



Under The Radar

*A dive into the news
you might have missed*



TRAFALGAR STRATEGY

Erdogan lays down the law

What happened?

Social media companies Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Periscope, YouTube and TikTok have each been hit with fines totalling over \$1M each for failing to comply with Turkey's new social media laws. The Turkish legislation requires social media platforms with more than one million users to appoint a local representative in the country, store user data in the host country, and block or remove content if the authorities demand it. The government led by Recep Erdogan said the new laws were necessary to tackle criminal activity, while campaigners argued the move was merely the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) tightening their grip over social media. Only the Russian platform VK has adhered to the ruling. The telecommunications regulatory authority warned that fines were just the start of punishments if social media companies do not comply, which could be followed by a ban on advertising and data restrictions that would effectively make them unusable in Turkey.

What does it mean?

Erdogan has had social media giants in his sights for some time. While he has been bringing swathes of Turkish society under his control throughout his 17 years at the top, a recent run-in with Twitter trolls has turned the digital landscape into his next target.

In July, Erdogan's daughter and son-in-law announced the birth of their fourth child on Twitter, which was swiftly met with a barrage of insults, including questions of the newborn's paternity. The tweets irked the President so much that 11 people were arrested and triggered Erdogan's new obsession. He reportedly told his provincial leaders that social media sites (including Netflix) were immoral and they needed to be regulated. It didn't take long before Erdogan's personal grievances turned political, and stringent legislation appeared before parliament and was voted into law.

Social media companies are rightfully concerned by the new laws. If the companies do appoint local representatives in Turkey, they will be accountable to the authorities, including the courts. Considering the courts routinely go after anyone who speaks out in Turkey (just ask Erdogan's Twitter trolls), this would put the companies in a worrying position. The companies would be censored at best, but at worse, become a puppet of the judicial system.

So far the platforms, especially Facebook, are holding firm, while the government has said they will go further. But with two-thirds of the population, an estimated 54 Million Turks, using the sites, a ban would be difficult to sell to the public. And how would Ergogan's government adjust to governance with no social media? Twitter, in particular, is widely used to communicate with their citizens. Will Erdogan be the one to blink in this very visible game of chicken?

Hate Speech – no longer a run of the (JS) mill issue?

What happened?

Free speech organisations are raising concerns over the Law Commission's proposals to prosecute individuals for hate crimes committed in their own homes. The proposed changes would undermine the current exemption in free speech legislation for private gatherings. If enacted in law, and then applied, it is argued that the current proposals would restrict the ability of people to freely debate issues within the confines of their own homes.

What does it mean?

It is widely accepted that more needs to be done to combat the recent rise in hate speech crimes committed in the UK. However, the implications of the Law Commission's proposals are raising serious questions over whether the proposed means for doing so, i.e. greater state involvement, justify the ends.

This is because the debate currently taking place is not just over what constitutes hate speech, but also over an individual's right to the privacy of their own home. The proposed legislation could mean that, if words uttered by an individual within the confines of a private dwelling are repeated in a public setting, these same individuals could then be liable to prosecution by the state.

There have also been concerns about the ends themselves – namely, combating hate speech through the law. Those in favour of doing so argue that this is the only way to effectively combat rising hate crime, whilst those who are opposed to it claim that hate speech laws are covert attempts to enforce an agenda of 'political correctness' upon them.

The frictionless discourse between the two sides must be causing famed philosopher J.S. Mill to turn in his grave. In his 1859 work, *On Liberty*, Mill spoke of knowledge arising from the collision of truth with error. In other words, he was saying that through discussion and debate comes greater knowledge and understanding. Arguably then, debates over the role of the state in these matters are missing the mark. The state can try to implement certain legislation upon people, but it will most likely fail to successfully enforce it. Or it could choose to do nothing, but then existing concerns over hate speech would remain unsolved and it would be considered ineffective. In other words, a *Catch-22*. So, maybe, this should not be about how the state will, or will not, solve these issues but, instead, how we can better engage with, and understand, one another.

Above all J.S. Mill was best known for his 'harm' principle, which he used to defend an individual's freedom up until the point that the exercising of such freedoms then harms someone else. The state will never be able to implement and enforce such a principle, and nor should it. But through attempting to engage and debate with one another, we won't need it to.

Beijing dashes Jack Ma's ambitions

What happened?

Ant Group's stock market debut has been halted by Chinese authorities over what they've termed as 'major issues'. The listing, which would have sold 11% of the company's shares, worth about \$34.4bn (£26.5bn), would have been the largest share offering in history. But the group's backer, Jack Ma, was abruptly called in for supervisory interviews by the Shanghai Stock Exchange, who later revealed that Ant Group no longer met the "listing conditions or information disclosure requirements", just two days before the offering. Ant Group then pulled its planned listing from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. Alibaba, which owns a third of Ant, saw its share price plunge 8.1% in New York on Tuesday, followed by 9.6% in Hong Kong on Wednesday, wiping \$3bn (£2.3bn) off Ma's net worth.

What does it mean?

The affair has reaffirmed a harsh truth in China: the CCP is all-powerful, and it will not tolerate the private sector rivalling or criticising its power. Jack Ma, the celebrity entrepreneur, is an icon in China, controlling a fintech empire that eclipses China's biggest banks. But he flew too close to the sun and has become too big and too outspoken for Beijing. In October, Ma attended a summit in Shanghai and delivered a damning speech, criticising regulators, and by

extension, the Chinese state. He also mocked the state-run banks, comparing the institutions to "pawn-shops". His comments were widely shared on social media, as they were an unusual public attack on the government by a well-known figure.

"He flew too close to the sun and has become too big and too outspoken for Beijing"

The speech went down like a lead balloon in Beijing, likely catching the attention of President Xi Jinping. One can certainly imagine the discussions by CCP officials deciding how to deal with this jumped-up celebrity. Ultimately, the party chose to hit Ma where it hurt most: his IPO (and through it, his pocketbook). And a fortnight later, Ma was pulled in for questioning, which started the chain of events which saw his public offering scrapped and his wealth reduced. The timing also was especially brutal; the 11th hour intervention ensured maximum damage, with all already plans set in motion for this historic moment.

The CCP may live to regret their attack on Ma, as China would have reaped the benefits of a homegrown company achieving a historic feat. But Beijing has sent out a powerful message to the private sector, one that no one will forget any time soon.

This Weeks Must Reads

The West can't ignore Macron's call to action

[The Times](#)

“We should be supporting Emmanuel Macron as he gallops into a clash of civilisations, a defence of what used to be viewed as shared western values”

- Roger Boyes on President Macron's fight against radical Islam.

Amazon gold rush:
Brazil grapples with illegal mining in the rainforest

[Financial Times](#)

“Illegal miners are once again flocking to the Amazon with the same get-rich-quick culture. But this time they are also bringing new heavy machinery and financial knowhow.”

- Bryan Harris, Sam Cowie & Gideon Long on the Amazon gold rush.

North Korea Tells Its People to Stop Smoking.
Can Kim Jong-un Quit, Too?

[The New York Times](#)

“The country is expanding a national campaign against the habit, even as state news media continues to show Mr. Kim puffing away”

- Choe Sang-Hun on Kim Jong-un's hypocritical smoking campaign.

America Is Too Divided to Reclaim Its
Place on the Global Stage

[TIME](#)

“Regardless of the way the final presidential tally shakes out, one thing is increasingly clear—in 2020, there is no advanced industrial democracy more politically divided than the U.S. is today”

- Ian Bremmer on America's standing in the world following the divisive election.



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