[NL] The Dutch Minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations responds to parliamentary questions regarding disinformation networks on social media

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On 2 October 2024, the Netherlands Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) published a response to parliamentary questions by Kati Piri and Barbara Catharina Kathmann, MPs from the GreenLeft-Labour political party alliance (GroenLinks–PvdA). The questions were related to the recent research on online disinformation networks during the recent elections to the European Parliament conducted by the Dutch consultancy firm Trollrensics. As seen in this research, coordinated networks of social media accounts were active in France, Germany and Italy, and they aimed to interfere with public discourse by discrediting public authorities. Piri and Kathmann, who submitted their questions on 12 July 2024, inquired about the Ministry's position concerning the outcomes of the research as well as the current national and EU-wide measures against disinformation and election interference. The answer was provided by Minister Uitermark, also on behalf of the State Secretary of Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Ministers of Defence and Justice and Security.

Minister Uitermark acknowledged that she was aware of the published research and expressed her concern regarding the drastic impact of disinformation networks on the rule of law and public trust in democratic institutions. Although the study did not establish any malicious activities in smaller Member States, including the Netherlands, Minister Uitermark indicated that Russian influence campaigns posed a threat to the Dutch society and must be appropriately addressed. In response to the inquiry whether the Netherlands, being a prominent attraction point for digital services, carries a special responsibility to tackle disinformation, Minister Uitermark stated that the EU legal framework, particularly the Digital Services Act (DSA), already obliges hosting providers (including online platforms) to take action on false and misleading information, including both its illegal and harmful forms. At the same time, given the documented misuse of Dutch ICT infrastructure by malicious actors, strengthening its resilience is essential to countering digital espionage, sabotage, and influence operations. Hence, Minister Uitermark underscored the need to effectively implement the Dutch Cybersecurity Strategy 2022 – 2028. Additionally, she pointed to the new measures against disinformation announced in June 2024, which include establishing a reporting facility, dispute resolution body and knowledge centre enabling citizens to bring complaints against content moderation decisions of

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online platforms.

Concerning additional measures taken during the EU elections, Minister Uitermark outlined both EU-wide and national initiatives. The former include the efforts made by the European External Action Service to analyse and expose disinformation, the 'stress test' conducted by the European Commission, as well as various coordination mechanisms among Member States. The latter encompasses disseminating reliable information about electoral processes, the inter-institutional dialogue involving municipalities, the Electoral Council and security authorities, as well as the communication with online platforms through the mechanism of 'trusted flaggers'. It was also revealed that the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations has recently commissioned further research into the vulnerabilities of open public debate, including how disinformation can undermine the Dutch democratic rule of law, as well as possible interventions which can enhance its protection. The first outcomes of this research will become available at the end of 2024. Additionally, Minister Uitermark remarked that during the informal session of the European Council, which took place on 17 June 2024, the Dutch Prime Minister emphasised the need for further research on potential foreign interference in European Parliament elections.

The response to parliamentary questions posed by MPs Piri and Kathmann signals growing attention to the issues of foreign interference and disinformation in the Netherlands.

Answer to questions posed by MPs Piri and Kathmann regarding Trollrensics' research on disinformation networks during the EU elections

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