

Knin cartoon (2022-001-FB-UA)

User appeal to remove content from Facebook

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In early December 2021, a public Facebook page describing itself as a news portal for Croatia posted a video and caption in Croatian. Meta translated the caption as “The Player from Čavoglave and the rats from Knin.” Čavoglave is a village in Croatia, and Knin is a city in the country. The video is an edited version of Disney’s cartoon [“The Pied Piper.”](#) It is two minutes and 10 seconds long, with a voiceover in Croatian. The video is overlaid with the word “pretjerivač,” which seems to refer to an online platform of the same name where users share videos and other types of content.

The video portrays a city overrun by rats. While the entrance to the city in the original Disney cartoon is labeled as “Hamelin,” the city in the edited video is labelled as the Croatian city of “Knin.” At the start of the video, a narrator describes how rats and humans lived in the royal city of Knin for many years. The narrator continues that the rats decided they want to live in a “pure rat country,” so they started harassing and persecuting people living in the city. The narrator explains that when rats took over the city, a piper from the Croatian village of Čavoglave appeared. Initially, the rats did not take the piper seriously and continued with “the great rat aggression.” However, after the piper started to play a melody with his “magic flute,” the rats, captivated by the melody, started to sing “their favorite song” and followed the piper out of the city.

Meta told the Board that the melody in the cartoon is from a well-known Western Balkans’ folk song. The company translated the lyrics of the song sang by rats as: “What is that thing shining on Dinara, Dujić’s cockade on his head [...] Freedom will rise from Dinara, it will be brought by Momčilo the warlord.” Meta told the Board that the lyrics are from a song dedicated to Momčilo Dujić, “a famous Serbian warlord during the Second World War.” The video then portrays the city’s people closing the gate behind the piper and the rats. The video ends with the piper herding the rats into a tractor, which then disappears. The narrator concludes that once the piper lured all the rats into the “magical tractor,” the rats “disappeared forever from these lands” and “everyone lived happily ever after.” The page sharing the content has over 50,000 followers. While on the platform, the content was viewed over 380,000 times, shared over 540 times, and received over 2,400 reactions and over 1,200 comments. The majority of the users who reacted to, commented on, or shared the content have accounts located in Croatia. The remaining users have their accounts located in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The content was reported over 390 times. Of those reporters, 362 reported the content for hate speech. This appeal to the Board is based on the report of one of these users, whose account appears to be located in Serbia. Based on prior consistent human review decisions, Meta determined that the content was not in violation of the Facebook Community Standards and did not remove it. Meta said that it uses automation when subsequent reports occur on content where it may have already made a prior decision, to avoid re-reviewing content it has already reviewed. After the user who reported the content appealed against Meta's decision, Meta conducted an additional human review and upheld the original decision to keep the content on the platform.

The user who reported the content submitted their appeal to the Board in Serbian. They begin by stating that the flute player represents "the Croatian Army, which persecuted Serbs from Croatia." They also state that the rats represent Serbs. According to the user who reported the content, Meta did not assess the video correctly. They add that the video "brings national and religious hatred" to the Balkans and beyond. They also state that "this portal" spreads "national intolerance between the two nations that barely healed the wounds."

In late January 2022, as a consequence of the Board selecting the case, Meta identified its decision to keep the content on the platform as an "enforcement error" and removed it as a violation of the Hate Speech policy. Meta explained that its original at-scale decision was based on a limited amount of context available to the content reviewer.

Under its Hate Speech Community Standard, Meta takes down content targeting a person or group of people based on their race, ethnicity and/or national origin with "dehumanizing speech or imagery in the form of comparisons, generalizations, or unqualified behavioral statements (in written or visual form) to or about: [a]nimals that are culturally perceived as intellectually or physically inferior." Meta told the Board that in light of the historical context in the case, the content contains a direct attack against Serbians by comparing them to rats. Meta concluded that the content creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion and that it may also promote real world harm.

In their statement to the Board, the user who posted the content stated that they are "not sure about the content" and that they are part of the page "only as business associate for advertising purposes." Meta does not consider the user who posted the content to be a public figure.

The Board would appreciate public comments that address:

- *How enforcement of Meta's content policies on hate speech should take into account local context in Southeast Europe, specifically Croatia, and the history of conflict in this region.*

- *How to improve human review of complex content, in particular in the form of video.*
- *The nature of Meta's compliance with its human rights responsibilities in relation to avoiding or mitigating adverse human rights impacts resulting from hate speech on its platforms in Southeast Europe, specifically Croatia, and its commitments to respect freedom of expression.*
- *Historical, social, political, and cultural context in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the nature, prevalence, and impact of hate speech in these contexts, including in diaspora communities.*

In its decisions, the Board can issue policy recommendations to Meta. While recommendations are not binding, Meta must respond to them within 60 days. The Board welcomes public comments proposing recommendations that are relevant to this case.