

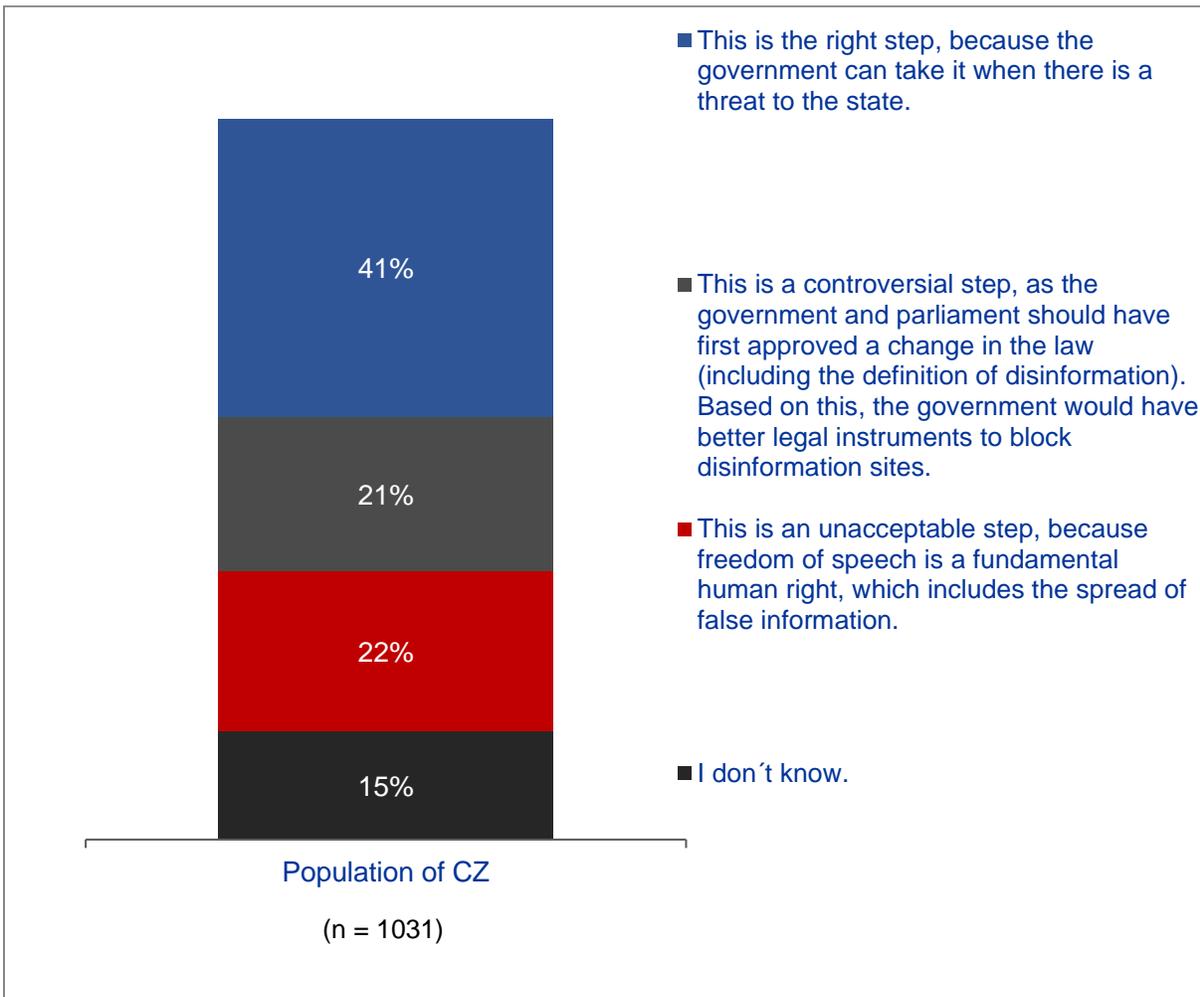
The impact of the war in Ukraine on the perception of freedom of speech in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

Prague 12.4.2022 – More inhabitants of the Czech Republic than the Slovak Republic accept the statement that their country is part of the information war waged by the Russian Federation. In the Czech Republic it is 52% of the population, while in Slovakia it is 40%. These are the results of a sociological survey conducted by Ipsos in both countries for the Central European Digital Media Observatory (CEDMO). Almost a third of the population of the Slovak Republic (29%) expressed the opinion that information warfare is merely a pretext for Western governments (including their own) to restrict freedom of speech. In the Czech Republic, it is 15% of the population. The sociological survey, which took place between 31 March and 6 April 2022, was attended by 1,031 respondents in the Czech Republic and 1,024 in Slovakia.

"The opinion that the Czech Republic is part of the information war waged by Russia is most often held by young people under 29 years of age (62%) and people with higher education. The same is true in Slovakia," says co-author Michal Kormaňák from Ipsos.

The sociological survey also shows that 41% of the population of the Czech Republic approves of blocking disinformation websites when there is a threat to the state. A fifth of respondents (21%) consider it a controversial step without clear legal powers, and the same number (22%) say it is an unacceptable interference with freedom of speech (see Graph No. 1).

Graph No. 1 – Attitude of the public in the Czech Republic to the blocking of Czech disinformation websites



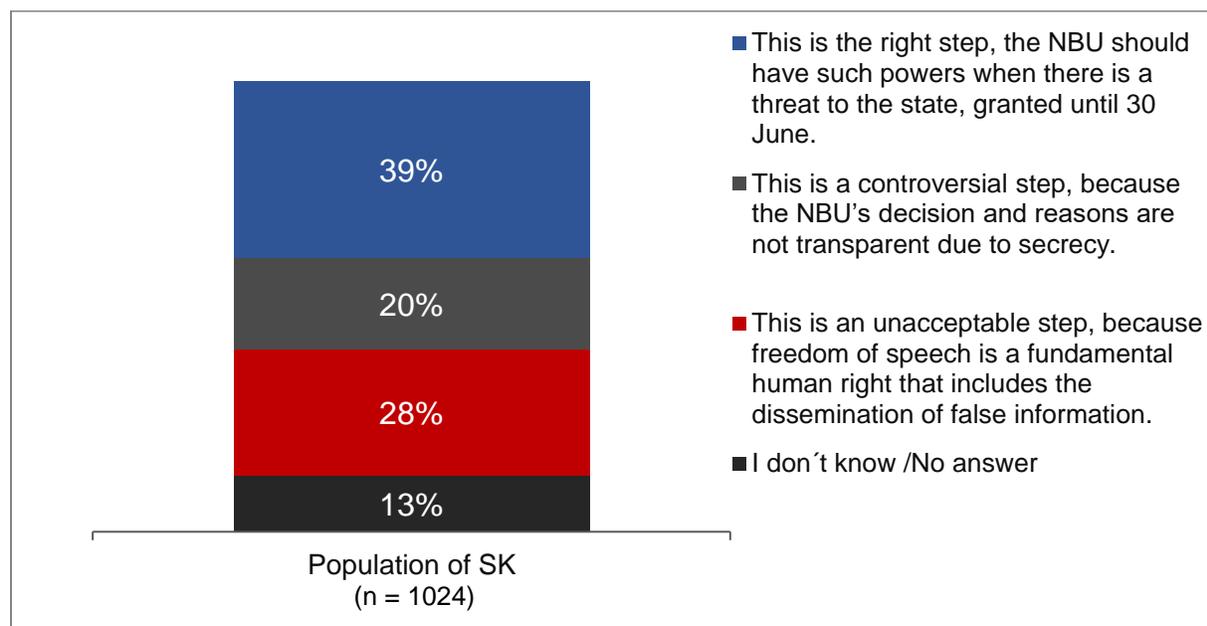
Question: Since the beginning of the Russian occupation of Ukraine, the government of the Czech Republic has been blocking some disinformation websites with Internet domain operators and mobile operators. Which of the following statements best describes your point of view?

It is worth to remind that in the Czech Republic at the end of February, the association CZ.NIC, which is the operator of the domain registry with the Czech national extension . cz, blocked eight websites publishing disinformation about the war in Ukraine. This was done on the basis of a call from the government, which did not name specific websites or how the addressed entities should proceed towards them. A few days later, mobile operators joined in and began blocking access to six websites on their networks.

Slovakia's disinformation websites were blocked in mid-March, on the basis of an amendment to the Cyber Security Act, which entrusted this power to the National Security Authority. The block is valid until June 30, 2022, and so far it concerns four sites.

According to the current sociological survey, 39% of the population of the Slovak Republic consider it correct that the local National Security Authority (NSA) has the temporary power to block disinformation websites during a threat to the state. On the contrary, 28% of respondents think that the new powers for the NSA are an unacceptable step that disproportionately interferes with freedom of speech. A fifth of respondents considers this power or its application to be questionable (see Graph No. 2).

Graph No. 2 – Attitude of the public in the Slovak Republic to the blocking of Slovak disinformation websites



Question: Regarding the war in Ukraine, has the National Security Authority the legal power to block malicious activities in the cyberspace of Slovakia, including disinformation websites?

"The greatest support of the extension of the powers of the National Security Authority can be seen in Eastern Slovakia, where 47 percent of respondents agree with it. A third of people who have graduated from primary school, a secondary school without a school-leaving examination, or with an apprenticeship certificate say that this is an unacceptable step," adds Michal Kormaňák from Ipsos.

Director of the Central European research centre CEDMO, Václav Moravec, of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University, states that this is the first wave of regular research to examine changes in public attitudes in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, on this and other issues.

If you have any questions or are interested in more information about CEDMO, you can contact Adriana Dergam, cedmo@fsv.cuni.cz

The CEDMO project is co-financed by the European Commission through the European Union Connecting Europe Facility, TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR - CEF-TC-2020-2 with project number: 2020-EU-IA-0267.