

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

I am very proud to be here today in this incredibly important gathering which is about how to join our efforts, how to work together to protect our societies from disinformation.

We will think together on how to more effectively tackle, slow down and stop disinformation.

One thing is obvious: for addressing a big problem we should think big. So, in order to successfully navigate in this big challenge, we should think strategically and comprehensively. Addressing disinformation requires political determination and unified action, mobilizing all parts of the government (including cybersecurity, intelligence and strategic communication communities, data protection, electoral, law enforcement authorities). This should be done in close cooperation with like-minded partners across the country. It also requires close cooperation between the government, civil society and the private sector, and especially online platforms.

Struggle against disinformation has been a top priority for the Armenian Government and civil society since Revolution in 2018. There have been a number of initiatives and projects aimed at tackling disinformation, however they all had a common disadvantage: the efforts have been fragmental and uncoordinated, consequently, their impact was so.

Early this year, the Armenian civil society and the government initiated the development of the Strategy against Disinformation for creating strategic responses and building National Resilience. **GOAL**

We started to work closely and jointly to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach. The strategy unites the efforts of the government, civil society and citizens to combat disinformation.

The document defines the strategic directions of combating disinformation. It envisages a complex of urgent and immediate actions to protect the Republic of Armenia, its institutions and citizens from disinformation.

The coordinated response is build upon on three strategic pillars:

- (i) Strengthen the capabilities of state institutions of Armenia to detect, analyze and expose disinformation;
- (ii) Improving cooperation and mobilizing the private sector to tackle disinformation;
- (iii) Raising awareness and level of education on media freedoms and media literacy by constituting societal resilience towards disinformation

1. Under the pillar 1st it is planned to implement the following activities:

- a. Improve the strategic communication in the government agencies, strengthen the human, financial and technical resources of the communication subdivisions
- b. Improve the proactive transparency of government agencies.
- c. Introduce a self-assessment and evaluation system of transparency and accountability of the government agencies.

Communication is one of the essential directions in the toolkit of combating disinformation. When an information vacuum occurs, it is quickly filled with disinformation, and consequently, timely and complete communication can significantly reduce disinformation.

To increase the efficiency of communication with government institutions, it appears necessary to take the following steps:

- Establishment of a unified framework of communication subdivisions of government institutions and replenishment with human, financial and technical resources;
- Regular trainings and capacity building for staff;
- Reorganization of the work for communication departments;
- Development of a general communication strategy and communication guide (protocol) for the government.

The essence of proactive publicity is that, upon their own initiative, government institutions publish information regarding their activities based on the principles of accessibility, timeliness and integrity.

Government agencies should undertake ambitious steps to fully publicize official documents of public interest, both upon their own initiative and on the basis of inquiries, in order to promote open and efficient governance and prevent the release of false information.

The purpose of proactive publicity is not only to spread anti-propaganda, but also to deliver the facts to the public as a fully disclosed open data in a timely manner in order for the "other side of the story" to form as a countermeasure, which citizens must comprehend before encountering false information.

For this purpose, it is planned to:

- **Effective management and modernization of web resources**
- **Development of a common standard and criteria for official websites**
- **Introduction of a system for assessing the transparency and accountability of government institutions**

2. Under the 2nd pillar of the strategy it is envisioned to implement the following activities:

- a. Establish a cooperation working group
- b. 2.2 Foster the cooperation with fact-checking platforms
- c. 2.3 Form a cooperation to promote co-regulation and self-regulation in the media field
- d. 2.4 Engagement and mobilization of private sector

The main goal of the 2nd direction is to ensure effective cooperation with all beneficiary groups and individuals as well as to establish the necessary mechanisms for collaboration for the implementation of the national strategy.

2.1 Establishment of a working group

Establishment of a working group by appropriate specialists of the cooperating bodies (heads of Information and Public Relations departments, editors, journalists, public relations professionals, presidents of non-governmental organizations, etc.)

2.2 Cooperation with fact checking platforms

An active cooperation framework will be formed with independent fact checking platforms. Regular discussions will be organized for discussing current developments and trends in the field. The government will also cooperate with these platforms by providing complete and timely data so that fact checking platforms may fully perform their functions.

In particular, collaborative formats will be actively pursued to reduce the flow of political disinformation during electoral periods.

2.3 Cooperation to promote media coordination and self-regulation

The agenda of combating disinformation also includes ensuring the media beneficial ownership and financial transparency, as well as promoting and strengthening self-regulation and coordination mechanisms for media outlets¹.

Self-regulation and co-regulation mechanisms are essential in combating disinformation. Recent documents published by the Council of Europe specifically underline that member states have clear commitments in regards to self-regulation, by providing adequate funding and legal assistance to self-regulation and co-regulation mechanisms ensuring independence and financial stability².

The scope of mandate of the independent regulatory body (National Commission on Television and Radio) will be expanded to include the mandatory media literacy component.

The regulatory body will ensure public awareness on the role and mission of the media, the role and functions of regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, as well as the relevance of transparency, financial accountability and regulations of beneficial owners of media.

2.4 Engagement and mobilization of private sector

The role of the private sector is also key in combating disinformation. Through active cooperation with both the government and civil society, private IT companies can take over the role of developing innovative tools against disinformation.

Social media platforms, search engines and online advertising are widely used to spread disinformation. Advanced technologies can both contribute to the spread of disinformation and become a vital tool in the fight against it.

Private companies can play a particularly important role in the development of useful tools through automated mechanisms and artificial intelligence for combating disinformation. Availability of state funding or grants from international organizations can motivate private tech companies to initiate effective programs for the local market.

¹ Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age - Decl(13/02/2019)2, https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=090000168092dd4d

² Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age - Decl(13/02/2019)2, https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=090000168092dd4d

3. And finally, under the 3rd pillar it is planned to implement:

- a. Development of a state strategy for media literacy and coordination
- b. Integration of media literacy in general education
- c. Trainings for teachers
- d. Working with groups excluded from general education
- e. Training and capacity building for public and community employees

Greater public awareness is essential for improving societal resilience against the threat that disinformation poses. The starting point is a better understanding of the sources of disinformation and of the intentions, tools and objectives behind disinformation, but also of our own vulnerability. Building resilience also includes specialized trainings, public debates as well as other forms of common learning for the media. It also involves empowering all sectors of society and, in particular, improving citizens' media literacy to understand how to detect and fend off disinformation.

Strong commitment and swift actions are necessary to preserve the democratic process and the trust of citizens in public institutions. The present Strategy sets out key actions to tackle disinformation in a coordinated approach of the Armenian institutions. Hopefully within 2 years implementation practice we can achieve the expected results set for the strategy and will be able to share our best practice with everyone.