



Armenian Bar Association

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Certified Mail and email to Legal@facebook.com

Jennifer Newstead, Esq.
General Counsel
Facebook, Inc.
1601 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Re: Copy of Our Letter to Facebook's Oversight Board
Case: 2020-003-FB-UA

Dear Ms. Newstead:

On behalf of the Armenian Bar Association, a nonprofit and nonpartisan U.S. entity,¹ I submit this comment in support of the appeal in Case: 2020-003-FB-UA. Based on publicly available information, the post in question does not violate Facebook's Community Standards on Hate Speech and the decision of removal should be reversed. A summary of our main arguments precedes the detailed discussion:

- Referring to those who had a hand in destroying Christian Armenian churches and cultural monuments with the Russian word "тазики" does not cross the red line of hate speech. This colloquial term is not on par with egregious, illicit and overt slurs. The term simply does not infer or insinuate hate;

- The remaining parts of the post fall squarely within the realm of civil discourse and dialectical expressions of current affairs. "Azerbaijani aggression" refers to numerous documented cases of government-sponsored cultural erasure and ethnic cleansing throughout history. This is not hate speech just as a composed response to Jewish Holocaust or Armenian Genocide denial is not hate speech; and

- Abridging free speech sets a dangerous precedent of stifling an open exchange of ideas, including those that draw attention to acts of aggression.

The use of the word "Тазики/Taziki" falls woefully short of qualifying as a slur egregious enough to warrant the removal of content for which the primary purpose, based on the description provided, is raising awareness of cultural erasure and historical revisionism. The etymology of the word "Taziki" comes from the Turkish word "Taz"

¹ www.armenianbar.org

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which means a bowl – wide and shallow, round or oval container.² “Taziki” is a diminutive plural noun of “Taz” that means bowls. The Facebook user likely used this word in a casual way as it is a mere rhyme of “Aziki,” a diminutive term for Azerbaijanis. The term is barren of hostile, abusive or demeaning character and does not qualify as hate speech.

The balance of the statements in the post falls squarely within political speech and does not constitute hate speech. Removing such a post threatens to censor politically-motivated speech. The user wrote that (s)he is against “Azerbaijani aggression” which cannot, and must not, be equated with dismissing a people as a whole or anything hate speech-related. If we cannot opine about the actions - aggressive or otherwise - of a country, how are the plights of an oppressed population to be shared with and documented for the international community? It is likely that this post was flagged by Azerbaijan’s troll farms, which, among other things, propagate pernicious propaganda for the end of Armenian culture and the manipulation of Armenian history.³

The summary of the post said that the user posted “alleged” pictures of churches in Baku. Although the photos were not included, it is beyond cavil that multiple Armenian churches in Baku were previously destroyed.⁴ At least one Armenian church is currently being used for non-Armenian and non-religious purposes. The reference to “Azerbaijani aggression” against Armenians in the context of Armenophobic propaganda, ethnicity-based pogroms, cultural genocide, historical revisionism, and desecration of holy sites is well-documented in numerous cases:

1. Destruction of Armenian churches in Nakhichevan, a native-Armenian region ethnically cleansed of Armenians during the 20th century;⁵
2. Deliberate bombing of the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi, twice during the most recent Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh hostilities, in violation of the Geneva Conventions;⁶

² [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Таз_\(посуда\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Таз_(посуда))

³ <https://nymag.com/developing/2018/10/azerbaijan-trolls-q-a-katy-pearce.html>
<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/facebook-azerbaijan-troll-farm>
<https://www.ombuds.am/images/files/2032f021fe81176414a649d588ad0e86.pdf>
<https://flnka.ru/digest/6434-rouben-galichian-on-how-azerbaijan-falsifies-history.html>
<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/10/08/eliminating-armenians-from-artsakh>

⁴ https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список_армянских_храмов_на_территории_современного_Азербайджана

⁵ <https://hyperallergic.com/482353/a-regime-conceals-its-erasure-of-indigenous-armenian-culture>

⁶ <https://www.france24.com/en/20201008-devastation-inside-karabakh-church-hit-by-rocket>

3. Historical revisionism claiming that churches in parts of Artsakh being handed to Azerbaijan are “Christian Albanian,” despite well-documented archeological evidence that they are in fact Armenian.⁷

4. Prior to the Baku and Sumgait pogroms carrying out ethnic cleansing of Armenians, there were over 200,000 Armenians living in Baku.⁸ Since Baku’s inception, Armenians contributed to the city in important ways, from playing a key role in developing Baku’s prosperous oil industry to their many architectural contributions.⁹

The user’s primary purpose was to draw attention to the war crimes and cultural calamity directed towards Armenians. Such content should not be censored, as it draws attention to crimes in the far reaches of the world that are otherwise not covered, or insufficiently covered in mainstream media. Removing such posts only serves to embolden those who would commit such crimes at the expense of oppressed people and would be consistent with the denial of the Jewish Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. That is a consistency which Facebook would do well to avoid.

Sincerely,

ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION



Lucy Varpetian
Chairperson

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/armed-conflict-and-heritage/r-nav/frequently-asked-questions>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/presidentaz/status/1331624720597458944>

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/cultural-heritage-in-the-crosshairs-once-more-11605731198>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Anti-Armenian_pogroms

https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Армяне_в_Азербайджане

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenians_in_Baku

<https://youtu.be/y5ZwGKrER6A>

<https://youtu.be/KbpdHnBmDz0>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture_of_Baku

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenians_in_Baku#Economic_life