



**SIDE EVENT AT THE OSCE ODIHR HDIM 2016
ARMENIA: RIGHT TO PROTEST AND STATE REPRISALS, 2015-2016**

Tuesday, 20 September, 2016
13:00-14:45, Meeting Room 2

Levon Barseghyan, Chairman of the Journalists' Club "Asparez"

Targeted violence against journalists in Armenia

The good news is that no journalist has been killed yet for his or her professional work. Other things are sad. As a rule, cases of violence against Mass Medias and journalists dramatically increase during political tensions, protests raising serious political issues, and elections. There was a time that violent actions were implemented by unknown entities or people with criminal past and related to any of influential oligarch or official. During the last two years, there is a new trend in Armenia: the Police, the body that is to maintain the public order and protect victims of violence, do most of crimes and attacks against journalists.



During the past two years, attacks on journalists and other Media professionals by the Police or entities supported by them have mainly been during mass protest demonstrations. When the Police start to unreasonably disperse peaceful protests and apply brute force, the work of journalists paid special attention to, but not for supporting them and not letting them undergo harassment, but right the contrary, aiming at making their professional work difficult, hindering, stealing and/or destroying recordings through physical violence. Does a legally working police officer have a need to do such illegal actions? The logic says: no. Those, who do illegal actions, need it and they do not want all of that to be recorded or revealed in any way. Coordinated attacks against Mass Medias can only be explained this way. (Photo by Radio Liberty video record).



I will now elaborate on the attacks on Mass Media representatives organized by the Police during the last two years.



Early in the morning of June 23, 2015 during a protest against electricity price rise on Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan

while beating the protesters and detaining them the Police and unknown entities cooperating with them beat and injured 13 journalists and operators and hindered the professional work of 11 other journalists. At the same time, technical equipment and memory cards of about ten journalists were intentionally broken and stolen. A witness and manager of all of this was General Levon Yeranosyan, deputy head of the Police, the commander of Internal Police troops. A criminal case was launched, only one investigator was examining the case, and for more than a year nobody was charged, and only on August 2016 four people were charged, who will most probably undergo amnesty after Sept 21, 2016. (Photo by Photolure)



The second mass attack by Police forces on journalists and Mass Media professionals started on July 17, 2016, the first day of uprising of the armed group “Sasna Tsrer” and lasted two weeks. (Photo by Radio Liberty)

The rights of journalists were illegally limited in the following ways:

-) restriction of the freedom of movement,
-) restriction of the freedom of speech,

- when they were not allowed to use their telephones,
-) illegal detainments,
-) beatings,
-) hindering the professional work,
-) using special means against journalists,
-) destroying technical equipment, etc.

The peak of police violations against journalist during the armed uprising of “Sasna Tsrer” was in Yerevan Sari Tagh district in the late evening of July 29, when at the end of clashes between police internal troops and protesters the same person general Levon Yeranosyan commanded to attack the protesters. The policemen not only used special means inadmissible in that situation, but also intentionally attacked and beat 23 cameramen, photographers, and journalists. Apart from policemen among attackers there were also bodyguards of police high officials and people known for their criminal behavior.

However, more than one and a half months has passed and their photographs are published and spread, but none of them has been indicted or charged yet. The journalists beaten by policemen and bodyguards on the night of July 29 were appointed to undergo medical examination only after one and a half months after the incident.

As a matter of fact, the Police don't properly conduct their responsibilities to maintain the public order, and at the same time they engage in criminal actions by attacking, beating and causing physical injuries not only to peaceful protesters, but also journalists.

One might think the Police don't know about the Article 164 in the RA Criminal Code, according to which hindrance to the legal professional activities of a journalist is punishable.

So, what is a cause of all of this? It's obvious that the Police can't go for such crimes on their own. If they had done it arbitrarily on June 23, 2015, they would have immediately been condemned, and such new crimes against journalist would not happen.

This impunity is obviously sponsored by a RA supreme official. In countries where corruption is to the extent of even capture the state, as Armenia is, the extent of authoritarianism doesn't allow to assume anything else than that the head of all power structures is the first official, in Armenia it is Serzh Sargsyan, the person holding the position of the president.

The impunity of law enforcement bodies and insiders is the best guarantee to freely implement such crimes in order to maintain this inhuman regime. If the regime punishes one policeman, it will not be able to command such violent actions or will not have result the next time.

Maybe the Police don't have sufficient resources to properly deliver public services? When we examine the RA state budget and the funding granted to the Police, it's easy to notice that the Police has been more than fully funded. During 2012-2015 the Police budget has increased by 10,68% annually (average for 5 years), when the state budget has increased only by 5,7% annually (average for last 5 years).

In addition to this, the Police have annually received money from its off-budget revenues equal to the 80% of the state funding. In other words, police has been one of the most fully funded fields during the past 4-5 years, and judging the often-updated uniforms, special means and cars, every wish they have had, was financed.

In 2011 the Police was given the 2,35% of the expenditure part of the RA state budget, 3,22% in 2015 and 2,96% in 2016. For 2011-2016 years state funding of the Police has increased by 64,43%. For comparison, the National Security Service funding has increased by 61,1% during the same time. None of the other state fields exceeds these ones. Defense funding has increased by 42,25%, and the overall state budget expenditure part has increased by 30,28% and income part by 34,75% for the same time period. That is to say, during the past 5 years Police and National Security Service funding have increased twice and outweighed the state budget increase pace. (Table in attachment bellow)

But this was not enough for their professionalism. Along with this, OSCE has granted the Police with 837.375€ in 2012 and at least 884.901€ in 2013. These grants were allocated by OSCE with best wishes for ensuring professionalism and logistics, and to help increase experience in managing crowds. As a result, the Police have become more brutal, inhuman and humiliating towards citizens and journalists, in particular. Who can say, would the Police be less brutal and more responsible, if they didn't get OSCE support or not?

Don't be surprised, but every time I try to find out the real number of the Police staff, police station staff members, policemen quantity, I am given a written and an official response, that the numbers are considered confidential with RA legislation and they cannot give me information. Indeed, the numbers are secret. We,

the tax-payers, don't know how many policemen are sustained with our money. A number of times we suggested authorities that these numbers should be unclassified and disclosed, no result. Now, tell me, please, is it normal according to European standards to fund the Police of a country that keeps it secret from the society how many policemen are there? In how many OSCE countries is it like this? Does OSCE have statistics? Does OSCE know how many policemen and staff members are there in the RA Police? If not, how has it decided to give the journalist-beating Police such a huge funding? If the OSCE is informed about quantity of the Armenian policemen, why is Armenian society not informed?

As the RA Police is a repressive machine committing illegal crimes, beating and detaining innocent and peaceful citizens and journalists, I consider it appropriate to turn to OSCE and other possible donors: stop funding that machine, because the crimes and inactivity of the past two years have shown that the main tools in an authoritarian regime should not be funded and nourished, they don't reform.

Armenia has become a police state. Otherwise we would have at least 20 people convicted and sentenced for the events of Baghramyan Avenue in 2015, and at least 40-50 policemen and bodyguards for the Sari Tagh district events. And this is not the end.

Levon Barseghyan

Council chairman of the Journalists' Club Asparez, 2000-2016

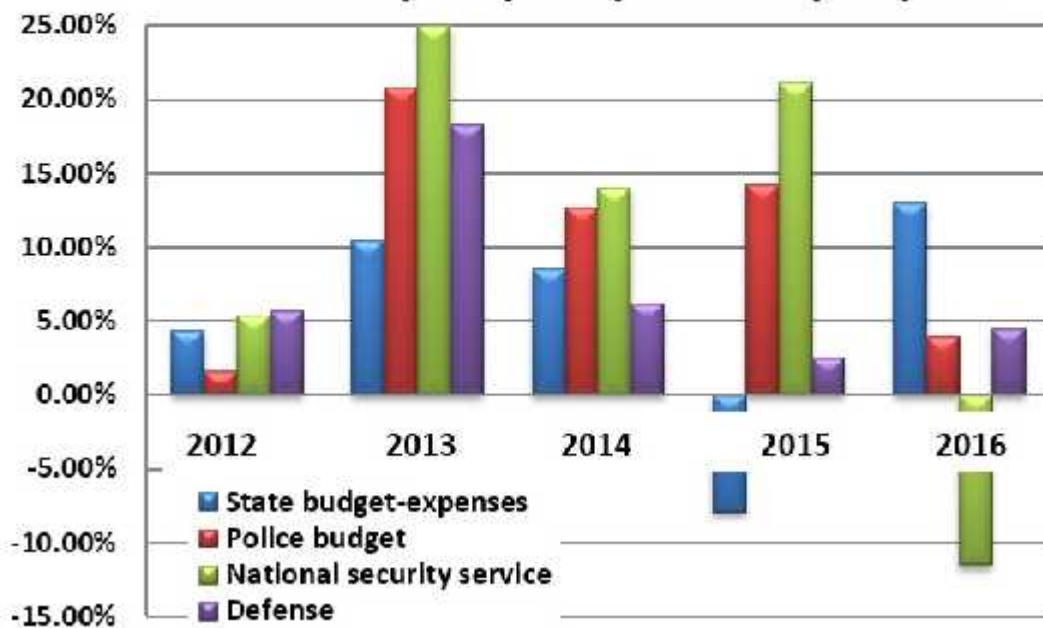
Gyumri City Council member

Attachment: budget shares to the Police, NSS and Defense needs

Republic of Armenia

	State budget MLN AMD		To the previous year	Police				NSS			Defense		
	Incomes	Outcomes		From State budget	To the budget expenses	To the previous year	other incomes	From State budget	To the budget expenses	To the previous year	From State budget	To the budget expenses	To the previous year
2011	877900	1026500		24075	2,35%		11684	12744	1,24%		146227	14,25%	
2012	938500	1071000	4,34%	24455	2,28%	1,58%	13187	13432	1,25%	5,40%	154473	14,42%	5,64%
2013	1059000	1183100	10,47%	29558	2,50%	20,87%	19953	16791	1,42%	25,01%	182740	15,45%	18,30%
2014	1168900	1284500	8,57%	33321	2,59%	12,73%	~ 21000	19153	1,49%	14,07%	194080	15,11%	6,21%
2015	1221300	1183003	-7,90%	38071	3,22%	14,26%	22552	23203	1,96%	21,15%	199033	16,82%	2,55%
2016	1183000	1337300	13,04%	39586	2,96%	3,98%		20527	1,53%	-11,53%	208014	15,55%	4,51%
	Average		5,70%		2,71%	10,68%			1,53%	10,82%		15,47%	7,44%
Change for 2011-2016			30,28%	64,43%				61,07%			42,25%		

Growth volumes of budget shares: Police, NSS and Defense of Armenia 2011-2016 (comp. to previous year) %%



Growth volumes of budget shares: Police, NSS and Defense of Armenia 2011 to 2016 %%

