



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The goal of the Union of Informed Citizens Consulting NGO (hereinafter referred to as the Organization) is to raise public awareness and promote public participation in decision-making processes in areas of public importance, as well as to promote democratic values and reforms. We believe that raising public awareness in areas of state and public importance is a fundamental and integral component of any democratic society.

The research studies and publications of the Union of Informed Citizens are related to foreign policy and related issues, democratic values, economy, security, elections, reforms, as well as citizens' rights.

The Organization undertakes work aimed at building the capacities of the journalistic community in Armenia, as well as carries out media activities through the Fact Investigation Platform (hereinafter referred to as the Platform) that combats disinformation.

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

The Organization actively participates in the advancement of a number of democratic reforms, building public demand, and drafting documents in the scope of such reforms.

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

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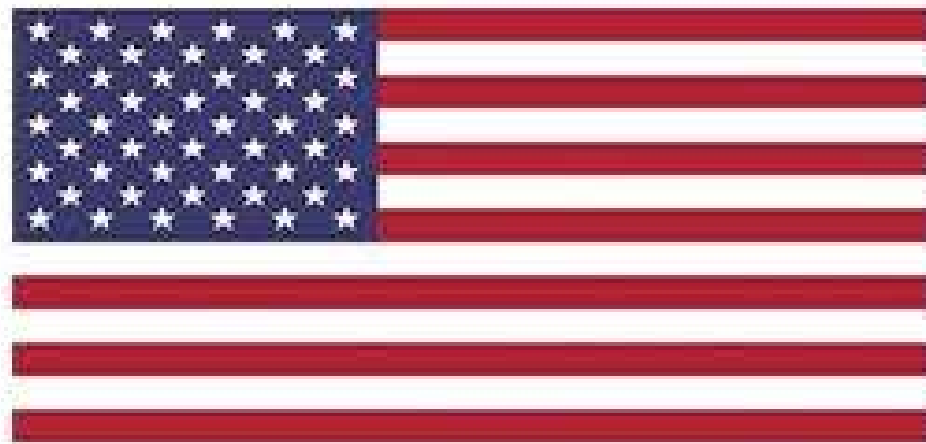


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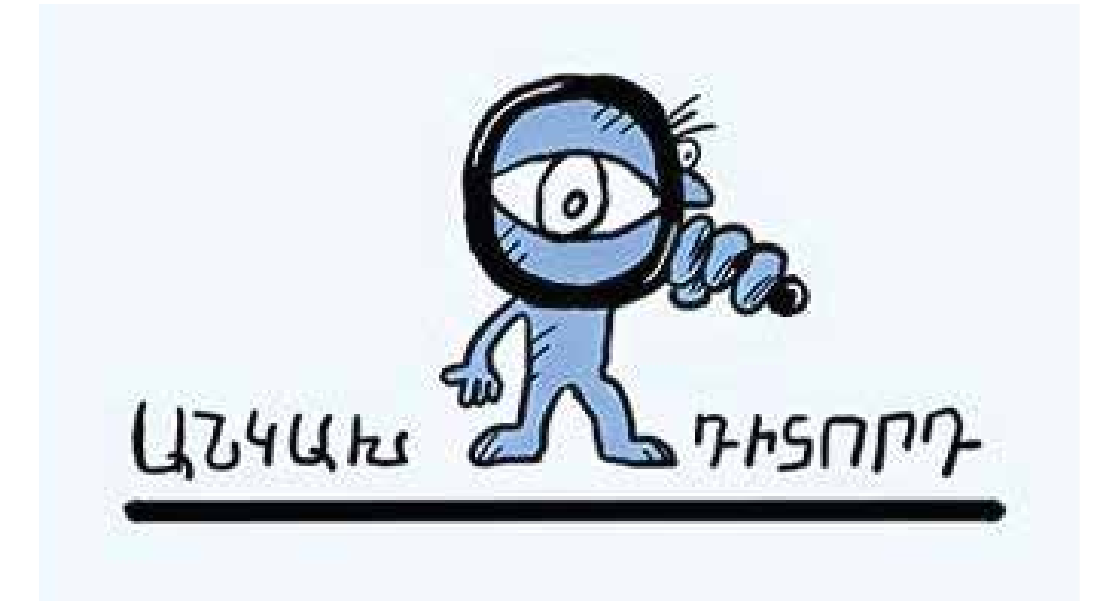


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The U.S. Embassy in Armenia



Democracy Development Foundation



ACTIVITIES OF THE FACT INVESTIGATION PLATFORM (FIP.AM)



In 2023, the Fact Investigation Platform continued its activities aimed at combating disinformation, false and manipulative news. Since the end of 2022, in parallel with the blockade of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijani “eco-activists,” false and manipulative news had been continuously flowing from Azerbaijani and Russian media platforms targeting the Armenian audience. This disinformation exacerbated especially during the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijani military on September 19 and the use of military force against the civilian population, resulting in the complete evacuation of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh. During the year, FIP.am prepared numerous publications on the above-mentioned false and manipulative information in the context of the events unfolding on Nagorno-Karabakh.

In addition to fact-checking, the Platform continued its investigative journalism activities, publishing dozens of investigations that became the subject of wide public debate.

2023 was also marked by the Yerevan City Council elections. On the eve of the elections, the investigations of the Fact Investigation Platform proved that, despite numerous claims, the Civil Contract party was using the administrative levers at its disposal both in Yerevan, in the regions and in consolidated communities to secure the maximum number of votes for its candidate. In addition to administrative resources, we showed that before and during the election campaign, large sums of unknown origin were spent by pro-government circles on dark PR of the main political opponents. These publications also served as the basis for the statement on the use of administrative resources by the authorities in the annual report of the Freedom House international human rights organization.

The Fact Investigation Platform continued to operate adhering to its principles of impartial and multifaceted coverage, keeping under its lens the public statements of both the Armenian government and opposition representatives and the activities entailing corruption risks.

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The platform tried to increase the accessibility of materials by presenting the work in various formats and headlines. In particular, video reports, explainers were prepared based on the motives of the published articles, the FIP podcast was released, during which team members presented the details of the preparation of this or that article, the weekly “Fact Check” summary program was released, etc.

The Platform’s visibility among the public has increased as evidenced by the regular letters received from users expressing their opinions on this or that material, as well as suggestions for fact-checking or rectifying information.

Numerous publications of the Fact Investigation Platform have been reprinted and republished by various news websites, a number of officials have made a reference to the materials published by the Platform in their speeches from various tribunes, and staff members have repeatedly participated in various programs and reports, public discussions, interviews, and provided comments on their work to various media outlets.

The Fact Investigation Platform has continued to produce its weekly “Factometer” program series on fakes and main disinformation this year.

Another initiative of the Platform is the FIP Podcast, in which fact checkers present their thought-provoking investigations.



CALCULATION OF PARTICIPANTS IN ASSEMBLIES

In early 2023, protests were being organized by the opposition over the blockade of the Lachin corridor and the painful loss of Artsakh and the forced displacement of its population in September. At the same time, rallies were also organized in the Yerevan City Council pre-election period, including by the ruling Civil Contract party. Union of Informed Citizens watched rallies throughout the year, conducted monitoring of rallies and counted participants, thus preventing manipulation and speculation about the number of participants in the rallies..



SEMINAR-DISCUSSIONS / CAPACITY BUILDING

In 2023, Union of Informed Citizens continued to organize seminar-discussions for journalists and influencers, aiming to increase their awareness of various fields. The speakers of the seminar-discussions were responsible for specific fields presenting details of their fields of expertise in a Chatham House format in an unrestrained atmosphere and answered the questions of the participants.

Thus, at the beginning of the year, the 14th seminar-discussion of the Union of Informed Citizens series on “Foreign Policy and Coverage” was held in Aghveran. The main topic of the event was the opening of the Lachin corridor and the negotiations on concluding a peace treaty. The speakers introduced the participants to the existing situation following the blockade of the corridor, the negotiations on its opening, the developments in the peace process, some details of the examination of claims filed by and against the Republic of Armenia in international tribunals, and answered the participants’ questions.

On April 15-16, a seminar-discussion on anti-corruption reforms organized by the Union of Informed Citizens NGO was held in Tsaghkadzor. The speakers introduced the participants to the implemented and ongoing activities related to the anti-corruption reforms, the hurdles encountered during their implementation, as well as the process of developing a new anti-corruption strategy.



On May 27-28, a seminar-training on the topic of “Introduction of New Procurement and Declaration Systems” was held in Tsaghkadzor attended by about 20 journalists and influencers, and the Deputy Minister of Finance Avag Avanesyan and Chairperson of the Corruption Prevention Commission Haykuhi Harutyunyan among the speakers.

On July 1 and 2, a seminar-discussion on foreign policy and coverage entitled “Foreign Policy and Coverage: Prospects for Negotiations” was held. This time, the seminar-discussion was dedicated to the foreign policy situation, in particular, the prospects for negotiations. During the event, speeches were delivered and all the questions of concern were answered by the Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, EU Ambassador H.E. Andrea Wiktorin, Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Armenia Armen Grigoryan, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, Special Representative of Armenia in the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process Ruben Rubinyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Artsakh Sergey Ghazaryan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Vahan Kostanyan, Ambassador-at-Large of the Republic of Armenia Edmon Marukyan, and President of the Research Center on Security Policy NGO, political scientist Areg Kochinyan.

On July 22 and 23, a seminar-discussion entitled “Problems, Successes and Future of Police Reforms” was held in Tsaghkadzor, organized by the Union of Informed Citizens NGO. The speakers introduced the participants to the activities implemented and in progress related to the reforms in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the hurdles encountered during their implementation, and also answered all the participants’ questions. The “Civil Society for You” project and the “Naughty Officials” campaign implemented within its framework were also briefly presented.



On November 4-5, a seminar-discussion entitled “Foreign Policy and Coverage: The Peace Process and Current Challenges and Opportunities” was held with speakers being Ruben Rubinyan, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, Special Representative of Armenia in the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process, Maria Karapetyan, Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia, Tatul Hakobyan, expert of the “ANI” Center, Areg Kochinyan, President of the Research Center on Security Policy NGO, as well as Daniel Ioannisyan, Program Coordinator of the Union of Informed Citizens NGO.

A seminar-training on “How to Monitor Public Procurement” was held in Dilijan on December 9-10 for journalists and civil society representatives. The event was organized by the Union of Informed Citizens with the support of the UK Government within the framework of the United Kingdom’s international development assistance. The speakers presented the peculiarities of the public procurement system in Armenia, the existing problems and the mechanisms for monitoring the system..



DISCUSSIONS WITH STUDENTS

During the year, the Union of Informed Citizens organized visits of students from a number of universities to state bodies within the framework of the “Promotion of Democratic Culture in Armenia” project implemented with the support of the Freedom House organization in order to introduce them to the ongoing reforms in various public sectors.

On February 24, students of the Slavonic University followed the joint session of the Constitutional Reforms Council and Commission. The students had the opportunity to see the preparatory work for the session, to follow the progress of the session directly from the hall, and after its completion, some members of the Council and Commission had direct interaction with the students and answered their questions of concern.

On March 31, Yerevan State University students met with the Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Committee and familiarized with the formation and activities of the Anti-Corruption Committee.

On April 14, another visit of students was organized to the RA Anti-Corruption Committee. This time, the Committee hosted students from the Faculty of Law of the European University of Armenia.

On May 19, a visit of Masters students from the Faculty of Law of the International Scientific and Educational Center of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia to the RA Anti-Corruption Committee was organized.

On June 30, a visit was organized for the students of the Faculty of Law of the Slavonic University to the Anti-Corruption Committee of the Republic of Armenia, where they had the opportunity to meet and ask questions to the Chairperson of the Committee, Sasun Khachatryan.



On November 8, a visit was organized for the students of the Faculties of Law, Political Science and Public Administration of Yerevan State University to the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia. The students were welcomed by the Chairperson of the Commission, Vahagn Hovakimyan, who spoke about the history of the formation of the Commission, the importance of elections, and the opportunity for free elections.

Visits were also organized for the students of regional universities.

In particular, on April 4, Vanadzor State University students paid a visit to the joint session of the Constitutional Reforms Council and the Commission.

On October 16, the students of the Ijevan branch of Yerevan State University visited the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia. They were welcomed by the Chairperson of the Commission, Vahagn Hovakimyan, who spoke about the permanent nature of the Commission's work, the issue of human resource flow, and other issues. Arusyak Terchanyan, a member of the Commission, delivered a welcoming speech.

On November 21, a visit of students of the Faculty of Law of Vanadzor State University to the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia was organized. The students familiarized themselves with the work of the CEC and the ongoing reforms.

On December 8, the final student visit of the year was organized. 2nd-4th year students of the Faculty of Law of the European University of Armenia were hosted at the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia.



PUBLIC DEBATES

On March 3, the Union of Informed Citizens organized a public debate in the format of a round table discussion on the constitutional regulation of socio-economic rights. The event was organized jointly with the EaP CSF Armenia National Platform.

At the end of the year, on December 1, the Elite Plaza business center hosted the public debate on “The Role of the Police in Ensuring Road Safety” and the award ceremony for the winners of the “Naughty Officials” Facebook group. The debate was held in a lively atmosphere. The speakers presented their priorities in improving road safety, touched upon the issues of the work of the police and other state agencies, and also answered numerous questions from the debate participants and media representatives.



ARMENIAN FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY

The Union of Informed Citizens, in cooperation with Freedom House international human rights organization, has been organizing the Armenian Democracy Forum every year since 2022, attended by high-ranking state officials of the Republic of Armenia, civil society representatives, diplomats, mass media representatives and the expert community.

On May 31, the second Armenian Forum for Democracy, organized by Freedom House international human rights organization and Union of Informed Citizens NGO, took place in Yerevan. The discussions were attended by the President of the Republic of Armenia Vahagn Khachaturyan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Freedom House President Michael Abramowitz, Head of the European Union Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Andrea Wiktorin, Human Rights Defender Anahit Manasyan, Minister of Finance Vahe Hovhannisyan, Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption Committee Sasun Khachatryan, as well as other representatives of the executive and legislative bodies of Armenia, the diplomatic corps, civil society, and about 190 journalists representing the media.

During the first panel discussion, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and civil society representatives discussed the democratic challenges facing Armenia and touched upon the country's security issues.

The next panel discussion was dedicated to human rights, with the participation of Human Rights Defender Anahit Minasyan, EU Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia Andrea Wiktorin, and other speakers.

The next panel discussion was on anti-corruption reforms, where issues related to the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Committee, as well as ongoing activities in this area were presented.

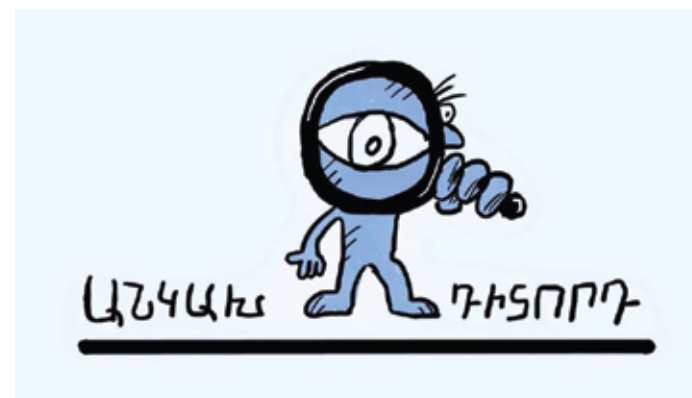
The last parallel panel discussion was dedicated to the fight against disinformation and state policy on the media.

ELECTIONS MONITORING

On March 26, 2023, the Organization, as part of the “Independent Observer” observation alliance (hereinafter referred to as the Alliance), carried out an observation mission in the communities of Sisian in Syunik region and Ani in Shirak region.

The Organization, as part of the Alliance, also conducted long-term and short-term observation during the Yerevan City Council elections held on September 17, 2023, and provided briefings, as well as observed the recount processes.

During the Yerevan City Council elections, the mission voiced a number of violations, in particular, the results of a journalistic investigations were published by its partners and the Fact Investigation Platform regarding the use of administrative resources for the purpose of collecting votes (the same issue was later reported by Freedom House human rights organization). On this account, the Civil Contract Party filed a lawsuit against the Organization in court, qualifying it as defamation. The journalistic community issued a condemning statement with this regard. At the same time, the Organization’s funds were seized in the amount of AMD 1 million. The Organization applied to the court, requesting to remove the security of the claim as this seriously hindered the Organization’s activities, and numerous justifications were presented. The plaintiff, appearing in court, also provided a motion to remove the security imposed on its own motion. As a result, the security of the claim was removed from the Organization’s accounts. The court of first instance partially satisfied the Civil Contract’s claim, and the Organization appealed the court ruling on that part. The appeal has been accepted for proceeding, and an investigation is currently underway.



STATE PROCUREMENT MONITORING

On November 24, 2023, “Promoting Accountability and Public Oversight of State Procurement” project was officially launched, implemented with the support of the UK Government within the framework of the United Kingdom’s international development assistance.

The project aims to strengthen public oversight of the state procurement system in the Republic of Armenia and promote transparency and accountability of state procurement.

A number of issues and drawbacks have already been identified at the initial stage of the project implementation on which official clarifications and recommendations for rectification and amendment have been submitted to the Ministry of Finance.

Due to the project, amendments to the government decision regulating the procurement sector have already been drafted to be submitted to the government for approval in the near future.



STATEMENTS

In 2023, the Organization issued a number of statements. In particular, jointly with other civil society representatives, we demanded from international partners to strongly and without reservation condemn the killing of three employees of the Passport and Visa Department of the Artsakh Ministry of Internal Affairs by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces on March 5.

Civil society also expressed concern about the press statement made by Council of Europe President Charles Michel following the recent trilateral meeting with Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev on July 15. In particular, civil society was concerned that the statement identified the Lachin corridor and Aghdam as options for resolving the current humanitarian crisis.

Civil society also expressed concern about the position of Azerbaijani “environmentalists” engaged in political manipulation, which led to the exacerbation of military aggression in the South Caucasus region and precluded the peaceful settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani military conflict, deteriorating the socio-ecological situation in the border regions. On July 24, a group of civil society organizations appealed to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, demanding urgent action due to the human rights emergency created by the complete blockade of the Lachin corridor in Nagorno-Karabakh.



In connection with the UN Security Council session to be convened at the request of the Armenian government, representatives of civil society organizations active in Armenia, including the Union of Informed Citizens, once again appealed to the Security Council member states to undertake a commitment to protect the Armenian people in Nagorno-Karabakh from the genocide and ethnic cleansing being committed by Azerbaijan.

The EaP CSF Armenia National Platform also called on the UN Security Council to prevent a new Armenian Genocide by deploying international peacekeeping troops to Nagorno-Karabakh and recognizing it as a UN mandated territory.

The organization's Program Coordinator, Daniel Ioannisyan, delivered a speech at the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform session held in Brussels on September 12, addressing the issue of the Lachin Corridor and drawing the attention of the participants to Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policies.

The members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum strongly condemned the attack unleashed by the Azerbaijani armed forces against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh under the guise of an "anti-terrorist operation," that claimed many innocent lives and caused massive destruction.

The Organizations Program Coordinator, Daniel Ioannisyan, delivered a speech at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimensions Conference, responding to the Azerbaijani delegate and addressing Azerbaijan, Armenophobia.



REFORMS

POLICE

The Organization ceased its activities as part of the Police Reform Coordinating Council in early 2023 in connection with which it jointly issued a statement with the NGOs that are members of the Council. The statement was addressed a number of issues in the reform process and the police.

Throughout 2023, the Organization issued more than 25 publications highlighting police reform issues and potential solutions. In particular, the publications addressed Patrol Service, police brutality, drug control, police forces, and other important issues.

The Organization, jointly with partner organizations, also issued a statement on violence by the police.

A seminar-discussion entitled “Problems, Successes and Future of Police Reforms” was organized with the participation of high-ranking police representatives attended by journalists. In addition, a public debate on “The Role of the Police in Ensuring Road Safety” was organized with the participation of experts in the field and deputies of the National Assembly.

The organization, as a speaker, participated in the session of the Armenia-European Union Civil Society Platform, during which the report on “Police Reform Process” drafted by the Union of Informed Citizens NGO was also presented.

During the year, the organization filed 6 lawsuits against the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Organization conducted an extensive study on the obstacles to citizens’ interaction with law enforcement agencies, and made relevant recommendations.

In 2023, the Organization's representative Daniel Ioannisyan was included in the Police Officers' Attestation Commission, within which he participated in the attestation process. The Organization's representative applied to law enforcement agencies regarding the alleged illicit enrichment of one of the attestation representatives.

The Organization was included in the commissions formed to interview candidates for civil service positions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Organization, being a member of the National Platform for Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector established under the Defense and Security Committee of the National Assembly, jointly made recommendations with the partner organization, which were included in the Committee, agenda



CONSTITUTIONAL

The Organization continues to be a member of the Constitutional Reform Council, within the framework of which it presented 3 constitutional concept proposals in 2023 related to the constitutional instruments of direct democracy, referendums, membership issues of supranational entities, abandonment of the principle of stable majority, and enshrining the principle of net neutrality in the Constitution. The Organization has also provided interviews and publications related to constitutional processes.

In 2023, the Organization also organized a roundtable discussion on constitutional processes attended by representatives of the legislative body, the government, the Constitutional Court, the Office of the Human Rights Defender, civil society, and lawyers specialized in the field. In 2023, the Organization created an opportunity for students of Slavonic and Vanadzor State Universities to attend the sessions of the Constitutional Reform Council as observers and ask questions to the members of the Council toward the end of the sessions.



ELECTORAL

In 2023, the Organization carried out a long-term and mobile observation mission within the framework of the “Independent Observer” alliance during the local elections in Yerevan.

During the pre-election period, the “Independent Observer” alliance conducted an investigation in cooperation with the Fact Investigaiton Platform showing through recordings that a number of community servants outside the capital were enlisting voters for the ruling Civil Contract party in the local elections to be held in Yerevan. On this account, Civil Contract party filed a lawsuit against Union of Informed Citizens NGO, a member of the “Independent Observer” alliance. A number of organizations made statements criticizing the lawsuit. At the moment, the court of first instance has partially satisfied the party’s claim against the Organization. The organization will file an appeal against the ruling.

Representatives of the Organization gave a number of interviews and publications on the elections, in particular, addressing the use of administrative resources, the behavior of the Public Television Company, and a number of other issues.

During the year, the Organization also organized study visits to the Central Election Commission for the students of Vanadzor State University, European University, Yerevan State University, and the Ijevan branch of YSU.



ANTI-CORRUPTION

Since the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Committee, we have been participating in the process of appointing investigators and operational officers of that body (member of the Admissions Committee: Ruzanna Avagimyan), which continued through 2023.

At the same time, UIC representative is the national expert on the preliminary interview of candidates for judges in the Anti-Corruption Courts (Artashes Sergoyan), within which individual interviews are conducted with the candidates for judges and an advisory opinion is drawn up by the expert.

During 2023, UIC also studied the obstacles to citizens cooperation with law enforcement agencies through a number of studies and developed recommendations aimed at solving them, which were submitted to the Anti-Corruption Policy Council of the Republic of Armenia.



REVENUE AND EXPENSE STATEMENT FOR 2023

N	2023 REVENUE BY DONORS		USD
1	Freedom House (Washington)	Balance	6 620
		Revenue	29 039
2	Prague Civil Society Center (Prague)	Balance	3 929
		Revenue	0
3	National Endowment for Democracy (Washington)	Balance	32 087
		Revenue	171 750
4	Open Society Foundations - Armenia (Yerevan)	Balance	48 377
		Revenue	0
5	Open Society Foundations - Armenia (Yerevan)	Balance	3 300
		Revenue	6 497
6	Democracy Development Foundation (Yerevan)	Balance	3 300
		Revenue	6 497
7	Democracy Development Foundation (Yerevan)	Balance	3 444
		Revenue	40 030
8	United Kingdom Government (London)	Balance	0
		Revenue	74 559
9	The United States Embassy (Yerevan)	Balance	0
		Revenue	7 300
			436730

N	2023 EXPENSES BY PROGRAMS		USD
1	Advancing Democratic Culture in Armenia	Expenses	49 355
2	Promoting Fact-Based Information through Journalistic Investigations	Expenses	3 929
3	Public Debate on Foreign Policy and Democratic Reforms	Expenses	180 945
4	Development of a Fact-Based Public Understanding of Crucial Matters through Diminishing the Impact of Disinformation and Manipulation	Expenses	51 798
5	Promoting Democracy among Young Audiences by Increasing UIC's Visibility on Social Media	Expenses	3 324
6	"Equal Citizen" Public Campaign	Expenses	6 445
7	Fighting Disinformation in the Crucial Areas with a Focus on Democratization Reforms, Human Rights and Civic Participation	Expenses	39 021
8	Promoting Accountability and Public Oversight of Public Procurement	Expenses	34 503
9	Fighting Corruption and Human Rights Violations through the Engagement of Citizens	Expenses	5 914
			375 234