

GUIDE TO ARMENIA WEBSITES

Posted on January 17, 2016 by Keghart



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By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 17 January 2016

It's a truism that most Diaspora Armenian media and websites have a perspective reflecting that of their owners—in majority of cases the three traditional political parties. What about the Armenia websites?

Do Diaspora readers, who read Armenia websites, know who owns what, and what's the agenda of the outlets they follow? For example, if they read an anti- or pro-Russia analysis, do Diaspora readers know whether the website is owned by a Russophile or a Russophobe or a pro-government or an anti-government outlet? In a country which doesn't have a tradition of free press and journalism is ham-strung by inexperienced practitioners and publishers who can be vulnerable to pressure, it's imperative that the readers know the accuracy of website reports and the objectivity of its analysis.

Although six Yerevan universities offer journalism courses, Armenia websites seem far adept at digital graphics and razzmatazz than in gathering and disseminating facts. In other words, "packaging" is given too much emphasis. Censorship is officially prohibited, but self-censorship is a fact of life because journalists know what can be allowed to be published. Self-censorship is particularly common in the coverage of corruption, security, and Artsakh. While a number of websites claim to be independent, the assertion has to be taken with a grain of salt. Many of the so-called independents have "patrons", "partners", "friends"...who support the outlet financially.

Here's Keghart.com's brief guide to some of the leading Armenia websites:

1. **Azatutuyun.am**

Based in Prague, it is part of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Armenian Service--a U.S government outlet.

2. **Azg.am**

After briefly changing hands, it is back in the Ramgavar Party media group. It's run by long-time editor Hagop Avedikian who was once editor of "Zartonk" in Beirut. In the early days of the RoA the newspaper served as a "school" for many budding journalists. The website is a copy of the newspaper.

3. **Yerkirmedia.am**

The website is owned by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Like "Azg" the website is a duplicate of the newspaper.

4. **Aravot.am**

Editor-in-chief Aram Abrahamian has a big staff with impressive CV. It is an independent site. The fact that Abrahamian once worked in the administration of the RoA president doesn't seem to influence the site's coverage.

5. **Armtimes.com**

Part of Haikagan Jamanag, it belongs to Nikol Pashinyan. After he became MP, he transferred the management to his wife. The website is anti the ruling Republican Party.

6. **Civilnet.am**

Owned by the Civilitas Foundation, it's run by Vardan Oskanyan, former foreign minister of Armenia and one of the founders of the now defunct "AIM" magazine of California. For years one of the main financial supporters of the organization was the Huntsman Corporation of the US. Its home page lists patrons (euphemism for financial supporters), including the governments of Germany, Switzerland, the US, Poland, the Netherlands, the UK, and Norway. It also includes the German Marshall Fund Eurasia Partners Foundation, Ernst & Young, the Rosgosstrack insurance firm in Russia and Armenian-Argentine businessman Eduardo Eurnekian, Krikor and Christine Jabourian, Armen and Nadya Ekserciyan, Haypost, and the Armenian Church Prelacy of Tehran. For a long time there have been rumours that it also receives financial aid from USAID.

7. **Armenpress** or **Armenian-news.com**

It is state owned.

8. **ArmeniaNow**

It's an independent site run by veteran journalist John Hughes who was a senior writer at "AIM" magazine.

9. **7or.am**

Managed by Andranik Tevanyan, it acts as a propaganda arm of former president Robert Kocharian and oligarch Gagik Dzaroukian. Another outlet which beats the drums for Kocharian is 2nd.am

10. **Lragir.am**

For a long time it has been assumed that George Soros/other Western interests help fund the site.

11. **epress.am** and **A1**

It's an NGO closely associated with the Independent Journalists' Network (IJN). According to reports, the IJN is linked to the European Journalism Centre which is funded through the Matra Social Transformation Programme, a development arm of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

12. **Panorama.am**

Belongs to PanArmenian Network NGO. Armen Azaryan is the CEO and co-founder. It carries little local news and analysis. Its focus is the Diaspora. Close to 30% of its followers reside in the US, 22% in the Russian Federation, 5.5% in Armenia. It declaims that it has no interest in influencing internal politics.

13. **PanArmenian.net**

Founded in 2000, it's the oldest online news agency in Armenia. The site is owned by NGO PanArmenian Media LLC. Its stated mission is the "establishment of a pan-Armenian common

information field and adequate presentation of Armenia to the world."

14. **HetqA1+online**

Specializes in investigative reporting. It is considered anti-Serge Sarkissian and is owned by Edig Baghdassarian. It receives financial aid from the George Soros' Open Society Foundations and Forum. In 2004 it was recognized by Transparency International for its work against corruption. It's one of the more professional and credible sites.

15. **Hraparak.am**

An independent outlet, it's run by Armine Ohanyan. Founded in 2008, it claims to have 600,000 monthly visitors. Hraparak is no friend of Robert Kocharian, among other oligarchs.

16. **News.am**

It's an independent outlet. While it has at least seven editors, Artak Yeghiazaryan (co-ordinator) seems to be the senior person. The "co-ordinator" title is meaningless in journalism. Is Yeghiazaryan the publisher, manager, the editor-in-chief, the owner?

17. **Tert.am**

Part of Armenia News and Armenia Today (public company). It claims to be the most popular website in Armenia in frequency of visits, citations and references. Its editor is Sasun Khachatryan.

Good News, Bad News

Freedom of Media Index (2015), published by Reporters Without Borders, placed Armenia 78th among 180 states. Turkey was 149 and Azerbaijan 162. Georgia was 69, the US 49. Israel was 101. On the negative ledger, the Yerevan Press Club is partially funded by USAID and globalizing champion Soros' Open Society Foundations Armenia.

