
ARMENIAN NATIONAL SECURITY SERVICE TAKING ON FAKE NEWS

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The Armenian National Security Service has been instructed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to launch a fight against fake news in the country.

Pashinyan said that criminal circles were spending millions on manipulating public opinion on social networks and in the media, and this is a matter of national security.

As a result, he instructed the head of the National Security Service to intervene:

I hope that your service will be able to provide concrete results. On social media there are even fake news items calling for violence, including those addressed to the former authorities, trouncing under the flags of the revolution. This is done in order to show that they are allegedly related to us. Such manipulation should receive a very hard counter-strike. I think the legislation of the Republic of Armenia provides such an opportunity – of course, in no way questioning the right to freedom of speech.

The first results of the fight against fake news were announced the next day.

The head of the National Security Service, Arthur Vanetsyan, stated that the Prime Ministers order had been carried out. The National Security Service had identified a Facebook user from a fake account that was disseminating false information about the activities of the Armenian authorities:

There is a very famous fake Facebook page that spreads disinformation – Society of the Spirits of Hayastan. The man who was hiding behind this page has been detained.

The head of the National Security Service reported that a criminal case was initiated against the admin of the page on grounds of spreading racial, religious and national hatred.

Armenian observers are concerned about the ongoing fight against fake news at state level.

Many perceived the PMs announcement as an attempt at censorship, despite the assertion that the fight should in no way impede on the right to freedom of speech.

The fact that the National Security Service is carrying out the PMs instruction makes the situation particularly odd, said the president of the Freedom of Information Centre, Shushan Doydoyan.

There are fears that under the existing conditions, the struggle against manipulation with the

direct participation of the National Security Service will be subjectively interpreted and will create an atmosphere of censorship in which journalists and civil society representatives will stop reacting and criticizing the activities of the authorities for fear of the consequences.

The chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Ashot Melikyan, says that the press service and special commission should deal with such issues [] the National Security Service.

The NSS already has many functions to perform, and it should focus on that. There are many other structures in the state system that can cope and deal with such [issues].

Information security expert Samvel Martirosyan says there are few successful stories in the world dealing with fake news and propaganda. In this regard, he believes that at this point it is better for Armenia to simply observe the situation abroad.

You can make changes to the legislation, and today many countries are following this path. But this is a bad way, because no one has yet come up with an effective law which would make it possible to suppress fake news and propaganda sources without affecting the normal media. Typically, the consequences are bad, and all this affects the freedom of speech.

<https://jam-news.net/armenian-national-security-service-taking-on-fake-news/>

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