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Meta OKs Hate Speech Against “Russian Invaders”

Tech giant Meta Platforms, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, is relaxing its policy on “hate speech” following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. From now on, users in certain countries will be allowed to call for violence against “Russian invaders” without any repercussions, according to the Meta’s internal communications seen by Reuters.

Andy Stone, a Meta spokesperson said in a statement,



Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we temporarily allowed forms of political expression that would normally violate our rules, such as violent speech such as “death to Russian invaders.” We still won’t allow credible calls for violence against Russian civilians.

The eased policy applies to most of the post-Soviet countries and some of their Eastern European neighbors, and covers Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

“We are issuing a spirit-of-the-policy allowance to allow T1 violent speech that would otherwise be removed under the Hate Speech policy when: (a) targeting Russian soldiers, EXCEPT prisoners of war, or (b) targeting Russians where it’s clear that the context is the Russian invasion of Ukraine (e.g., content mentions the invasion, self-defence, etc.),” details one of the e-mails.

“We are doing this because we have observed that in this specific context, ‘Russian soldiers’ is being used as a proxy for the Russian military,” it adds.

“T1” refers to the so-called [Tier 1](#) “hate speech content,” which targets a person or group of people on the basis of their “protected characteristic(s)” such as race or ethnicity with:

- Violent speech or support in written or visual form
- Dehumanizing speech or imagery in the form of comparisons, generalizations, or unqualified behavioral statements
- Mocking the concept, events or victims of hate crimes even if no real person is depicted in an image.
- Designated dehumanizing comparisons, generalizations, or behavioral statements

The social-media company is also said to be “temporarily” allowing Ukrainians, Russians, and Poles to post calls for the death of Russian President Vladimir Putin or Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, per internal e-mails to the social media platforms’ content moderators.



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Meta [claims](#) that it takes its role “in keeping abuse off the service” “seriously.” Its official policy on hate speech [reads](#),

We believe that people use their voice and connect more freely when they don't feel attacked on the basis of who they are. That is why we don't allow hate speech on Facebook. It creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion, and in some cases may promote offline violence.

Facebook, the world's largest social-media platform, frequently changes its content-moderation rules. It has been [criticized](#) by its own independent Oversight Board for inconsistently changing and implementing its policies.

As [reported](#) by *The Washington Post*, “The company, for example, created an exception to its hate speech rules for world leaders but was never clear which leaders got the exception or why. After it suspended the account of President Donald Trump in the wake of violence on Jan. 6, 2021, the Oversight Board said the decision was correct but that Facebook did so without a clear rationale or plan.”

The Big Tech giant has been harshly criticized for being extremely lenient during the George Floyd riots of 2020, which turned out to be the [most destructive](#) and violent protests in American history.

Last week, the tech company announced it was changing its rules to allow users to praise the neo-Nazi “Azov” Ukrainian military unit — previously banned from being freely discussed under the company's “Dangerous Individuals and Organizations” policy — since it is now a part of Ukraine's attempt to repel the invasion, as first [reported](#) by *The Intercept*.

The outlet points out, “The group's [neo-Nazi] affinities are not subtle: Azov soldiers march and train wearing uniforms bearing icons of the Third Reich; its [leadership](#) has reportedly [courted American alt-right and neo-Nazi elements](#); and in 2010, the battalion's first commander and a former Ukrainian parliamentarian, Andriy Biletsky, [stated](#) that Ukraine's national purpose was to “lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led Untermenschen [subhumans].”

In response to the policy changes that now OK hostile speech toward the Russian President, the Kremlin called the tech company Meta “extremist” and called on U.S. authorities to intervene.

“We demand that [U.S.] authorities stop the extremist activities of @Meta, take measures to bring the perpetrators to justice,” said the Russian Embassy in the United States [via Twitter](#) on Thursday. “Users of #Facebook & #Instagram did not give the owners of these platforms the right to determine the criteria of truth and pit nations against each other.”

Also on Friday, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office [called](#) for a criminal investigation to be launched against Meta, citing Russian propaganda and extremism laws as the country's state media watchdog, Roskomnadzor, [said](#) Meta-owned Instagram will be blocked due to “calls for violence” against Russian troops.

Last week, Russia banned Facebook in the country in response to what it described as unlawful restrictions of access to Russian media on the platform. *The New American* [reported](#) that Meta restricted access on its platforms across the European Union in the end of February after the European Commission said it intended to ban “the Kremlin's media machine.”



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