



Report

Groups Spreading Disinformation about US “Biological Weapons” Laboratories in Armenia and Their Motives

During recent months some of Armenian and Russian media have been constantly referring to the actions of reference laboratories opened in Yerevan, Gyumri and Ijavan in 2016, which are financed by Threat Reduction Agency of the US Department of Defense.

Published materials [state](#) that laboratories have a dual significance and pose a danger for “the population of Armenia, which is Russia’s strategic ally, because they can create biological weapons there”.

These allegations have been [denied](#) by all the relevant authorities. Spokesperson of the RA Ministry of Health Anahit Hayatyan was surprised to hear such a question and immediately denied the allegations. And MoH “National Center of Disease Control and Prevention” state non-commercial organization’s (SNCO) called the information absurd.

The US Embassy in Armenia also [referred](#) to the question by calling that type of information propaganda. As for The embassy suggested getting information about the activity of the laboratories from the RA Ministry of Health and the RA Ministry of Agriculture, since the laboratories are under their control.

In spite of official denials, some entities still spread the disinformation about the US creating biological weapons in Armenia.

Putting away the discussion on the content of the issue, the Union of Informed Citizens decided to address the groups which persistently spread this disinformation.

"For Restoration of Sovereignty" Initiative

The first statement of this type regarding the activity of the laboratories was made by the



member of "For Restoration of Sovereignty" Initiative [Hayk Ayvazyan](#) during the conference entitled “Medical laboratories in the context of Armenian security and sovereignty.

Այվազյան. ԱՄՆ լաբորատորիաները վտանգավոր են Հայաստանի համար

Speakers put the main emphasis on representing the US as a military threat for Armenia, and, in that

context, the medical laboratories were introduced as “military facilities”.

It is noteworthy that participants from the Russian Federation were also invited to the conference. In particular, Head of Ural Regional Center of Russian Institute for Strategic Studies Dmitri Popov presented a report (topic: “The Military-Biological Activity of the US in the Post-Soviet Space, Threats for CSTO member countries and Possible Counteraction Measures”).

The statements made in the same building where the Russian “Sputnik” media organization is located were immediately placed on Sputnik’s [website](#). [Nyut.am](#), [Ararat TV](#) and [iravunk.am](#) news websites followed Sputnik.

The spread of disinformation stopped for a while, when [SUT.am](#) fact-checking website published a letter from the RA Ministry of Health, according to which Russia had provided the office of “Reference Laboratory Center” of the RA MoH “National Center for Disease Control and Prevention” SNCO with 14 different types of devices and equipment, laboratory furniture for sanitary-chemical laboratory. In other words the laboratory for “biological weapons” has also received support from Russia.

But after some time, this false information came into circulation again, and this time through the Russian agency called [Regnum](#) (this agency is famous as one of the tools of Kremlin propaganda).

We get a fuller picture when it turns out that the author of that publication on the Russian website is the same member of “For Restoration of Sovereignty” Initiative Hayk Ayvazyan. Ayvazyan and his initiative were also noticed during their fight against the “Bill on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence”.



“For Restoration of Sovereignty” Initiative actively supports strengthening the Russian-Armenian relations, they promote CSTO and EAEU, introduce Russia as the one and only guarantor of our security, criticize the US, Europe and NATO.

It is noteworthy that the Russian version of the [website](#) of the Initiative is way more extensive and is more frequently updated than the Armenian one.

“HASAK” Political Party

The Russian trace was noticed again when the Head of “[HASAK](#)” political party Arman Ghukasyan and Deputy Head Tsovinar Kostanyan came up with a press [conference](#) where the same disinformation was announced again.

This time the speakers were trying to use other approaches to bring justifications for the claim that the information collected in those laboratories can be used for the creation of biological weapons.



The conference was mainly covered by Russian sites [eadaily.com](#), [arminfo.info](#), [yerkramas.org](#), [boeingisback.com](#), [comment.am](#), [asekose.am](#) and etc.

Both of these people and some of the media that covered the conference were noticed in the fight against “Bill on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence”, representing it as something forced on Armenia by Europe (you can find our report about it [here](#)).

Head of “For Social Justice” (HASAK) political party [Arman Ghukasyan](#) and its Deputy Head [Tsovinar Kostanyan](#) are famous in the Internet for their pro-Russian positions and for actively publishing photos with the Russian ambassador, as well as famous Russian politicians. They were also noticed for organizing a [protest](#) near the UK Embassy in Armenia.

It is worth noting that Arman Ghukasyan and Tsovinar Kostanyan are not only involved in politics, but also in the NGO field. They also lead “International Humanitarian Development” NGO, which has its part in the propaganda. Since [2015](#), this organization has been targeting a number of famous organizations in the NGO field, such as “Eurasia” Cooperation Fund and Open Society Foundations-Armenia, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office and etc.



It is worth reminding that Ghukasyan had made a statement according to which a number of non-governmental organizations and journalists had allegedly been trying to make a “color” revolution in Armenia during the police base takeover days. The aforementioned interview by Ghukasyan was published in the Russian [sputnikarmenia](#) website in the Russian language (there was no Armenian version of the interview in the website). Ghukasyan even made presentations about his ideas related to the “color revolution” in [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Kazakhstan](#).

Ghukasyan had also promised to publish the “list of American agents” until the end of August. A few days later, a [video](#) was published in Eastern Ukraine (self-proclaimed Republic of Donetsk), in which a number of both pro-government and opposition politicians were accused of being US “agents”. The video also contained the passport scans of a number of US diplomats. And there is strong [evidence](#) that these were obtained through Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSS).

It is worth noting that Arman Ghukasyan and Tsovinar Kostanyan now act as experts in newly formed “Voice of People” Club (although it is not clear what type of experts they are).

Trace of Russian Funds and Propaganda Machines

“[Luys](#)” Information and Analytical Center (head: Hayk Ayvazyan) is actively spreading the statements connecting with this issue on their Facebook page. In this group, you can mainly find statements in Russian, which mostly have anti-western nature.



Note that “Luys” Information and Analytical Center has applied for a [grant](#) to the Russian “Gorchakov Fund”, and the Head of the [Board of Trustees](#) of the Fund is Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov personally. The fund was established on February 2, 2010 by the decree of then-president Dmitri Medvedev and has direct funding from the Russian state budget.

“[Yerevan Geopolitical Club](#)” also carries out enthusiastic activity in spreading disinformation. And here we again meet most of the persons noted above. All the “analyses” referring to Armenia are published in the Russian language as if they were intended for Russians, rather than Armenians.

Head of Russian [state](#) “[Rossotrudnichestvo](#)” organization and Russian Ambassador in Armenia Ivan Volinkin’s assistant Mark Kalinin also participated in one of the discussions of the club, and we can see Head of the HASAK political party Arman Ghukasyan sitting next to him.



Also note that the statements of these people are mostly spread by pro-Russian media ([armeniasputnik.am](#), [geoclub.info](#), [kavkazoved.info](#), [openarmenia.com](#), [verelq.am](#), [regnum.ru](#), [fondres.ru](#), [eadaily.com](#),

eurasianinfoleague.com, armsovereignty.com and etc.).

For instance, the Armenian office of Russian “[Sputnik](#)” radio station, that actively spreads the information about biological weapons, belongs to the Russian [state](#) organization “Russia Today” which is [led](#) by well-known Kremlin propagandist Dmitri Kiselyov.

Conclusions

So now we can surely state that the authors of the disinformation about US making biological weapons in Armenia and the scandal raised because of that are pro-Russian propagandists.

The most active role-players have connections with the Embassy of Russian Federation in Armenia or with Russian fund in one way or other.

Therefore, the main goals of disinformation are to represent USA as an “enemy” and “danger” to Armenia, and create an image of Russia as the guarantor of our security and our “rescuer”.

“Union of Informed Citizens”

16.06.2017 Yerevan