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IRIS 2019-2/20

NL-Netherlands: Dutch government presents course of action against disinformation in the build-up to national and European elections.

In a letter sent to Dutch parliament on 13 December 2018, the Dutch Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations set out the Dutch governmental plans to tackle disinformation in the build-up to the European and national provincial elections of May and March 2019, respectively. The letter, in part, aims to implement motions that were adopted earlier in this context by the Dutch parliament.

The Minister opens the letter by reiterating that the spread of disinformation with the goal to undermine and destabilize the democratic order poses a real threat. The government's efforts are aimed at countering state actors — or actors that can be related to state actors — that covertly try to influence public opinion. At the same time, referring to recent research (see e.g. IRIS 2018-9/29), the Minister acknowledges that the impact of disinformation in the Netherlands is currently limited.

The Minister starts by setting out the leading principles in the Dutch government's approach to tackle disinformation. Among other things, the emphasis is on the importance of ensuring the protection of human rights and of establishing a diverse media landscape and a high level of media literacy among citizens. Highlighting the transnational character of the phenomenon, the letter additionally welcomes efforts taken at the level of the European Union. This includes the Action Plan against disinformation, which has been presented on 5 December 2018 and the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation (see IRIS 2019-1/7) which has been signed by online platforms and representatives of the advertising industry.

The Dutch government's approach has two focuses in parallel. First, it will initiate independent scientific research on the effects of social media and internet search engines in the build-up to the elections. The research will, among other things, look into transparency of the origin of certain information. It will conduct both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The results will be presented in the summer of 2019. The second focus is on media literacy; in addition to actions already taken in this area, the Dutch government will launch an online awareness campaign that aims to make citizens more aware of the phenomenon and existence of disinformation and of the responsibility of citizens in recognizing such information. The Minister also highlights the importance of freedom of expression and independence of the press, and the Minister therefore emphasizes that the government itself will refrain from determining if a specific message contains disinformation. The campaign is set to start in February 2019.

• *Brief van 13 december 2018 van Minister Ollongren (Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties) aan de Tweede Kamer inzake desinformatie en beïnvloeding verkiezingen* (Letter of 13 December 2018 from Minister Ollongren (Interior and Kingdom Relations) to the House of Representatives concerning disinformation and influencing elections)

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