[NL] Dutch Media Authority intervenes making certain online sports broadcasts free without registration

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On 20 January 2025, the Dutch Media Authority (*Commissariaat voor de Media*) announced that, following an investigation, a major Dutch broadcast provider would be making broadcasts of certain sports competitions more easily accessible to the general public, without the creation of specific accounts or the sharing of personal data. The investigation followed VodafoneZiggo acquiring the broadcasting rights to the Champions League and Europa League, which are part of the so-called “events list” under the Dutch Media Act (*Mediawet*). Events on the events list are of general social interest and must be available to at least 75% of Dutch households, without having to pay extra for it; the Media Act states that these events must be distributed via an “open television programme channel”. Notably, in 2023, the Dutch Media Authority published guidance on the distribution of events via an open television programme channel, giving providers the freedom to use different broadcasting techniques, including online broadcasts via a browser or an app.

Crucially, when VodafoneZiggo acquired the broadcasting rights to these football competitions, viewers who were not VodafoneZiggo customers could only watch these matches without extra costs if they created an account, which also required them to share their personal data with VodafoneZiggo; and with this account, they could watch the broadcasts via the app or browser. However, the Dutch Media Authority received reports and questions from viewers who experienced the creation of an account as a barrier. In addition, interest groups also expressed their concerns about accessibility for people with fewer digital skills, including many elderly people; the Media Authority was asked to take enforcement action against VodafoneZiggo.

Indeed, during discussions about this with VodafoneZiggo, the Media Authority had expressed its concerns about the accessibility of the broadcasting methods that VodafoneZiggo would offer to non-customers. After an investigation, the Media Authority informed VodafoneZiggo that the obligation to create an account in order to watch the match did not comply with the rules of the Media Act. The Media Authority stated that it “puts the viewer's interests first: as many people as possible should be able to watch the broadcast of the event free of charge and without further barriers”. In this regard, the Media Authority found the obligation to create an account and to register multiple personal data to be “too high a

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barrier". Importantly, on 20 January 2025, VodafoneZiggo announced that the broadcast could now also be watched via an "open web link", with viewers no longer needing to create an account for this.

Finally, the Media Authority stated that it will "continue to monitor whether VodafoneZiggo ensures that sufficient households can watch the broadcasts".

Commissariaat voor de Media, "VodafoneZiggo maakt uitzendingen UEFA-competities makkelijker toegankelijk na gesprek met Commissariaat", 20 januari 2025

Dutch Media Authority, "VodafoneZiggo makes UEFA competition broadcasts more accessible after talks with the Commission", 20 January 2025

https://www.cvdm.nl/nieuws/vodafoneziggo-maakt-uitzendingen-uefa-competities-makkelijker-toegankelijk-na-gesprek-met-commissariaat/

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