TECHNOLOGY ASPECTS OF THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR SA: EXCITING TIMES AHEAD!

Category: Commercial Law,Media and OTT,Privacy Law, Infosec, and POPIA,Technology Law
written by Lucien Pierce | March 13, 2018

In his State of the Nation address last night, President Ramaphosa touched those areas of the South African economy that can turn our fortunes around relatively quickly: agriculture, tourism, manufacturing and technology. What he had to say about technology is really exciting.

"Government is finalising a small business and innovation fund targeted at start-ups."

He's just come back from Davos. It's possible he heard someone from the World Economic Forum say "*that emerging technological paradigms may serve as a window of opportunity for the latecomer or emerging economies; not being locked into the existing technological system, they may seize the opportunity to leapfrog into emerging or new industries.*"[1] I know it sounds like a lot of gobbledygook, but what I think this means is that by using new technology, lots of small, nimble, innovative, State-funded start-ups can employ lots of people who may produce innovative products, to help their country get ahead: I can just see that unemployment rate thermometer dropping from a worrying 30% to something much better.

"Our prosperity as a nation depends on our ability to take full advantage of rapid technological change. This means that we urgently need to develop our capabilities in the areas of science, technology and innovation."

I think our President wants us to take a leaf out of the books of South Korea, Singapore (although not the press freedom leaf) and the other Asian Tigers. Singapore went from a "third-world" to "first-world" nation in one generation by using innovation and technology.[2] I think President Ramaphosa knows that if we put our minds to growing the science, technology and innovation sectors, we can do just as well.

"***We will soon establish a Digital Industrial Revolution Commission, which will include the private sector and civil society, to ensure that our country is in a position to seize the opportunities and manage the challenges of rapid advances in information and communication technology.***"

With archaic-minded people proposing dead-in-the-water[3] concepts like “Wholesale Open Access Networks” (WOAN) to act as a monopoly over communications infrastructure, President Ramaphosa is going to have to find some really “with-it” people to run an organisation with as lit a name as the Digital Industrial Revolution Commission (we could call it D.I.R.C., which has an equally cool ring to it, just like Knight Rider’s K.I.T.T.). It’s not a new concept – other countries have similar organisations – and I believe it can work.[4]

“The drive towards the digital industrial revolution will be underpinned by the availability of efficient networks. We will finalise our engagements with the telecommunications industry and other stakeholders to ensure that the allocation of spectrum reduces barriers to entry, promotes competition and reduces the cost to consumers.”

President Ramaphosa knows that, with efficient networks and cheap connectivity, a graduate with programming skills, living in Kuruman, will be able to contribute to fintech, regtech and insuretech as a distributed ledger technology programmer without, having to leave the beautiful scenery she loves so much. I have a feeling that silly concepts like the WOAN will be “thwoan” out the window and we could well see high-demand spectrum being made available in more effective ways. This will also act as a source of revenue for the State and could provide more efficient and cheaper access to communications for those living in remote and underserviced parts of our land.

I’m exciting about what the future holds, especially with a technologically savvy president who doesn’t think that the 4th Industrial Revolution is a remake of some third-rate Bolshevik-themed movie.

[1] HTTPS://WWW.WEFORUM.ORG/AGENDA/2018/01/THE-4TH-INDUSTRIAL-REVOLUTION-IS-A-WINDOW-OF-OPPORTUNITY-FOR-EMERGING-ECONOMIES-TO-ADVANCE-BY-LEAPFROGGING

[2] HTTPS://WWW.OECD.ORG/COUNTRIES/SINGAPORE/46581101.PDF

[3] HTTPS://WWW.GSMA.COM/SPECTRUM/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2017/07/GSMA_SWN-8-

PAGER_R3_WEB_SINGLES.PDF

[4] HTTP://WWW.DIGITALEUROPE.ORG/OUR-WORK/DIGITAL-ADVISORY-COUNCIL