

Interview with Use:Joe Roe, June 28, 2022

Shira Klein – interviewer

Q: What are your thoughts on the Arbcom 2019 “Antisemitism in Poland” case concerning Icewhiz and Volunteer Marek?

A: As background, ArbCom had another case going on, the Fram case. It took all of ArbCom’s energy and led to half of the committee resigning, out of exhaustion. With some distance, I realize that the Fram case was super insider politics, not very important, while the Holocaust in Poland case has real-world significance. Yet at the time, we were all focused on Fram and the “Antisemitism in Poland” case was on the back burner. On the decision, there were only 6 of us judging, which is not a lot, as normally there are 15.

Q: What was the Fram case, in a nutshell?

A: Fram was a high profile administrator, and was banned and has his admin rights removed by the WMF. That was extremely unusual because it was generally accepted that these kind of conduct issues were a matter for the Wiki community to manage on their own. ArbCom then became mediators between the WMF and the Wiki community. We had 60 people talking at us saying you need to deal with the Fram thing.

Q: How much time would you say you spent on the Icewhiz-Marek case? How many cases would you get per year?

A: I’d say it was 6-7 cases a year per arbitrator. ArbCom is an elected body of 15. Only arbitrators can hear cases. So each case does stretch quite a small group of volunteers. On average, on a case, when I was not the drafting arbitrator (the one who writes the decision, so they spend more time), I’d spend maybe half a dozen hours a week, maybe not even that much. Total of 10 hours at most, spread over 6 weeks. For the Marek-Icewhiz case, AGK and Opabinia Regalis were the drafting ones.

Q: What do you think of the decision in general?

It was not our finest hour. There was a general lack of discussion. We were trying to get through it very quickly. Well, I can only speak for myself. I was trying to get through it very quickly. While we were voting on the decision, people on the Talk Page pointed out factual errors in our decision, like that the term “Polocaust” was not a term Icewhiz was using derogatorily, but a term that exists to show a certain point of view.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Antisemitism_in_Poland/Proposed_decision) I think there were some errors going on like that.

Q: I noticed that you opposed the majority vote on FOF #10. Was there any discussion on that?

We had some discussion off-Wiki but not much. Most of it was on the ArbCom case on Wiki. Regarding #10, because it was a BLP, I was in a minority. I’m speculating that is because other admins are more strict than I am about harming a person’s reputation, but I can’t speak for them.

Q: If there anything else you’d like to add?

I definitely spent a lot more time thinking about this after the case was closed.

The ArbCom decision was, “everybody’s in the wrong.” That was because of lack of time and expertise – none of us knew anything about the subject – but it was also because our system is set up that way. We’re not meant to look at who is right or wrong. We’re all about conduct, not content.

Q: But isn’t content and conduct overlapping?

A: Yes, but what is the alternative? Do you really want 15 people with no expertise on Holocaust history to go into the sources to figure out what’s unreliable, what’s right and what’s wrong? We’re not experts. There would have to be another body to do something like that.