Panel 2: Regulation of the Digital Sphere?

Date and Time: Saturday 23 January 2021, 13:30-15:00 CET

The backdrop

In the development of any ground-breaking technology, there comes a time when it is crucial to strike a balance between the promotion of infrastructure and its restriction through regulation in order to achieve a positive effect on social development. However, humanity is currently facing the challenge that the steady expansion of infrastructure is not accompanied by an increase of regulation, which is not only raising questions of the degree the internet should be regulated but of who should control it.

These and similar questions are discussed in the international community, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). But which voices are heard in these initiatives and which ones remain silent? How does this affect regulatory approaches?

International cooperation - not only on this complex of issues - is threatened by increasing disinformation, which can manipulate public opinion leading to a loss of trust within and between states. While there has been little progress on this front, the privacy of EU citizens has been increasingly protected since 2018 by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that manifests a cornerstone in the protection of Internet users from manipulation by algorithms. But is this regulation sufficient to ensure protection against increasing user surveillance? How are such regulations globally applicable?

Digitalisation is rapidly transforming the world. The pandemic acts as a catalyst for the widespread adoption of new forms of communication and exchange, and therefore further urges the need to negotiate the regulation of the internet. Focussing on the challenges of internet governance, the panel discusses the most pressing issues and potential future scenarios.

Key Questions addressed by the panel:

- For decades, innovation, technology and commerce have outpaced legislation and regulation, allowing corporations to achieve higher financial gain through deregulation or self-regulation. This imbalance has often been at the expense of the wider public interest. How far should state regulations of the digital space go? How far must they go in any case? And who should be responsible?
- How can the Internet, which is constantly in a state of change, be regulated?
- What can initiatives like IGF or ITU do, what do they have to do? Which voices need to be empowered in such forums?
- What risks poses disinformation to cooperation on a (inter-)national level and how could it be reduced?
- To what extent is the GDPR sufficient to protect the privacy of Internet users? How can such a regulation, or one that goes even further, be internationalized?
- What developments do you fear / hope for?