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## **DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION PUBLIC COMMENT ON META'S OVERSIGHT BOARD CASE(S) ON THE POLITICAL DISPUTE AHEAD OF TURKISH ELECTIONS**

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The use of the expression "İngiliz uşığı" or "British Servant" poses an interesting question regarding the severity and impact of certain slurs, especially slurs that are not racially, religiously or parochially oriented. Speaking as an organization based in Pakistan, the expression is equivalent to the accusation of being "foreign funded" in Pakistan which is a frequent derogatory phrase used especially in conjunction with human and women's rights movements or more recently "Imported Hakoomat" or "Imported Government" used to accuse the current caretaker government of being supported by Imperial agendas. Whilst understanding that these terms can prove to be harmful or may be used to diminish or delegitimize individuals, organizations or institutions etc. placing a ban on these expressions poses a threat to online freedom of expression. Especially in this case, the posts containing the offending audio were put up by new outlets and hence should be covered under Meta's newsworthy allowance. In fact, it seems counterintuitive that newsworthy allowance can cover graphic and disturbing content in the public interest but not language that may be considered "hate speech".

More importantly, as per Meta's own internal audit the term no longer means hate speech. It is important to note that the harmful effects of hate speech are also contingent on the speaker. For example, in this case the person levying the slur is the same gender, ethnic background, and enjoys a similar position of power and privilege, despite varying political affiliations. The use of the phrase can be said to be the equivalent to saying "commie". During the height of the Cold War such a word was akin to a slur that had material consequences for people such as discrimination in employment and increased scrutiny and harassment by law enforcement and intelligence agencies, etc. However, the word has since lost its weightage and can no longer be considered the case as appears to be the case for "İngiliz uşığı". This further reinforces the importance of context in determining the harm and level of impact of a word, especially since in some context slurs (former or current) can be used together with other words and phrases that can make it hate speech, or in some cases (such as this one) the use of a slur word should not be automatic grounds for removal.

Political affiliation as such is not a protected characteristic; the decision to remove the word from the list of offensive words was correct and the decision to restore the content was also correct. Removal of such content published by verified news outlets negatively impacts the Turkish people's right to information because removing this content removes public access to an

interaction between two public figures which may inform public opinion and discourse on the people and parties they represent. It also offers a way to hold politicians accountable especially in a country that has been flagged for its internet censorship and particularly dissenting opinions against the ruling party AKP including legitimate criticisms or critique of their emergency response to the earthquakes in Turkey.

Meta should also consider making its list of derogatory slurs publicly accessible or at least provide access to a searchable database where words can be entered and be checked for whether they are allowed on its platforms.

\*To read the Oversight Board's full decision on this case [here](#).

\*\*To see all submitted Public Comments [here](#).