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Durov warns: The end of the free internet has begun

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Telegram founder Pavel Durov sees a digital iceberg behind the British social media ban. He believes it will sink the free internet and drag down fundamental civil liberties.

On stage at the Freedom Forum in Oslo, Telegram founder Pavel Durov weighed in on the debate surrounding the social media ban in the UK. [TKP reported extensively](#): First comes the "age verification" and the "ban for those under 16," which is actually a ban for everyone. Only those who prove their age—ultimately via a digital ID—will be granted access to the internet. Durov paints a bleak picture.

He compares Western societies to the Titanic. They have already struck an iceberg and begun to sink – yet most citizens are still sitting in their cabins, convinced that the ship of personal freedoms is unsinkable.

The move in Great Britain is the next step. Initially in the UK, and certainly soon across the entire EU, it provides the perfect pretext for mandatory digital IDs, device-level verification on every mobile phone, and the de facto abolition of anonymous communication online. Fundamental civil liberties such as the privacy of correspondence and freedom of information are thus on the verge of being abolished.

The measure is packaged in the familiar language of child protection. In practice, however, all major platforms must verify users' ages via facial scan, passport, or credit card data. What begins as a restriction for minors is quickly evolving into a nationwide system of internet passports.

Encrypted messaging apps are currently exempt from the ban, but the same "Online Safety Act" already contains the legal mechanisms to later enforce backdoors. Tech executives who refuse to turn every smartphone into a state surveillance device face up to five years in prison.

Durov spoke from two decades of experience at the helm of major platforms and with direct state pressure from Russia, the EU, and France. His core message:

"Our ship has already run aground on the iceberg. We've already begun to sink without even realizing it. And I'm talking about the ship of our personal freedoms."

The passengers of the Titanic refused to leave the ship for almost two hours after the collision with the iceberg. People believed the Titanic was unsinkable. The lifeboats set sail half empty.

Only in the last half hour did people begin to panic – but by then it was already too late. Not enough lifeboats, nowhere to hide, nowhere to flee to."

Durov cited concrete examples: In the United Kingdom, thousands of people are arrested every year for social media posts. In Germany, a politically incorrect comment can lead to fines or even imprisonment. "Child protection" rhetoric is used to immediately end any debate.

"As soon as someone says 'child protection,' very old and deep parts of our brain are suddenly activated. Who could possibly be against protecting children? It completely bypasses logic, debate, and rationality."

Suddenly, people are willing to give up everything. And authoritarian regimes have repeatedly managed to push through all sorts of repressive laws under the guise of child protection."

He recalled how Russia had unsuccessfully tried to ban Telegram. The authorities blocked the app, but 95 percent of Russian teenagers continued to use it anyway – many via VPNs, which exposed them to significantly more radical and illegal content than the original platform.



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🚩 Telegram founder Pavel Durov explains here how, in his view, false and misleading claims by Keir Starmer, Ursula von der Leyen and others are being used to gradually establish a Stasi-like system for digital identity surveillance – a “digital gulag”. [Show more](#)



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Starmer justified the ban for those under 16 by saying it would "give children back their childhood." The accompanying rules require age verification on Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, X, and other platforms. There are also restrictions on live streams, messaging strangers in games, as well as curfews and scroll limits for those under 18. The regulations are expected to take effect before Christmas 2026 and be fully enforced by April 2027.

Big Brother Watch comments: This involves blanket identity checks for everyone who wants to use a mobile phone, tablet, or laptop. The same government that has repeatedly failed to protect children from grooming gangs and ideological indoctrination in schools now presents itself as the sole authority that can decide what is "safe" online.

The British model is accelerating a global trend already visible in Canada, Australia, and the EU. Each country uses slightly different justifications, but all are building the same core capability: a verified digital identity as a gateway to the open internet.

Once every post, every search, every message, and every transaction requires a state-linked identity, dissent, which was previously difficult to monitor across the board, becomes a simple administrative measure. An entire generation will grow up with permanent surveillance as the norm.

Durov's warning from Oslo: The ship has already struck the iceberg. The only question is how many passengers will still be below deck when the water reaches their cabins.