

Twitter gives France data in anti-Semitic posts

July 14 2013, by Elaine Ganley

Twitter has given French authorities information that can help identify the authors of a series of racist and anti-Semitic tweets that carried French hashtags, and the social media site also has agreed to work with a Jewish student group that sued for the data on other ways to fight hate speech.

The president of the Union of Jewish Students of France said Saturday that his organization, known as UEJF, was withdrawing a \$50 million lawsuit against San Francisco-based Twitter Inc., which was originally filed as a means to pressure the company to comply and "end Twitter's indifference."

"We got Twitter to respect the laws of our country," Jonathan Hayoun said in a telephone interview. Propagating racial and anti-Semitic hatred is against French law.

Twitter's policies require international users to comply with local laws regarding online conduct and acceptable content, and the social network's free-wheeling style has in the past been stymied by European legislation. For instance, Germany restricts the use of Nazi-related symbols and slogans, such as the swastika or the phrase "Heil Hitler." Twitter blocked a neo-Nazi account in Germany last October.

In January, a Paris court ordered Twitter to turn over data that could help identify account holders who last fall posted the offending [tweets](#), which included slurs and photos evoking the Holocaust. The anti-Semitic

tweets, which started Oct. 10, were followed by racist posts against Muslims. Twitter then agreed to pull the tweets.

A joint statement Friday from Twitter and the UEJF said the social media site has turned over to the Paris prosecutor's press and public liberties section "data that may enable the identification of certain users that the vice-prosecutor believes have violated French law."

The statement also said the two sides agreed to "actively continue contributing together to the fight against racism and anti-Semitism, in keeping with their respective domestic laws and regulations." Those efforts will include "taking measures to improve the accessibility of the reporting procedure of illegal Tweets."

The Paris court had also ordered Twitter to make it easier for users of its French website to report any "illegal content." However, Twitter was not obligated to comply since the U.S. company has no offices in France.

The Jewish student group's president said it had reached a broader deal with Twitter that goes beyond the statement, but he refused to provide details, saying it was confidential.

French law forbids all discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, race or religion and has done so since 1881. There has been a raft of legislation since then refining the broad ban, including a ban on inciting racial hatred. A 2004 act addresses the Internet, but is mainly directed at Internet service providers and hosts, saying they must contribute to the prevention of revisionist and racist data.

Hayoun, the Jewish group leader, said it was important that Twitter "stop directing its eyes only to American laws and the First Amendment of the American Constitution. In France, you can't say just whatever you want on the Internet."

He said he hopes the people who posted the offensive tweets would be punished because "Twitter is a public space, and just like it is forbidden to say 'dirty Jew' in the streets it is forbidden to type it out on your keyboard and send it on Twitter."

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