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Armenia: reform of power agencies faces rights defenders' criticism

In Armenia, the reform of the law enforcement system is an attempt to take full control over power structures and can become an instrument for setting up dictatorship, the human rights defenders interviewed by the "Caucasian Knot" believe.



The "Caucasian Knot" has reported that after signing the peace agreement on November 9 2020 by the parties in Karabakh conflict, the Armenian opposition held numerous protest actions demanding the resignation of Nikol Pashinyan, the Premier. Thus, on January 11, 2021, oppositionists blocked the road to the Yerevan Airport to prevent Pashinyan from flying to Moscow for negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian Cabinet of Ministers has approved the Police Reform Strategy for 2020-2022. According to the project, the creation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is planned. The Police will become only one of the divisions of the new ministry, within which the National Guard, the patrol service and an operative management centre will also be formed.

Rights defenders have criticized the idea and creation of the MIA. By reforming the law enforcement system, the ruling power is striving to take full control over the power structures, **Nina Karapetyants**, a human rights defender and the head of the Helsinki Association of Armenia, told the "Caucasian Knot" correspondent.

In her opinion, Pashinyan, the Premier, is trying to solve the issue of preserving the power and protecting himself from undesirable events during the early elections and post-election processes. "He understands that he no longer has the former legitimacy. And his intention to create the MIA indicates that Pashinyan has chosen the path of dictatorship," Ms Karapetyants has concluded.

Artak Kirakosyan, a rights defender and the head of the Civil Society Institute, also did not rule out that Pashinyan is trying to take control over the power bloc due to the loss of trust in the society. "Every day, the public confidence in him is decreasing; while security structures remain practically the same. Given the Premier's pathological suspiciousness, which we have seen recently, it is quite possible that he wants to subjugate the power structures," Mr Kirakosyan has explained.

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Activists report detentions at protest action in Yerevan, Yerevan marchers stand up for Pashinyan's opponent, Political analysts treat unification of Armenian opposition as fragile.

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