

THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL SECURITY POLICY IN THE BALKANS

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to identify the features of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia in the context of a regional Security Complex Formation with a determining role of external actors based on the analysis of the State's foreign policy activities evolution. Regional security complexes are formed by a group of states whose primary security interests are so closely interrelated that their national security cannot be considered in isolation from each other. The processes taking place in the selected states are related to macro-regional development and cannot be considered in isolation from civilizational, confessional and other factors, considering economic and political globalization, new challenges and threats. The events taking place in North Macedonia are closely interlinked with regional processes, within which the state builds its foreign policy aimed at solving domestic political problems, preserving the stability of the political system and the stability of socio-economic development. At the same time, the foreign policy vector of Macedonia is built in accordance with the region-wide context and inextricably linked with ensuring security in the Balkan region. Within the evolution of foreign policy of Republic of North Macedonia five distinct periods can be identified between 1991 to 2020. In each of these periods, the most pressing problems related to the implementation of the main idea of the state's declared foreign policy, integration into the European Union and NATO, were solved. By 2020, these plans had begun to be implemented and together with other countries in the region and the active participation of external actors, North Macedonia is becoming an organic part of the emerging security complex. This complex is characterized by a high degree of

interdependence of the region's states. It includes a stable system of regional relationships and interconnections of a structural and spatial nature of various types including political, economic, cultural and historical. Such system allows the region to act as a subsystem towards the international environment.

Key words: *North Macedonia, regional security complex, foreign policy of North Macedonia, Ohrid Agreement, Prespa Agreement.*

Introduction

The Balkans is a region with great potential for the escalation of new conflicts. The political, economic and social problems of the Balkan countries affect European stability and security issues. A special term "Balkanization", suggesting the process of State disintegration, accompanied by further fragmentation of newly formed political entities has appeared in the international relations. These processes lead to ethnic and religious conflicts and even to civil war.

In the second half of the twentieth century scientists studying foreign policy started to pay special attention to regional aspects. Thus, in the 1960s. O. Young developed the concept of "political discontinuities"(Young, 1968, p. 369-392), B. Russett proposed the concept of international regions(Russett, 1967, 252 p.; Russett, 1998, p.368-394), S. Cantori and L. Spiegel justified the idea of the existence of a regional "subordinate system"(Cantorini, Spiegel, 1970, 432 p.), M. Bricher proposed the concept of allocating regional subsystems(Brecher, James, 1986, 160 p.).

In the early 1990s, British scientist B. Buzan(Buzan, 1991, 393 p.) noted a trend to the emergence of Regional Security Complexes, groups of states whose primary security interests are so closely interrelated that their national security cannot be considered in isolation from each other. In subsequent studies, B. Buzan and O. Wæver(Buzan, Waever, 2004, 596 p.)proposed to consider the regional complex as a structured subsystem of security and development built into the political and economic structure of the macro-region. Thus, the Regional Security Complex is supplemented by development problems, which leads to the creation of a regional complex. At the same time, security is the basic characteristic of such a regional complex. In the proposed concept, the Regional Security Complex is a structural element of the regional subsystem.

Wendt's research is focused(Wendt, 1999, 452 p.) on the analysis of those models that dominate the regional complex social structure. According to the concept of the Regional Security Complexes, those models complement the understanding of the regional situation, since the factors of mutual hostility or friendship become important in the framework of a common understanding of the processes that form the regional complex. Similar problems are considered in the work of M. Spindler(Spindler, 2005, 188 p.), which focuses on the social construction of the region and the influence of economic factors on regional processes.

B. Buzan and O. Wæver provide several options for the evolution of regional complexes: the preservation of the existing situation, internal transformation and external transformation of the complex. Internal transformation involves changes in the structure of the complex, with regard to the endogenous social processes, which are based on the relationship of friendship or hostility. External transformation may take the form of merging or splitting existing regional complexes under the influence of great powers or international organizations.

The concept of Regional Security Complexes is influenced mainly by the neorealist approach to territoriality, which is considered in conjunction with security issues, as well as the constructivist approach, which is associated with the emphasis on the participants of the regional complex from the security point of view.

It is worth noting that B. Buzan and O. Wæver do not represent the totality of regional security processes, since they minimize the impact of economic and political processes and do not take into account new challenges and threats. Korean researchers Jong-Yun Bae and Chung-in Moon (Bae, Moon, 2005, p. 7-34) reformulated the traditional concept of Regional Security Complexes by introducing new parameters. Firstly, they proposed to consider the activities of non-state actors such as transnational corporations, terrorist and criminal groups, civil society groups. Secondly, to replace the model of the relationship of the elements anarchical, hegemonic or hierarchical with a model of balance of forces or a decentralized world order. Thirdly, to take into consideration the influence of economic, social, environmental and other relevant spheres on the safety problems. Fourthly, to consider the set of ideas, norms, historical memory images, which determine the regional security complex participants behavior. Fifthly, to consider both realistic and liberal mechanisms for the security issues resolution.

However, Voskresenskij believes that “questions about regional and sub-regional subsystems related to the latest trends in modern international relations: globalization, regionalization and fragmentation, as well as the concept of the region itself and, in this regard, the specific regional division of the world, are debatable in the world's social sciences. All the same, the results of this discussion ultimately determine what kind of world we will see in the very near future, since regional issues are directly related to the practice of international relations and diplomacy” (Voskresenskij, 2012, p. 30).

Thus, the academic environment continues to reflect on regional processes related to the new challenges and threats. The processes taking place in the selected states are related to macro-regional development and cannot be considered in isolation from civilizational, confessional and other factors, considering economic and political globalization and, since North Macedonia is a part of the Balkans, the events taking place in North Macedonia are closely interlinked with these regional processes.

The purpose of this work is to identify the features of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia in the context of a regional Security

Complex Formation with a determining role of external actors based on the analysis of the State's foreign policy activities evolution.

The objectives of the study are: highlighting the stages of the evolution of foreign policy of Republic of North Macedonia, the characteristics of each of these stages in the context of solving domestic and foreign policy problems, solving the problem associated with the name of the state, substantiating the country's course towards NATO and structures of the European Union.

Evolution of the Macedonian Republic's foreign policy

Since gaining independence in September 1991, Macedonia has sought to consistently implement the idea of integration into the European Union and NATO in its foreign policy. Despite the bloodless nature of the separation from Yugoslavia, the Republic of North Macedonia faced the same difficulties as its neighbors, namely, the unmanageable process of "Balkanization", which consists in the continuous fragmentation of states on the basis of ethnic and religious contradictions. This process has destabilized the situation in the region for many years. Thus, the foreign policy vector of Macedonia is built in accordance with the region-wide context and inextricably linked with ensuring security in the Balkan region.

The desire to join the EU and NATO in the context of the Balkan crisis led to certain political steps by the Macedonian leadership in 1991-2019 and revealed a number of problems, as well as opportunities for further development of the foreign policy of the former Yugoslav Republic.

There are several periods in the evolution of the foreign policy of the Republic of North Macedonia:

1. 1991-1995
2. 1995 -1999
3. 1999-2005
4. 2005 -2018
5. 2018-present.

In September 1991, Macedonia declared its independence and began to seek recognition from both the leading supranational organizations, such as the UN, NATO and from neighboring states and powerful actors such as the United States, Russia. The first state to recognize Macedonia under its Constitutional name was Bulgaria, although the two states had an unresolved dispute over the status of the Macedonian language. Nevertheless, with certain reservations the Bulgarian government recognized an independent Macedonia (Stojanovski, Marolov, Ananiev, 2014, p. 305). This was followed by recognition from Turkey, the Russian Federation, and Slovenia. Macedonia sent a request to join the EU, NATO and the UN, but these were rejected due to concern by Greece over the name of the new State.

The existence of the administrative region of Macedonia within Greece, which, like the former Yugoslav Republic, is partially located in the territory of the historical region of Macedonia, gave rise to accusations of irredentism

and threats to the territorial integrity of Greece by Macedonia. As a result, many states were forced to consider the Greece's position when establishing relations with the new Republic. In turn, Greece, being a member state of NATO and the EU, vetoed the country's invitation to join these organizations. The Republic's naming dispute also affected the UN's position, which accepted Macedonia under the compromise name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Under this name, the Republic was recognized by the majority of the world's states.

The FYROM foreign policy during this period was aimed at gaining recognition by the world community and establishing contacts with major powers. In fact, these goals were achieved, though with certain reservations due to the confrontation with Greece. As a result, the settlement of contradictions with Greece became the second goal of the Republic of Macedonia during this period. It is also important that using the Greek-Macedonian dispute in the internal political struggle, the politicians of both countries were taking an uncompromising stance for a long period of time. An economic embargo announced by Greece against FYROM in 1994 became an aggravation of the contradictions. In these circumstances, the UN mediation in resolving the disputed issue coincided with the FYROM intentions. In the autumn of 1995, a so-called Interim Agreement was concluded between Greece and the FYROM, under which FYROM was obliged to remove from its state symbols all disputed attributes that are somehow related to the Greek nation state and history, and to amend its constitution. In turn, Greece lifted the embargo and pledged not to prevent FYROM from joining NATO and the European Union. A peculiar consolidation of this agreement was the FYROM's joining NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which provided certain guarantees to Macedonia in the light of the continuing instability in the Balkans.

With the advent of the Serbo-Croatian war and the war in Bosnia, 1991-1995 was the hardest period after the collapse of the SFRY. It seemed impossible to develop any regional model of stabilization due to the pronounced anti-American and anti-NATO position of the Serbian leadership; on the contrary, Croatia, Slovenia and FYROM were ready to integrate into NATO. In other words, stabilization in the region was possible only if Serbia's position changed and the fighting stopped. In addition to the fighting, there were also economic difficulties associated with the Greek embargo against FYROM.

The first period of Macedonian foreign policy can be characterized by several theses: the search for recognition, the initiation of thorny issues, then the approval of compromises. This period is determined by FYROM's joining the Partnership for Peace program, since this was a success of the young State's foreign policy and confirmed its Euro-Atlantic vector.

The second stage was marked by the FYROM foreign policy stabilization, which was facilitated by the end of the Bosnian conflict and the relatively peaceful situation in the Balkan region. Joining the Partnership for Peace program provided an opportunity to work more closely with NATO on

defense issues thus improving the combat capability of the Macedonian army with consulting specialists of the North Atlantic Treaty and some guarantees in case of stability violation in the Balkans. A moment when NATO assistance was needed came as a result of the Macedonian Republic's controversial foreign policy, specifically diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. Of course, this step was dictated by the economic considerations and the prospect of Taiwanese investment in the FYROM economy (Roc, 1999). But the downside was a short confrontation with China which included breaking off the diplomatic relations.

China's reaction to Macedonia's attempt to recognize Taiwan was swift and painful. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China vetoed the extension of the UN Preventive Deployment Force mandate, which had been present on the territory of FYROM since 1995 to monitor the border areas with Albania. Thus, the young State had been left defenseless in case of destabilization in Albania itself or in the Albanian-speaking areas bordering the Republic of Macedonia. In these circumstances, NATO forces were deployed to FYROM territory. This was also beneficial to the North Atlantic Treaty itself. Preparing for an operation against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, NATO needed a bridgehead, which became FYROM. At the same time the Republic of Macedonia was ready for the wave of Albanian refugees from Kosovo which came in 1999 and was reliably protected from being drawn into the fighting into its territory. Thus, NATO was established in FYROM, and the same year, 1999, the Republic received the status of a candidate for the North Atlantic Treaty.

Another important event in Macedonian foreign policy that contributed to the stabilization of the Republic's situation was the joint Declaration of the Macedonian and Bulgarian Prime Ministers on friendship and good-neighborly relations concluded in 1999. This Declaration eased the tension between the two states connected with the rights of the Bulgarian minority in Macedonia.

Regional security in the Balkans might have advanced between 1995-1999, but the stabilization of the situation in Croatia and Bosnia did not guarantee the resolution of all the contradictions in the region, as exemplified by the Kosovo issue that escalated in 1998. The next round of the Albanian-Serbian conflict and the subsequent NATO operation against the FRY demonstrated the vulnerability of the region and the inability of the Balkan States to resolve all contradictions without external assistance. The end of the second period of North Macedonia's foreign policy with the events related to the NATO war in Serbia is significant: the states of the region approved a military settlement of the conflict in the FRY in order to finally achieve stabilization and integrate into NATO.

The second stage of the FYROM foreign policy can be determined by an emphasis on the country's movement closer to NATO and joining the NATO's policy mainstream in the Balkans which was dictated by security reasons. This resulted in the NATO forces presence in the Republic and

gaining the candidate status for the North Atlantic Treaty which opened up prospects for the Republic's rapid integration into NATO.

The third stage of the foreign policy in general continued the development of established contacts in both economic and military strategic aspects. The most remarkable and fateful event in the foreign policy of the FYROM was the conflict with Albanian separatists that took place in the North-West of the country in the summer of 2001.

At this time, the main problems faced by FYROM were related to the Albanian community, which makes up a quarter of the Republic's population. This is an example of the internal political context of the State being intertwined with foreign political events taking place in the region, and above all, those related to the aggravation of the situation in neighboring Albania and Kosovo. In Albania, in January-March 1997, there were mass riots due to the collapse of financial pyramids. The population seized weapons from armories, arming the People's Liberation Army, which played a crucial role in the destabilization of the situation in the country in 2001 (Central'nayai Yugo-Vostochnaya Evropa, 2015, p. 160). The demands for broad autonomy, including confederate relations on the part of the mostly Muslim Albanian community, were unacceptable for a state with a clear predominance of the Orthodox Slavic population. The military clashes initiated by Albania were stopped with the direct participation of NATO and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) forces. Under pressure from the international community, the leaders of the main political parties in FYROM, including the Albanian ones, in the presence of international mediators of the United States, NATO, the EU, and the OSCE signed the Ohrid Framework, an agreement on a political solution to the crisis, on August 13, 2001 (Framework Agreement, 2001). The main principles of the agreement were FYROM sovereignty and territorial integrity, and unitary character.

However, the concessions obtained by the Albanian minority, reflected in the Macedonian Constitution, were perceived by many as a way to federalize and decentralize the state. At the same time, the EU and NATO control over the agreement conclusion was regarded as turning the Republic of Macedonia into an international protectorate (Ponomareva, 2010, p. 124). However, this process can be interpreted differently. The active participation of the EU and NATO in the settlement of the conflict indicates the interest of Euro-Atlantic structures in stabilizing the situation in the Balkans and in partnership with the Republic of Macedonia, steadily moving towards membership in these organizations.

The approach of NATO membership was marked by another important event for FYROM during this period, joining the Adriatic Charter in 2003. Along with Macedonia, the members of this charter were Albania, Croatia and the United States. Joining NATO's «Balkan umbrella», an assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty member states which are in special relationship, indicated that one of the main goals of Macedonian policy, membership in NATO, was to be soon achieved. The recognition of Macedonia under its

constitutional name by the United States was also natural. Continuing the reforms initiated in 2000 in accordance with the criteria of the European Union, in 2005, Macedonia finally received the EU candidate status. The movement towards the EU and NATO membership was delayed when the issue of the State's name was again on the agenda.

As for the region itself, the period was marked by the creation of the first regional organization Adriatic Charter and the achievement of a certain political homogeneity of the states in the region, reflecting the stabilization that started at the turn of 1990-2000s. However, the sporadic manifestations of instability reflected in the conflict in FYROM in 2001 indicated that regional security was not yet assured.

The third stage of FYROM foreign policy falls between 1999-2005. This period is marked by the first serious inter-ethnic clash characterizing the "Balkanization" process and Macedonia's orientation towards even closer cooperation with NATO. At the same time, an Association Agreement signed with the EU increased the chances of the Republic of Macedonia of joining the European Union. Nevertheless, the main issue concerning the state's name remained unresolved, and there was a high probability that Greece would veto the Macedonia's joining the EU and NATO. This task was to be solved by the new President.

The fourth period of Macedonian foreign policy was the longest and the most successful one, since the main goals were achieved in the period 2005-2018. After Greek side (The Issue of the Name of North Macedonia, 2020) declared that it would not accept the Constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia, the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General, Mr. Nimetz, had to get involved in the resolution of the issue which lasted for more than ten years and was often complicated by the uncompromising behavior of both the Greek and Macedonian sides. The internal political situation in FYROM also influenced the process of resolving the name dispute: the conservative parties rise to power turned into anti-Greek nationalist rhetoric and blocked further opportunities for negotiations. However, by 2008, when the 20th NATO summit was held in Bucharest, FYROM was ready to join the North Atlantic Treaty, and the government of the Republic received support from the main political parties. Keeping in line with NATO's policy in the Balkans, Macedonia recognized Kosovo's independence in the autumn of 2008, soon becoming one of its main foreign economic partners (Kosovo-Macedonia, 2013). However, once again, joining NATO was not successful due to the Greek veto. This scenario did not suit the leadership of the North Atlantic Treaty itself, which hoped to gain a foothold in the Western Balkans by accepting Croatia, Albania and FYROM. In any case, the Macedonian leadership needed to finally resolve the issue of the name, and major actors, the UN and NATO, were also interested in this outcome. During this period, contacts with Greece become more effective from year to year. At the same time the foreign policy in the North-East also became more active, as evidenced by a number of military and economic agreements concluded with

the Russian Federation, as well as the strengthening of cultural ties with Turkey.

Not being able to join NATO forced the FYROM leadership, albeit with some delay, to start interacting with the other power centers, local and global, in case of long-term strategy changes. In this matter, the revival of contacts with Russia indicated a possible orientation away from NATO and interaction with Turkey was clearly anti-Greek. While conducting such a policy, FYROM showed some firmness. It did not join the sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and expressed support for plans to create a Turk Stream pipeline (a natural gas pipeline running from Russia to Turkey), which implementation was planned for 2015. However, the war in Syria, which had become a threat to Europe in general and to the Balkans in particular, required both FYROM and Greece to seek ways to compromise to force the Macedonian integration into NATO. In 2016, a period of close contacts with Greece on the issue of Macedonia's renaming started. This period showed that both sides were ready to find the compromise version of the Balkan State's name. The background to this was the unrest in FYROM in 2015-2016 against the conservative-nationalist Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, which did not share the idea of European integration.

The logical settlement of the Greek-Macedonian dispute and the fourth stage of FYROM foreign policy was the Final Prespa Agreement (Agreement, 2018) signed by the Prime Ministers of Greece and FYROM on June 12, 2018. According to this document, Macedonia changed its Constitutional name to the Republic of North Macedonia. The document was soon ratified by the Macedonian and Greek parliaments. A year earlier, good-neighborly relations with Bulgaria were agreed to by signing a special Memorandum. Under the Bulgarian-Macedonian Agreement, the Macedonian side was obliged to protect the Bulgarian minority in every possible way (Bilateral relations with the Republic of Bulgaria, 2020).

The period 2005-2018 in the General Balkan context was the most intense, in that many processes that started in 1991 were completed. This included the unilateral Declaration of Independence by Kosovo's Albanian-majority political institutions. This step was recognized by the entire international community and logically completed the disintegration processes in the post-Yugoslav territory, satisfying the separatist demands of Albanian-speaking groups in Serbia. Previously, the Union state of Serbia and Montenegro split up; Croatia, Montenegro and Albania joined NATO in 2013. Croatia joined the EU, and Serbia, Montenegro and Albania were rewarded with candidate status. Only Bosnia entered the integration process with some delay due to the difficult economic situation persistent from socialist times, and for understandable reasons of the partial recognition of Kosovo. There were no major episodes of destabilization. However, tensions with the Albanian minority persisted in FYROM, Serbia, and Montenegro, with occasional armed confrontations with state police.

The fourth period of the Macedonian foreign policy was one of the most dramatic and most successful. The goal of preparing for NATO membership was achieved, while maintaining and even somewhat strengthening ties with Russia and Turkey. This provided the Macedonia with a kind of insurance in case of unexpected developments in the region. The FYROM integration into NATO during this period was necessary not only for the Republic of Macedonia itself, but also for NATO and Greece, which led to the end of the name dispute.

The fifth period of Macedonian foreign policy is current now and seems to be easily predictable. In 2020, the last NATO member States will ratify the North Macedonia joining the North Atlantic Treaty, after which Macedonia will continue to implement reforms to meet the criteria for joining the EU, despite the difficulties that arise (Guy, 2019). The struggle of parties in the domestic arena is not as acute as it was decades ago, and it can be argued that society as a whole is positive towards Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

The regional security problems in the Balkans lay in the ethnic contradictions of various groups inhabiting the region and the various aspirations of political elites, not all of which were focused on Euro-Atlantic integration. As the majority of the regional states have been involved in the EU and NATO integration processes, the achievement of the regional security us a real possibility.

However, some challenges remain. The first challenge for regional security in the Balkans continues to be the certain Albanian-speaking extremist groups that maintain contacts with the Islamic State (ISIS). Compact groups of the Albanian population in North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia may well become a favorable environment for spreading the ideas of Greater Albania, combined with Islamic radicalism.

The issue of refugees from the Middle East, in particular from Syria, is also important. After Turkey's announcement of the opening borders with the European Union for refugees (Turkey will, 2020), It was up to the Balkans to halt the flow into Central and Western Europe. Taking into account the fact that Radical Islamists often enter the European region together with refugees (Galijasevic for Insider, 2020), the Balkan States face the goal to contain this flow.

Finally, a new threat to the regional security of the Balkans is the coronavirus infection (COVID-19), which has spread from Asia to the middle East (Iran) and the Mediterranean (Italy). In the region itself, COVID-19 cases have already been confirmed, and the number of infected people is increasing. This obliges the states of the region to consolidate efforts to combat the spread of infection in both local and global interests.

Speaking of the prospects for regional security in the Balkans, it can be argued that only the integration of all the states in the region into the EU and NATO as well as joint participation in regional economic projects will minimize possible instability. An example of cooperation is an Agreement

reached in 2015 by Greece, Serbia, Hungary and Macedonia with Turkey on the use of the “Turkish Stream”.

Conclusions

The analysis of the foreign policy of North Macedonia in the context of regional processes leads the following conclusions:

1. During the first years after the collapse of the SFRY, many states, including Macedonia, clearly defined the direction of their development towards NATO and the EU. The protracted war in the Balkans required each Republic to come under the wing of NATO as soon as possible. There was no need to talk about region-wide stabilization processes.

2. As Serbia weakened, NATO asserted its presence on the peninsula, which was in synergy with the interests of states in the region, including North Macedonia. The contradictions between Macedonia and Bulgaria and Greece, settled with international participation served as an indicator of such presence.

3. The overthrow of the previous regime in Serbia actually calmed the situation in the region and opened up opportunities for the regional organizations aimed at integration into NATO creation. North Macedonia was granted EU candidate status and benefited from NATO assistance in resolving the conflict with the Albanian minority in 2001.

4. Resolution of the long-standing controversy over the name of the Macedonian State made it possible for the Republic of North Macedonia to become a NATO member and strengthened NATO's positions in the region. The Balkan region is close to completing the consolidation and creating a collective security system under the aegis of NATO. The important thing here is that the region faces new challenges, including the export of extremism from the Middle East and socio-economic instability caused by the influx of refugees from Syria.

The intervention of NATO and other regional actors contribute to a regional security complex formation under NATO control and, in recent years, under control of the EU and the OSCE. This regional security package includes both countries members of the NATO bloc, Albania, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and candidates, Bosnia and Herzegovina and, under certain conditions, Serbia and Kosovo. The emerging security complex is characterized by a high level of the regional states' interdependence in the security field. This distinguishes it from other regions, such as Middle Eastern, Transcaucasian, Central Asian. This security complex also includes a stable system of regional interconnections of a structural and spatial nature of various types including political, economic, cultural, historical. Such a system allows the region to act as subsystem with regards to the international environment.

Based on the processes of the regional level and the influence of the international community, the Republic of North Macedonia builds its foreign policy aimed at solving domestic political problems, maintaining the stability

of the political system and the stability of socio-economic development.

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