Argument map
Blockade of RT and Sputnik News

Central question

What are the arguments in the Netherlands for and against the EU regulation requiring Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block the websites of RT and Sputnik News?

Pro

Con

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Information

The blockade prevents the spread of disinformation
- The blockade prevents EU citizens from having easy access to disinformation from RT and Sputnik News.
- RT and Sputnik News spread disinformation and violate journalistic principles such as fairness and impartiality.
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- The blockade stimulates a societal debate on public opinion forming and information exchange.

The blockade is necessary to limit the spread of disinformation
- Without the blockade the ban on distribution through other channels, such as radio and TV, is ineffective.
- Organisations involved in the Internet are not sufficiently organised to decide on a blockade themselves.
- European independent media are not sufficiently able to counter disinformation themselves.

Legal

The blockade is legally sound
- The regulation states that RT and Sputnik News threaten order and security, including through sedition.
- There are precedents for blocking websites, such as the blocking of The Pirate Bay website.
- The blockade is a proportional response, because Russia also blocks European media websites.

The regulation contains sufficient legal safeguards
- The EU argues that the blockade is in line with fundamental rights under the European Charter.
- The regulation treats all distribution channels (TV, radio, Internet) equally.
- The blockade is sufficiently targeted; open communication with Russia remains possible.
- The blockade is sufficiently targeted; the chance that innocent parties will also be blocked is small.
- The regulation is the result of legitimate decision-making processes with input from all EU Member States.

Politics

The blockade strengthens the position and image of the European Union
- The blockade is binding for all EU countries, which will prevent Russia from playing them off against each other.
- With the blockade, the European Union can show decisiveness towards Russia and solidarity with Ukraine.
- The blockade will help maintain support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia.

Principles

The blockade is morally necessary
- The blockade supports Ukraine and shows solidarity with their struggle against Russia.
- Russian aggression requires that the EU try to hit Russia in every possible way, also by means of a blockade.
- Organisations involved in the Internet are morally obliged to contribute to the implementation of sanctions.
- The blockade is not principally at odds with the design of the current Internet.
- Internet infrastructure is not politically neutral, and thus may legitimately be used as a means of sanction.

Con

Information

The blockade hardly reduces the spread of disinformation
- The blocking of RT and Sputnik News is easy to circumvent for users with some technical knowledge.
- RT and Sputnik News have hardly any Dutch users or influence on the Dutch public.
- To the extent that RT and Sputnik News spread disinformation, it is only a small part of their content.
- Aside from RT and Sputnik News, there are plenty of other channels of disinformation.

The blockade will lead to a more poorly informed population
- Readers who are susceptible to disinformation want to visit RT and Sputnik News because of the blockade.
- Independent information for Russians is declining as Russia blocks European media as a countermove.
- The blockade will make it easier to legitimise censorship of media in the future.
- As often happens with sanctions, the measures might lead to excessive compliance by ISPs.

There are better alternatives than a blockade to combat the spread of disinformation
- Supporting independent media in Russia will have a better result than blocking RT and Sputnik News.
- Educating citizens and giving them the tools to identify disinformation is more effective than blocking websites.

Legal

The necessity for the blockade is poorly substantiated from a legal perspective
- The regulation does not prove that RT and Sputnik News spread war propaganda.
- The regulation does not prove that RT and Sputnik News threaten public order and security in the EU.
- The blockade is not an economic sanction, hence it does not fit with the rest of the economic sanctions package.

The legal safeguards in the regulation are insufficient
- The blockade goes against Article 11 of the European Charter on freedom of expression and information.
- The blockade does not have a clear end date and can therefore remain in place for longer than necessary.
- The regulation harms legal certainty because it does not make it sufficiently clear who should do what.
- The blockade can lead to legal inequality because EU Member States interpret the regulation differently.

Politics

The blockade will weaken the position and credibility of the European Union
- The blockade will undermine the moral authority of the EU as a champion of free society.
- The blockade will make it more difficult to condemn similar measures by other countries in the future.
- The blockade is a geopolitical sign of weakness, because the EU appears to be afraid of some websites.

The blockade will widen the gap between citizens and politics of the European Union
- Due to its rapid enactment, the regulation is not based on a broad public debate.
- The blockade is a sign of distrust in the ability of citizens to evaluate information for themselves.
- The blockade undermines support for the EU's disinformation policy because the blockade contradicts it.

Principles

The blockade harms the principle of a free and open Internet
- The blockade undermines the free exchange of information on the Internet.
- The blockade violates the neutrality of ISPs.
- The blockade was a unilateral decision by the EU that undermines the multilateral governance of the Internet.

The blockade does not fit with European and Dutch values
- The blockade deprives citizens of the autonomy to decide for themselves what information to consume.
- In the absence of judicial review, the blockade is political censorship and harmful to the rule of law.

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Definitions
Internet Service Providers: service providers that offer access to the Internet and hosting.
Website Blockade: making websites inaccessible to users who wish to access them by means of an Internet Service Provider.
RT: formerly known as Russia Today. Russian media organisation financed by the Russian government.
Sputnik News: Russian media organisation owned by the Russian government.
Disinformation: Disinformation is untrue, inaccurate or misleading information that is deliberately created and disseminated to make money or to harm a person, social group, organisation or country (source: www.rijksoverheid.nl).

Organizations involved
This map was commissioned with the help of experts from the following organizations:

BIT, Bits of Freedom, Dutch Cloud Community, Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Free Press Unlimited, Freedom Internet, Internet Society, KPN, Public Interest Litigation Project, RIPE NCC, Stratix, SURF, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Amsterdam and VodafoneZiggo.

Each organization regards the arguments on the map from its own perspective, which means none of them needs to agree with all of the arguments and will weigh them differently.