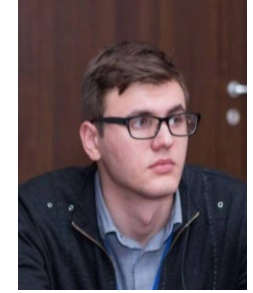
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**Վահրամ
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Պատմաբան

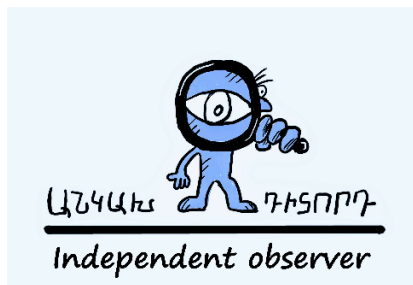
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PARTNERS



Raising Public Awareness on Citizen Rights

In 2018, Union of Informed Citizens prepared animation videos on human rights issues. A few of the videos were prepared jointly with partner organizations. For instance, the video on drivers' rights was prepared jointly with the "Driver's Friend" NGO. Videos related to consultations for demonstrators, detainees, and legal relations with the police were prepared jointly with the "Protection of Rights without Borders" NGO. The video on the rights of military servicemen was prepared jointly with the Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor Office. Some of the video texts have also been translated into Russian and English to provide wider access. Apart from our website, our materials have also been published 145 times by various local online media outlets. The videos were broadcast on 6 radio stations and 7 TV channels. In addition, within the framework of the "Enhancing Citizen Awareness on Parliamentary Elections and Stimulating Public Debate on Reforms" funded by the German Marshall Fund, sectoral reform concepts were developed and animated videos were prepared based on those concepts. These videos were aimed at creating a demand for reforms through public awareness-raising, and thereby reducing corruption risks in a number of sectors, such as the law enforcement system, educational institutions, and so on.



Fight against Corruption through Raising Awareness of Citizens

Union of Informed Citizens implements the Project “Fight against Corruption through Citizens’ Awareness-Raising” with the financial assistance of the US Embassy. Umdimel.am website has been created within the framework of the project. The website provides detailed advice for citizens who find themselves in different situations, and is aimed at increasing citizens’ awareness and preventing corruption risks in a number of public sectors. In the website, citizens can find about 100 specific topic-related questions and answers that include the sequence of steps to take, and the required documentation. There is quite a wide range of areas, including Police, Road Police, Judicial Acts Compulsory Enforcement Service, public services sector, courts, investigative authorities, healthcare, education, armed forces, food safety, consumer rights, elections, local self-government bodies, banking and financial institutions, customs and tax authorities, personal data protection, domestic violence, freedom of information, urban development, labor rights and mass media.



Journalist Education

Pursuing Positive Change through Empowering the Civil Society

The aim of this project is to organize trainings for 50 journalists on topics of monitoring and advocacy in the field of human rights, criminal justice and social justice, and award grants to six groups of journalists to conduct investigations in these three areas. Within the framework of the project trainings have been organized for 75 youth activists in order to improve their skills and promote their involvement in monitoring and advocacy conducted by civil society organizations in the aforementioned three areas. This project is funded by the European Union and implemented jointly with the OSF-Armenia and the Public Policy Institute NGO.

Promoting Watchdog Journalism in Armenia

In 2018, Union of Informed Citizens launched a two-year project (funded by the UN Democracy Fund) aimed at generating interest towards watchdog journalism in Armenia, thereby increasing public oversight over governing bodies. Journalists and active citizens are the main beneficiaries of the project "Promoting Watchdog Journalism in Armenia".

An online training has been developed within the framework of the project, consisting of 12 video lessons and closed-ended questions for each lesson. Topics that introduce the key tools and skills of investigative journalism have been drawn up by 9 Armenian and 3 international experts in the field, and then animated and transformed into videos to make the course more interactive.

A separate website (course.uic.am) has been developed for the course, which was officially launched in December 2018. It is envisaged that 150 journalists who have registered and taken the online course will be given the opportunity to participate in face-to-face training to enhance the knowledge received through the online course, and eight of them can receive sub-grants for their investigative projects.

It is envisaged that the project will contribute to increasing the investigative articles in Armenia, attaching more importance to conducting journalistic investigations, and, consequently, increasing public oversight.



Խելացի որոնում համացանցում

Համացանցում որոնում կատարելու հմտությունները խիստ անհրաժեշտ են հետաքննող լրագրողների համար, քանի որ հաճախ հետաքրքրություն ներկայացնող անձինք ու նրանց երեխաները իրենց ճոխ ու հաջողակ կյանքն ի ցույց են դնում համացանցում: Այս դասում ծանոթացեք խելացի որոնման գործիքներին Google-ում և սոցցանցերում:



Ինչպես կարդալ ֆինանսական հաշվետվությունները

Ժամանակակից ընկերությունների ֆինանսական հոսքերն ամփոփված են ընկերությունների ֆինանսական հաշվետվություններում, որտեղ հաճախ կարող եք գտնել տեղեկություններ ու ապացույցներ կազմակերպությունների իրական սեփականատերերի ու կասկածելի ֆինանսական գործարքների մասին:



Ինչպես ստանալ տեղեկատվություն պետական մարմիններից

Օրենքով հասանելի տեղեկատվությունը պետական մարմիններից ստանալու համար երբեմն անհրաժեշտ է լինում հաղթահարել որոշակի խոչընդոտներ, ծախսել երկար ժամանակ, մարդկային և ֆինանսական ռեսուրսներ: Այս դասում ծանոթացեք տեղեկատվություն ստանալու հիմնական սկզբունքներին:



Foreign Policy and Coverage

During the year 2018, the traditional "Foreign Policy and Coverage" workshops were held. In spring, a seminar-discussion entitled "EU-Armenia Agreement: Signing to Implementation" was held, with the participation of 23 foreign policy-covering journalists from leading media. The workshop was held in off-the-record format, and involved the following speakers: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the European Union to Armenia H.E. Mr. Piotr Antoni Switalski, President of the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia Gagik Makaryan, Expert David Khachatryan, Programs Director of Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center Varuzhan Hochtanyan and other leading experts in the field.



RA Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Head of the European Union Delegation to Armenia H.E. Mr. Piotr Antoni Switalski, Spokesperson of the RA Acting Prime Minister Arman Yeghoyan, Founder of Armenian Institute of International



and Security Affairs Styopa Safaryan and expert on international affairs, public figure Hovhannes Igityan spoke to the journalists during the seminar-discussion in autumn. During the event, 23 representatives from different Armenian media outlets had the opportunity to hold direct discussions in the off-the-record mode with officials and professionals in the field and to get acquainted with the important details related to coverage of Armenia's foreign policy.

These seminars are aimed at raising journalists' professional skills in the field of foreign policy coverage. Foreign ambassadors, leading officials and leading experts in the field make speeches and answer journalists' questions at the event.

Dronalism School

The Union of Informed Citizens, together with the Prague Civil Society Center, organized the annual international dronalism school for journalists, bloggers and civic activists. The program of the Dronalism International School consisted of practical and theoretical parts that enable participants to develop their core skills and gain the knowledge they need to work independently within a few days.



During the school, the participants got acquainted with the technical structure of the drone, the main physical and legal risks and the rules of its use. Participants learned the basic air maneuvers and made their first flight with mentor's guidance, and then filmed short thematic stories in Yerevan and around it.

Voter Education

Within the framework of the project funded by the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation of German Marshall Fund, the Union of Informed Citizens NGO prepared 8 educational and awareness-raising videos about elections, both during local elections in Yerevan and parliamentary elections. The videos were broadcast on local, regional and national TV channels as well as on the YouTube channel of the Union of Informed Citizens, and were disseminated on social networks. The videos have enabled both voter education and reduction of electoral corruption risks.

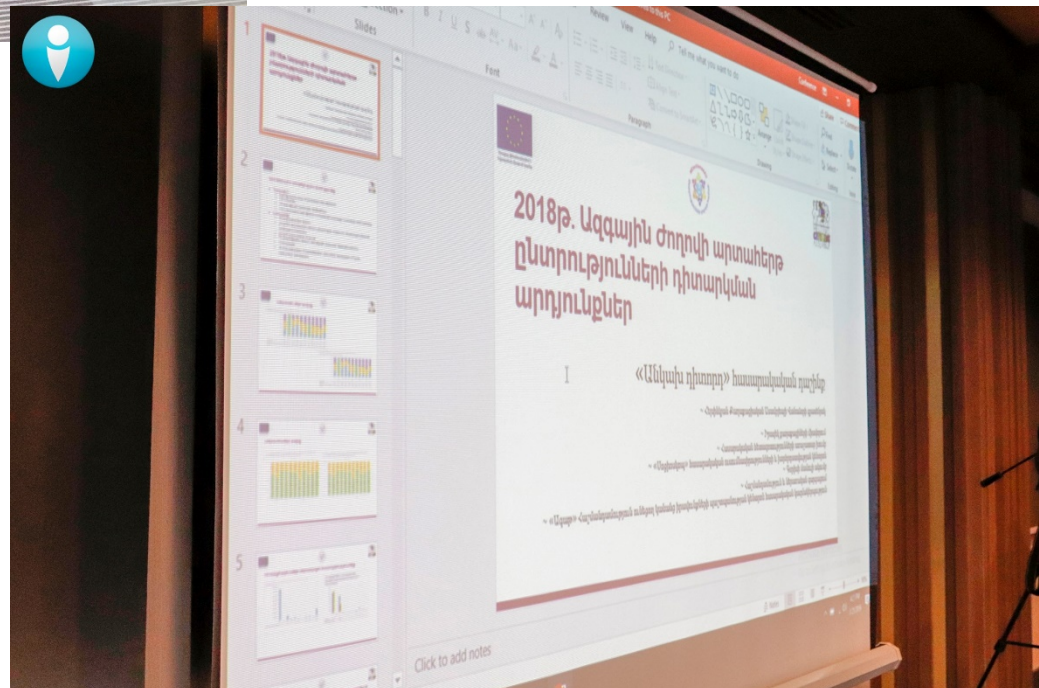
Participation in the Electoral Reform

Union of Informed Citizens NGO actively participated in the process of elaborating electoral reforms in Armenia in 2018. In particular, in May and June, a list of issues subject to discussion within the framework of electoral reform was prepared at the organization. On 17 June 2018, the Commission on Reform of Electoral Legislation adjunct to the Prime Minister was set up, and Programs Coordinator of Union of Informed Citizens Daniel Ioannisyan was appointed secretary of the Commission (First Deputy Prime Minister Ararat Mirzoyan was the chairperson of the Commission).

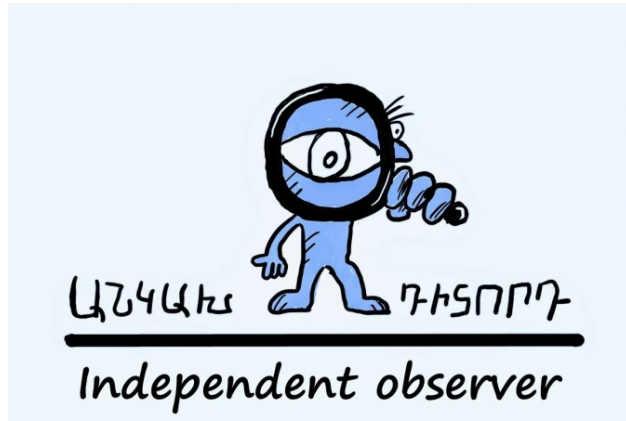
In addition to professional discussions, the Commission has organized wide public discussions with participation of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political forces, non-governmental organizations, observer organizations, media representatives, organizations dealing with the protection of different target groups' rights. All the 12 public discussions were moderated by Daniel Ioannisyan.

The Commission on Reform of Electoral Legislation submitted draft amendments to the Electoral Code, the Code of Administrative Offenses and the Criminal Code. In September 2018, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses and to the Criminal Code, which significantly reduced the risk of electoral violations, toughened the penalties for electoral

crimes, and opened new opportunities for observer NGOs. However, the parliament failed to adopt amendments to the Electoral Code.



Election Observation



In 2018, Union of Informed Citizens NGO conducted observation of electoral processes within the framework of “Independent Observer” observation mission. In particular, the following elections were observed:

- **Early elections of Yerevan Council of Elders**

On September 23, "Independent Observer" observed 95 polling stations throughout the voting day. Within the scope of the mission, there were 230 observers and 10 lawyers, as well as 17 mobile groups. The vote tabulation process was observed in 105 polling stations. The work of 10 Territorial Electoral

Commissions was also observed.

Additionally, 5 television channels and 5 online media as well as Facebook social network were monitored during the whole course of the campaign, as well as on the “election silence day” and the voting day. Interim and final reports were published as a result of the monitoring.

- **Early local elections in Hrazdan**

36 observers and two mobile groups were included in the mission, which observed 15 polling stations throughout the voting day. The vote tabulation process was observed in 17 polling stations. The work of the Territorial Electoral Commission was also observed.

- **Early parliamentary elections in Armenia**

"Independent Observer" Public Alliance conducted long-term observation of the early parliamentary elections with 84 long-term observers. The observation mission included 800 people and 40 mobile groups. 300 polling stations were observed on the voting day. The vote tabulation process was observed in 325 polling stations. The work of 36 Territorial Electoral Commissions was also observed.

From November 19 to December 9, six TV channels and 5 online news outlets were monitored. Interim and final reports were published as a result of the monitoring.

Development of Fact-Checking Journalism in Armenia



In 2018, sut.am website was renamed fip.am (Fact Investigation Platform). New sections appeared in the modified website, and the scope of activities has also been expanded. In 2018, 246 articles were published on the website of the Fact Investigation Platform, and each article had 8500 views on average.

After the revolution in 2018, there was a sharp increase in the number of fake users and “mushroom websites” on the Internet. The Fact Investigation Platform increased the number of its staff to disclose fake users, and deny disinformation spread by different websites.

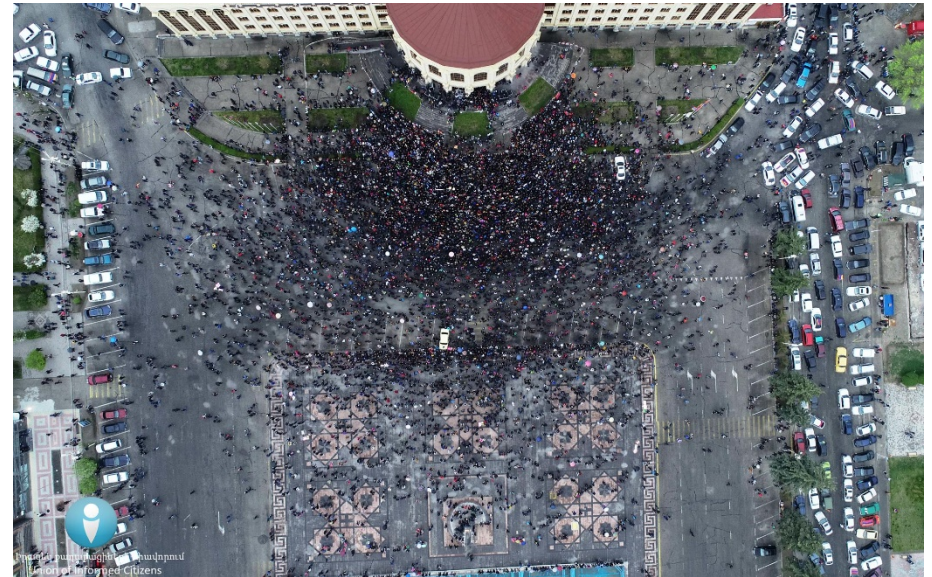
During the pre-election and post-election period, Fip.am began to study Facebook accounts, deny fake news and manipulations spread through these accounts. One of the team members managed to infiltrate into one of the groups of fake users, thus revealing that during the pre-election campaign one of the parties used a whole army of fake users which campaigned for the party.

In parallel, Fip.am continued to carry out its functions of fact-checking, disclosing false information, false declarations of officials' property, publishing investigations of former officials' businesses. Law enforcement authorities initiated criminal cases, various administrative penalties were imposed on officials based on the publications on Fip.am. The publications of the Fact Investigation Platform were republished by different media outlets, officials made clarifications with regard to our publications, and members of the Fact Investigation Platform participated in different programs, gave comments to media outlets regarding their investigations.

Activities during the Revolution

In April and May 2018, the team of the Union of Informed Citizens actively monitored police actions against peaceful assemblies, recorded violations of law and fundamental rights during the protests. Team representatives were in all major hot spots.

During the Revolution, the Union of Informed Citizens, along with other non-governmental organizations, launched a human rights defense hotline and provided legal support to detained peaceful demonstrators.



Monitoring of Protests

The Union of Informed Citizens NGO monitored all major demonstrations in 2018 and calculated the number of participants by means of aerial photography to provide objective information to the public.

We have counted the number of participants of “YELQ” Alliance’s protests against price hikes, the protests and car marches of “Reject Serzh” and “ My Step” movements, as well as all protests that took place after the revolution. The photos taken during the shooting were often widely distributed on the Internet.



Persecutions

In 2018, cases of illegal influence on performance of work duties by representatives of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO were registered.

Particularly, during the air shootings of the Teghut mine in February, the security officers of the mine chased the UIC team, trying to take the filmed material from them. The problem was solved through police intervention.

During the revolution, the organization's unmanned aerial vehicle was downed by means of radioelectronic attack. A member of the team Tirayr Muradyan was beaten by police officers and the same Tirayr Muradyan was detained by police officers. After the revolution, police officers were prosecuted.

And in October, during the local elections in Hrazdan, a criminal case was filed against a team member, Rafael Afrikyan, during his investigation related to abuse of administrative resources. Shortly afterwards, the criminal case was dismissed due to lack of corpus delicti.