



Annual Report 2020

About the Organization

The goal of the Union of Informed Citizens Consulting non-governmental organization is raise public awareness, to promote public participation in areas of public importance and in the decision-making process, as well as to promote democratic values and reforms. We believe that increasing the level of public awareness in the spheres of state and public importance is the key and integral component of any democratic society.

Research works and publications of Union of Informed Citizens address foreign policy and related issues, democratic values, economy, security sector, elections, reforms, as well as the rights of citizens.

The organization undertakes activities aimed at increasing the capacities of the journalistic field in Armenia, and also carries out news activities through Fact Investigation Platform that fights disinformation.

Union of Informed Citizens together with its partners is actively involved in the process of improving the quality of elections in Armenia both through observation mission and influence on the processes preceding it.

The organization takes an active part in the promotion of a number of democratic reforms, the formation of their demand among the public and the drafting of documents.

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

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- Staff
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ՎԱՍՏԵՐԻ ԱՌՈՒԳՄԱՆ ԻԱՐԹԱԿ fact investigation platform

In 2020, Fact Investigation Platform continued its activities fighting disinformation, false and manipulative information.

The scope of the Platform's activities was expanded along with which changes were made to make the website more interactive and accessible to the reader. A special system for evaluating materials was introduced in the website which meets international fact-checking standards. The platform has also taken active steps towards investigative journalism publishing dozens of investigations that have received a great resonance from the public. Due to the activity of the Fact Investigation Platform, false declarations submitted by officials regarding their property were revealed on the basis of which a number of investigations were carried out. Based on the publications of FIP.am, criminal cases were initiated and various administrative penalties were applied to the officials, as well as various officials gave clarifications.

The recognition of the platform among the public has significantly increased which is evidenced by the numerous letters regularly received from users to check facts or verify information.

Publications of the Fact Investigation Platform have been reprinted and republished by various news websites, and the team members have participated in various programs and commented on their investigations in various media outlets.

Countering the Pandemic

The organization, with the support of the Open Information Partnership network, implemented the program "Countering COVID-19-related Disinformation, Manipulations and Conspiracy Theories," within the framework of which the Fact Investigation Platform addressed the widespread disinformation during the pandemic on preventive measures, tests, restrictions imposed by the state, as well as actively spreading conspiracy theories and speculations. Two journalists from the team have also received appropriate training in order to counter disinformation about COVID-19 more effectively.



Media Monitoring

The organization summarized the manipulations and propaganda theses spread on the political events in the Armenian media field in the first and second quarters of 2020. Quarterly reports have been prepared for the periods between January-March and April-June 2020. The reports were prepared on the basis of monitoring of social media, online media, print media and YouTube channels of TV channels during the specified period.

The reports can be found at the following links:

<https://uic.am/10341>

<https://uic.am/10565>



Public Discussions

At the beginning of the year, public discussion entitled "Gas pricing and tariffs. How will the negotiations with the Russian Federation end?" was organized during which the additional agreement signed between "Gazprom Export" LLC and "Gazprom Armenia" CJSC, the increase in the volume of gas imports from Iran to Armenia and the prospects of organizing transit through the interflow of gas through the territory of Armenia as well as other related issues were discussed.



In February, a public discussion was organized on the draft law on the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Committee during which the goals, functions and the issues faced by this body were discussed. According to the draft law, the Anti-Corruption Committee will be composed of central and regional bodies. Regional bodies will be formed gradually. The central body will be composed up of operational intelligence, investigative and internal security departments as well as international cooperation, staff management, financial and economic, training provision and information technology departments.

In February, a public discussion on "Police Reforms" was also held during which the Police Reforms Strategy 2020-2022 was discussed according to which the Ministry of Justice proposes to create a Ministry of Internal Affairs, make a transition to the Patrol Service, and assign the function of preliminary investigation to the police in full or in certain types of cases.

In spring, a public discussion on the topic "Foreign TV channels and the Armenian multiplex" was organized during which the statement of the Chairman of the National Television and Radio Commission Tigran Hakobyan about the possible ban on the broadcasting of foreign TV channels on the RA state digital multiplex was discussed. According to it Armenia is almost the only country that has allowed foreign TV channels. Broadcasters to enter the state multiplex. The reasons are different: political, technical, ideological and linguistic.



In summer, a public discussion on the topic of Police Patrol Service was held. In the framework of police reforms, a Patrol Service is being introduced instead of Patrol Guard Services and Traffic Police in Armenia. It is planned to be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, the new service will be launched in Yerevan by the first quarter of 2021, and then throughout the country by the first quarter of 2022.

In July, the National Security Strategy was discussed which declares as its main goal the establishment of benchmarks for ensuring the safe and progressive development and well-being of Armenia and its citizens.



We also organized the public discussion "Supreme Courts in the Concept of Constitutional Reforms." The purpose of this reform, according to the opinion of the members of the expert commission who voted for it, is to increase the efficiency and public trust in the judicial system and to ensure the independence of judges and courts, as well as to reform legal education. During the discussion, the idea of creating the Supreme Court and its justifications were also discussed in detail.

In September, the public discussion on "Issues of Transparency of Election Campaigns and Party Financing" was held. Current reforms of the Electoral Code and the Law on Parties propose changes in the procedures for increasing the transparency of the financing of election campaigns and political parties.



At the end of the year, we had another discussion on the topic "What Preconditions are Needed for Quality Elections," during which the holding of consultations with the involvement of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces, the necessary changes in the Electoral Code and other issues were discussed.

These and other discussions were attended by actors and responsible persons of the field, MPs, experts, civil society representatives.

Elections



Union of Informed Citizens jointly with Union of Informed Citizens Stepanakert Office carried out an observation mission during the voting days of the Presidential and National Assembly elections of the Republic of Artsakh during the first stage held on March 31 and the second stage held on April 14.

282 electoral precincts were formed in the Republic of Artsakh. 49 electoral precincts in Artsakh and one precinct in Yerevan were observed by the UIC. Observations were carried out in all 8 territorial electoral commissions, as well as 10 mobile groups of the mission. Both during the pre-election stage and on the voting day, media monitoring and observation of the law enforcement system's activities were carried out. 113

short-term observers, 5 lawyers, 9 telephone operators and data entry experts and about 25 administrative workers were involved in the mission.

According to the results of the voting, it can be said that the national elections of Artsakh were held under competitive conditions, but the degree of fairness of that competition was significantly different from the requirements for elections in democratic societies.



Both during the pre-election period and in the first and second phase of the elections, there were violations that could have a significant impact on the results of both the National Assembly and the presidential elections.

Although the authorities of the Republic of Artsakh made significant efforts to ensure the transparency of the elections, the deficit of political will to fight (restrict and disclose) election violations was evident.

The electoral legislation, system and administration of the Republic of Artsakh need significant reform. The good practice of video broadcasting from polling stations and furnishing them with ramps should be developed.

The observation report of Artsakh republican elections can be found [here](#).

Reforms

Police

In 2020, the public was presented the strategy of the RA Police reforms and the resulting 2020-2022 plan which was approved in April of the same year. The organization had its active participation in the development of this strategy.

The organization, in the person of Daniel Ioannisyan, was involved in the Police Reforms Coordinating Council which deals with the coordination of actions planned by the police reform strategy.

In June 2020, the Patrol Service and the Operational Management Center planned by the police reform strategy were launched in Yerevan. The organization was also involved in recruiting and interviewing commissions for patrol officers.

Constitutional

On February 12, 2020, by the decision of the Prime Minister, the Professional Commission on Constitutional Reforms was established, which is composed of both state officials, including one representative from each of the NA factions, as well as lawyers-scientists and representatives of non-governmental organizations, in particular, Union of Informed Citizens, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor and the Armenian Lawyers' Association.



The activity of the Commission was mainly aimed at the implementation of the constitutional changes outlined by the 2019-2023 strategy of judicial and legal reforms. However, on the initiative of the Commission members, other issues not foreseen by the strategy were also discussed.

However, following the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh on September 27, 2020 and due to the political tension created in the Republic of Armenia after that, the operation of the Professional Commission on the Constitutional Reforms was actually suspended.

Electoral

In May 2020, the National Assembly adopted the package of law on Amendment to the Electoral Code and the related laws which mainly refer to local government elections, and already in August, the working group on electoral reforms of the National Assembly started public discussions of the Electoral Code constitutional law in online format.

Union of Informed Citizens took part in the process of developing the above-mentioned package, and also, in person of the organization's representative, Artashes Sergoyan, joined the NA working group on electoral reforms, which has been operating since May 2020. A number of proposals were presented to the group and a conceptual proposal for a change related to the voters' list was drawn up. As the Union of Informed Citizens was the only one involved in both electoral and constitutional reforms, the organization also attempted to act as a sort of bridge between the two bodies.



Judicial

Union of Informed Citizens nominated lawyer-scientist Anahit Manasyan to the judges' activity evaluation committee established within the framework of judicial reforms, who was elected to that position in July 2020 by the general assembly of judges.

The organization also implemented the project "Securing Accountable Implementation of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)" with the support of the OSF, within the framework of which the monitoring of the implementation of the commitments undertaken by the Armenia-

EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was carried out. In particular, the monitoring of the road map for the implementation of sectoral reforms (police, electoral, constitutional, anti-corruption) was carried out.



The project "Making Reforms More Transparent through Public Engagement" was launched within the framework of the grant of the Public Relations Office of the US Department of State the aim of which is to present the process of reforms in various sectors of public administration to the public in an accessible way.

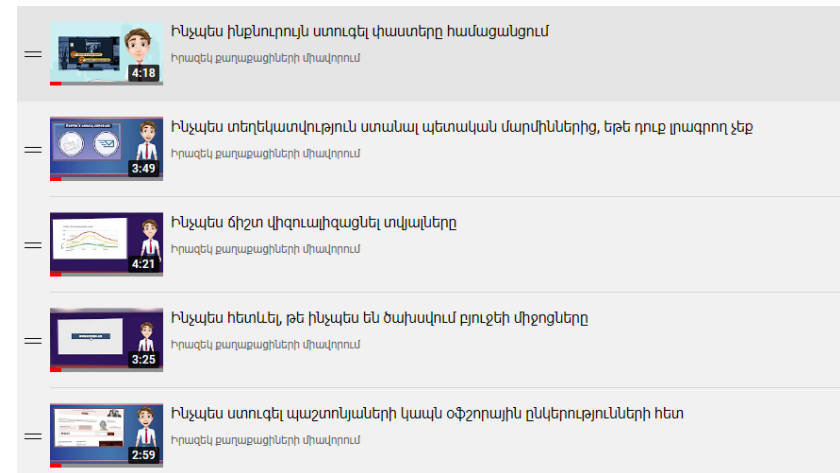


Reforms are often written in long and complex documents, various laws and drafts, which require deep professional skills to cope with. This project aims to resolve this issue through the website Reforms.am which will be intended for interested citizens and journalists.

Training Journalists

Within the framework of the project "Promoting Watchdog Journalism in Armenia" implemented with the support of the United Nations Democracy Fund, the organization prepared another 5 video lessons on fact-checking tools. The aim of the project is to contribute to the increase of public control over government bodies through the development of watchdog journalism in Armenia. The main beneficiaries of this project are journalists, students and active citizens.

On September 26-27, Union of Informed Citizens organized a two-day seminar-discussion entitled "Foreign policy and coverage: EU-Armenia, CoE-Armenia relations" for working journalists.



The President of the "Europe in Law Association" NGO, the coordinator of the Eastern Partnership CSF national platform, Lusine Hakobyan, the chairman of the RA NA Standing Committee on Foreign Relations, Ruben Rubinyan, as well as the head of the CoE division of the European Department of the MFA, Tigran Samvelyan, made a report at the event.

Unfortunately, in the morning of September 27, due to the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh, the event was interrupted, as a result of which the speeches and discussions planned for the second part of the event were cancelled.

War

During the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh, the organization worked in an emergency mode, journalists also went to Artsakh to cover on the ground, as well as to collect facts about the war crimes committed by Azerbaijan which were actively presented to the international community. Evidence was gathered on the use of cluster munitions, the targeting of civilians and civil infrastructures, as well as journalists.



The collected facts were also published by Human Rights Watch which you can read below:

- [Azerbaijan: Cluster Munitions Used in Nagorno-Karabakh](#)
- [Technical Briefing Note. Cluster Munition Use in the Karabakh Conflict](#)

During these difficult days, the organization, with the support of Reporters Without Borders, acquired bulletproof vests and helmets for journalists covering the war.

Income and Expense Report

N	2020 Revenue by Donors		USD
1	United Nations Democracy Fund, New York	Balance	25430
		Revenue	0
2	Prague Civil Society Center, Prague	Balance	3892
		Revenue	13429
3	Multimedia Education Center, Tbilisi	Balance	0
		Revenue	800
4	National Endowment for Democracy, Washington	Balance	38610
		Revenue	103000
5	Open Information Partnership, London	Balance	0
		Revenue	6033
6	Open Society Foundations - Armenia, Yerevan	Balance	20349
		Revenue	108700
7	Open Information Partnership, London	Balance	0
		Revenue	9987
8	US Embassy in Armenia, Yerevan	Balance	0
		Revenue	25865
9	Open Society Foundations - Armenia, Yerevan	Balance	0
		Revenue	5500
10	Reporters Without Borders, Paris	Balance	0
		Revenue	6421
11	Freedom House, Washington	Balance	0
		Revenue	27976
12	Prague Civil Society Center, Prague	Balance	0
		Revenue	18139
			414131

N 2020 Expenses by Programs			USD
1	Enabling Watchdog Journalism in Armenia	Expenses	22796
2	Capacity Support for Fact-checking and Media Monitoring Activities	Expenses	17321
3	Co-Production of Multimedia Product on "Fake Detector"	Expenses	800
4	Public Debate on Foreign Policy and Democratic Reforms	Expenses	134631
5	Countering COVID-19 Related Disinformation, Manipulations and Conspiracy Theories in Armenian Media	Expenses	6033
6	Development of a Fact-Based Public Understanding of Crucial Matters through Diminishing the Impact of Disinformation and Manipulation	Expenses	124060
7	Exposing Malign Information Operations in Armenia by Building Investigative Capacities of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO	Expenses	8070
8	Making Reforms More Transparent through Public Engagement	Expenses	5341
9	Securing Accountable Implementation of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)	Expenses	1127
10	Contributing to the Task of Providing Armenian Journalists with Bullet Proof Vests and Helmets	Expenses	6421
11	Advancing Democratic Culture in Armenia	Expenses	2936
12	Promoting Fact-Based Information through Journalistic Investigations	Expenses	158
			329695