

# After lawsuit threat, Twitter to pull racist posts

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The Twitter logo is seen at its California headquarters. Twitter has agreed to remove anti-Semitic messages from the micro-blogging site after threats of legal action, a Jewish student union in France said Friday.

(AP)—Twitter agreed to pull racist and anti-Semitic tweets under a pair of French hash tags after a Jewish group threatened to sue the social network for running afoul of national laws against hate speech, the organization said. The decision came a day after Twitter bowed to German law and blocked an account of a banned neo-Nazi group there.

The freewheeling social network is increasingly running up against European anti-discrimination laws, many of which date to the aftermath of the Holocaust by governments that acknowledged the contribution of years of hate speech to the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews. Friday's action, which was not carried out immediately, could mark a new stage

for the company that has famously refused efforts to police its millions of users.

But it's not entirely clear how the social network planned to carry out the agreement or in what timeframe.

"Twitter does not mediate content," the company said in a statement. "If we are alerted to content that may be in violation of our terms of service, we will investigate each report and respond according to the policies and procedures outlined in our support pages."

The company's policies require international users to comply with local laws regarding online conduct and acceptable content. They also ban any content with direct threats of violence.

The French Union of Jewish Students, which planned to supply Twitter with a list of the offensive tweets to be pulled, said it would still file a formal complaint against the social network to bring the tweeters to justice. The union held a conference call Thursday night with Twitter executives in California.

The anti-Semitic tweets in French, which started Oct. 10, included slurs and photos evoking the Holocaust, including one of a pile of ash and another of an emaciated Holocaust victim. They were followed by offensive, anti-Muslim tweets.

On Thursday, Twitter blocked the neo-Nazi's account in Germany, although its tweets were still visible to any user whose settings include a different location. The French-language tweets came from hundreds of users, not all of them necessarily in France.

Almost immediately after the French group announced its agreement with Twitter, tweets went up against what some users saw as an attack on

freedom of expression—all using the hash tag that started the wave of racist posts on Oct. 10.

Elie Petit, vice president of the group, dismissed the criticism: "I don't think a call for murder is freedom of expression," he said.

French law forbids all discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, race or religion.

German law is more specific. Because of its Nazi past, the country has strict laws prohibiting the use of related symbols and slogans—like the display of the swastika, or saying "heil Hitler."

Emma Llanso of the Washington-based Center for Democracy and Technology, said the French case appears to be far less clear-cut than the German one. In Germany, she said, there was a specific request from a government body under a specific law. In France, it was essentially a private group threatening a lawsuit.

Ultimately, Llanso said, "how are users supposed to know what kind of content is or isn't allowed on the service?"

"If Twitter seems to be stepping back in its support of free expression, it might find itself under more pressure" from other governments, she said.

After the decision in Germany on Thursday, Twitter's general counsel Alex Macgillivray said in a tweet that the site's administrators "never want to withhold content, good to have tools to do it narrowly and transparently."

In a statement, Jonathan Hayoun, the French group's president, said it wasn't trying to be the "garbage collectors of the Internet." But, he added, "Twitter can't be a place of illegal expression."

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