

France Unveils New Rules on Mass Communications Surveillance



Paris, March 23 (RHC)-- The French prime minister has unveiled a set of phone and internet spying rules against suspected terrorists, saying the country has never faced so great a terrorist threat. "Because we often cannot predict the threat, the services must have the power to react quickly... There cannot be a lawless zone in the digital space," French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said in Paris, referring to the new surveillance measures.

The rules authorize the government to force communications companies to search phone and Internet metadata and flag potential terrorist behavior to police. Authorities will have access to digital and mobile communications of anyone linked to a "terrorist" inquiry without prior authorization from a judge. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and phone companies will be forced to give up data upon request. French authorities will keep recordings for a month, and metadata for five years.

Intelligence services can also place cameras and recording devices in private dwellings and install a device that records every key stroke on a targeted computer. They are allowed to use location trackers for cars and devices that can determine the identity of nearby mobile phones.

The new French law completely overhauls what officials label as an outdated legal framework for spying. France, however, is lagging behind other Western countries that have adopted comprehensive legislation allowing them to spy on modern communications of its citizens and foreigners.

This is while the United States has been criticized over its massive spying programs, which were revealed in documents leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013. Experts say the measures violate core provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

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