

The European Integration and the Democratization in Eastern Europe (Working paper)

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This communication is based on a dissertation project in progress concerning the political changes in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, and more particularly, concerning the role of the European integration in the post-communist democratization. A certain controversy dominates the literature regarding the role of the European integration in this democratization. This debate comes mainly from putting accent on institutional and strategic approaches. They use quantitative methods, even if it isn't always necessary from methodological standpoint. Thus, the literature on the role of the European integration in the democratization of the post-communist countries defends the idea for harmonious spreading of the democratic institutions (Vachudova 2005), or for spreading that takes as a basis certain preexisting economical rationality within the national actors (Tomescu-Hatto 2008), or for spreading that bumps itself on the harmful effects of the former economic and social structures.

Institutional or strategic analyses have, of course, reserved place in the literature. But they are not the only, and nor necessarily the best ways to analyze the role of the European integration in the post-communist democratization. In some post-communist countries, contrary to the expectations, democratization goes not so harmoniously. Some of these countries, such as Bulgaria and Romania, are already EU members. If the conventional approaches, institutional and rational choice, do not give entirely satisfactory responses to understand these countries, a new approach becomes necessary. I try to conceive another way of seeing the same process of integration. Its logic does not share the arguments that "forget" the existence of the actors or that take them as simple computing machines with pre-established interests or cultural values. I propose an alternative departure point, in which the institutions, far from disappearing, become results of a dynamic and interpretative social construction.

In this alternate model, based on the works of Max Weber and Norbert Elias, the social actors produce democratic or anti-democratic norms in the process of their interaction, and the European integration is only a factor among several others that may influence this interaction. The democracy becomes therefore not a result of the mechanical introduction of a list of prerequisites (such as free elections, freedom of expression), but a dynamic result of a system of dialogues between actors on different levels. In this sense, the European integration contributes to more democracy if the dialogues than it constructs and the dialogues of which it is an object contribute toward establishment of new democratic ethics.

Thus, the democracy is not just a simple procedure, an electoral choice; it is rather an "ethics" that must equally exist between elections. Such enlarged vision of the democracy allows for separation between a non democratic system that formally respects electoral procedures, but that leaves the mass of the citizens as far as possible from the

decision-making, from a substantial democracy in which the elections are only one among several political norms.

I. The main question and the literature review.

1. Presentation of the main question.

The process of the political changes in the post-communist countries in Eastern Europe occupies a non-negligible place in the political science literature on the democratization after the fall of the Berlin Wall. My M.A. thesis (Mitropolitski 2007) had to evaluate the main approaches and the schools in this literature based on their theoretical anticipations on the possibility of democratization, for the entire group of the post-communist countries and for some of them in particular. The method used in this paper put the existing theories into four main groups, according to the dominant independent variable that affects democratization (or its quality) or the lack of democratization: the heritage (social, cultural, political and economic); the institutional choice after the communism; the role of the dominant political ideology among the ruling elite; and, finally, the role of some external factors.

After verifying these groups on dissimilar cases (Belarus as a country that evolves toward authoritarianism, Romania that moves toward democracy, and Macedonia that remains in intermediary position), the main conclusions were: 1) There is no single model that can explain all possible post-communist political trajectories after 1989-1991; 2) there is, nevertheless, some hypotheses of the group of political institutional choices (the choice of an electoral system) that explain well the two extreme cases (Belarus and Romania), but that have difficulties with the intermediary cases (such as Macedonia); 3) Some other hypotheses, such as national feeling uniting governments and citizens, and relative autonomy of the state can bring more light for the intermediary trajectory of democratization (Macedonia).

A controversy comes nevertheless from the role of the external factors and the role of the European integration, in particular. In brief, on this subject, the literature gives several responses that are mutually excluding each other. To understand the role of the European integration, a new research becomes necessary.

2. The literature review (The EU as causal factor).

a. Euro-optimists.

Which are the positions, presented here in brief, and defended by the representatives of different groups of authors in the debate over the role of the European integration in the post-communist democratization? On one hand, for Vachudova (2005), the European integration changes the rational calculation of the political elites in Central and Eastern Europe. The European Union, for her, acts sometimes as a passive leverage and sometimes as an active leverage for democratization. The term "passive leverage" means that the simple possibility of joining the Union changes the results of the rational calculations of the political elites; the "active leverage" means that the Union also

changes directly political structures, which, in turn, introduce more political competition (2005: 161).

For Vachudova, the role of the Union in the post-communist democratization is always positive. With certain nuances, this optimistic vision is shared by Pridham (2001; 2005). According to him, nevertheless, talking about a positive influence of the Union on the democratization, one must set a time frame only to the period of "active" integration, i.e. the period that follows the invitation to begin the negotiations for membership, because this is only with these negotiations that the home elite learns the "art" of the political pluralism under the influence of the Union (2005: 115). Even for this period, however, Pridham (2007) puts some limitations over the political conditionality. These limitations come mainly from the fact that the Union does not represent a unified actor; the Commission that manages the file of the expansion and the national governments of the Union have not necessarily the same goals and the same perceptions in the matter of the democratic consolidation in the applicant nations. Levitsky and Way (2005a; 2005b; 2007), and also Coricelli (2007) and Schimmelfennig (2007) consider the European Union and his positive influence in the framework of the general influence originating from the West. For Levitsky and Way, the West as political, economical and military center has no real competitors in the world after the end of the Cold War. According to their model, the capacity of the West to influence the post-communist countries in a democratic and liberal direction depends on two factors. These are the western "leverages" that determine the level of possible pressure, and the western "links" (e.g. commercial links) that determine the level of acceptance of this pressure (2005a: 21). Only the existence of strong leverages and strong links contributes to the democratization in the countries in transition. The external pressure is the one of the factors, according to Rose-Ackerman (2007), that helps the post-communist countries to consolidate their democracies. According to the author, the fact that a country becomes EU member does not mean that the democracy is already consolidated. It is for this reason that the western pressure must continue even after the formal membership.

b. Euro-pessimists.

In the literature there is also a group of authors that links the influence of the European Union with certain erosion in the democratic quality. Raik (2004) defends this position based on the fact that the European Union destroys the internal democratic process of decision-making; that the EU introduces a model of administrative subordination between Brussels and the post-communist countries; and that the Union detaches the local political elite from its electoral basis. According to him, the logic of the European integration facilitates the bureaucratization of decision-making that gives an advantage to the executive and leaves few places to a really democratic process in the post-communist countries (2004: 591). The erosion in the democratic quality can finally lead towards democratic erosion as political regime. Bideleux (2001) adds, in the same direction, arguments that the post-communist countries are more and more becoming under the direct administrative control of Brussels, and that the economical liberalization controlled from abroad destroys the democratic process in the countries without consolidated democratic system. He also notes that the process of the European integration gives of huge advantage to the executives over the parliaments. If there is a

correlation between the democratization and the Europeanization, according to him, this correlation is always negative. Once embarked on the integration process, the countries become more and more governed by the laws, procedures, norms, and decisions, that are made and remade in Brussels and not in these countries (2001: 27). Gallagher (2005a; 2005b), based on examples from Romania, shows how the European Union can give a false democratic legitimacy to political forces that are far from democratic behavior, but that know how to play with the European card to reinforce their political positions.

c. Intermediary positions.

Between the group of the Euro-optimists and Euro-pessimists, there is also an intermediary position regarding the role of the European integration in post-communist democratization. Kolarska-Bobinska (2003) sees the European Union at the same time as an actor that prevents and facilitates the democratization in different moments. According to her, in the short run, the European integration leads to less democracy, but in the long run, at least she hopes it so, the process should reverse itself. What happens, in the short run, is some negligence of issues such as the political stability and the institutional protection. The countries in transition neglect these questions while putting the accent unilaterally on the acceleration of the process of European integration. But once the place within the Union is assured (to note that Kolarska-Bobinska writes before that happens in 2004), she expects that the know-how transfer would produce democratic consolidation (2003: 97). Grzymala-Busse and Innes (2003) share this ambivalent vision that divides the influence on the democracy quality before and after the membership (to note also that they defend this idea before the first post-communist countries become EU members in 2004).

Dimitrova (2002) also makes distinction between the influence of the Union before and after the adhesion. For her, contrary to Kolarska-Bobinska and to Grzymala-Busse, it is before the formal membership that the influence of the EU is stronger. According to her, after the membership, the new institutions and their goals can gradually be changed because of reinforcement of the domestic veto points.

3. The literature review (other causal factors).

The literature on the role of the European integration in democratization shows other causal factors, besides the external factors, that may act in the same causal direction. These others groups of factors are the legacies, both institutional and cultural, but also the institutional choice after the communism, and also the role of the political leadership in the process of democratic transition. It is necessary to present in brief these factors in the literature review, because their theoretical arguments can be useful to clarify the mechanisms of influence of the European Union and international spreading of democratic norms.

a. Communist and pre-communist legacies.

The approach that puts the accent on the legacies is, chronologically, the oldest school on post-communist democratization. What matters in this approach is that the past

of an individual country largely determines its contemporary political trajectory. While comparing this approach with all the others, one can say that it is the "deepest" in terms of causality, according to the classification of Kitschelt (2003). This approach, nevertheless, allows very different interpretations; certain authors consider that the effective legacies are always obstacles to democratization (Jowitt 1992), but others consider that certain elements of the legacies, for example the existence of rational bureaucracy of Weberian type, can even facilitate democratization (Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Toka 1999). The arguments of Jowitt follows the logic according to which the legacies include a reinforced dichotomy between the public and the private domains, a very low level of political participation, a lack of shared civic identity, social fragmentation, and a presence of semi-autarkic economical structures (Jowitt 1992: 287-289). In brief, according to him, all these factors act against democratization. One can add here the arguments of Volgyes (1995) who establishes a link between the problems of democratization and the Communist legacies; the latter impose the psychological need of an excessive political authority. These arguments are interesting regarding the current project, because they can be integrated in the chapter that analyzes the culture and ideas as obstacles for the democratic quality (not to confuse with the culture as a subjective and constructivist interaction).

On the other side, for Brzezinski (2002) certain elements within the pre-communist legacies can facilitate democratization and to eliminate the negative legacies of the communism. These are traditions of state decentralization, of different relations between the state and the church, and also the institutionalization of private property (2002: 196-197). As the pre-communist legacies show a big variety of forms in comparison with the communist era, the democratization will have chances to succeed at least in some countries in Eastern Europe. Similar conclusions to that of Brzezinski, but coming from a model of Marxian inspiration, are made by Mot (2002). She also distinguishes countries such as Poland (democratic success) and countries such as Romania (painful transition towards unconsolidated democracy), their post-communist trajectories being result of the social and economical structures that developed during the centuries that produced the effect of the path dependence for the future generations.

b. Post-communist institutional choice.

Another approach on the political transition tries to explain democratization and the variations in the democratic quality with the institutional choices, by definition rather specific but also with of typical traits for the group of post-communist countries. This school is a sort of an intellectual reaction against the perspective that puts the accent on the legacies; it opposes the pessimism as of the possibility of democratization (Ackerman 1992). The institutional approach is part of the official EU discourse, according to which the European integration is a process of spreading the democratic norms and liberal institutions, and that this transfer has always positive effects on the democratization in the countries in transition. Of course, the institutional approach is not an optimist approach without any ambiguity. In the framework of this approach, a part of the authors share the concerns of Linz (1990) on the dangers that come with the institutionalization of a strong president elected in universal suffrage (Fish 2001; Frye 2002).

c. Strategic choices of the post-communist elite.

A third theoretical approach on the democratization puts the accent on the role of the strategically thinking political actors as *homines economici*, in which these actors try to increase their power and, by consequence, influence the political trajectories and the quality of the political system in the post-communist countries (Roeder 1994). These actors are able, without renouncing their interpretative framework as *homines economici*, to try to dominate a political world that corresponds only to their ideological visions. In the dissertation framework, one of the authors within this approach that interests me in particular is McFaul (2002); according to him, what counts for the different political trajectories are the ideologies of the main politicians. Another author to keep in mind is Nodia (2002), that is not interested in dominant ideologies of the politicians, but rather in the way they perceive the relative strength of the democratic ideas (or authoritarian ideas) in the international context.

Certain authors use at the same time a mixture of strategic and institutional approaches (Vachudova 2005; Tomescu-Hatto 2008). What matters for them is some realignment between pre-established rationality of the national political actors and norm transferred by the European Union. As the EU membership always comes with certain promises of financial assistance, the European Union expects that the national actors would adopt the desired institutions. What matters is that the national governments are rational and unitary actors; these governments cannot therefore refuse an offer as generous that goes with the possibility to join the European Union. Once this interest realignment between the expectations (exterior) and rationality (interior) is made possible, the transfer of democratic norms from the West to the East becomes easy.

d. The political culture.

To finish with this brief review of the others approaches on democratization, I must mention also the authors that, following Putnam (1994), establish correlations between the political culture of the masses and the democratic quality (Inglehart 1997; Newton 1999). The level of trust between the people and the level of participation in associations have positive correlation with the good functioning of the democratic institutions. Where there is no such trust and the participation in the associations is low (as in the post-communist countries) the democracy is deficient. According to Putnam, to understand the political development in Russia one must look at Palermo and not at Paris or London. This cultural approach of type "social capital" is attacked in the literature often enough. Stolle and Hooghe (2005) critique this approach on theoretical and empirical grounds as being inaccurate, exceptional, one-sided and irrelevant. Letki and Evans (2005) show, on the basis of post-communist political development, that increased trust between the people no longer produces democracy, but that on the contrary, democratization has a negative impact on the trust between the people in the post-communist context. Valkov (2009: 1) simply refuses to accept the existence of a concomitant relation between the two variables within the same context. He says that the associative activity in these countries resembles rather the picture in Latin America, where the association level is also comparatively low.

4. Discussion of the literature.

Summing up the literature on the European integration and post-communist democratization, one must note that the literature makes an important omission in setting up the reasons why the European integration should influence this democratization. The priority is usually given to causal factors that work at the level of the institutions and of their transfer to the East, and also at the level of the rational choice of the politicians, especially those in the post-communist countries. The question of the perception of the European integration and also the question of the integration as a process of transformation of values at the level of the local political elite and at the level of the general population, as elements of the culture, including the political culture in these countries, is almost absent. Here by culture I do not mean pre-established and unchanging ways to see reality, a tradition that goes far enough (Almond and Verba 1963) and that has defenders in our days (Radu 1998), but an interaction vision of the culture, according to which far from being static, it represents dynamic results of the interaction of the actors, an interaction that also includes subjective interpretation of this event. How imported institutions adapt themselves in a symbolic social world is a question not very well analyzed in the post-communist context. In what sense, and especially how, the specific picture of the Union plays a role in political interaction? As the perception questions are almost absent from the ontology, except for the school of the cultural prerequisites, it should not be surprising that the question of the influence of the European integration on the democratic quality takes care mainly with the formal institutions and with the behavior of some actors at the center of the national executives.

II. Methodology and first results.

1. Definitions.

As far as the definition of the democracy is concerned, the contemporary literature is dominated by procedural, minimalist, and anti-substantive definitions. This approach is associated with the work of Joseph Schumpeter (1942 (1975)). It identifies the democracy as an institutional arrangement to arrive to political decisions in which the individuals make decisions regarding the competitive fight for popular vote. Huntington (1991) and Horowitz (1991) share this procedural vision. According to them, it has replaced the traditional definition that links this system with the will of the people or with the common good. Following the logic of Robert Dahl (1961), Huntington and Horowitz declare democratic a country where there are elections based on universal suffrage, in addition to freedoms of expression, press, and party organization.

Przeworski (1991, 10) also defines the democracy as a system in which government can lose elections and accept the results without trying to destroy the system. He also defines the democracy as a system of institutionalized uncertainty (1991, 14), as a system where the rules are predictable, but not the results. This accent on the procedures favors the institutional explanations of democratic occurrence. The existing definitions eliminate the question how the population perceives the democracy. It is for this reason that a new enlarged definition becomes necessary to give an equal chance to other theoretical models, especially to interpretative models. The democracy, according

to me, is the capacity of the social actors, based on their perceptions of their social relations, to want to influence the actions of the other actors on a reciprocal basis to the point where the relations of domination become reversible. This new definition of the democracy does not contradict in anything the conventional definitions of procedural type. On the contrary, it gives new meaning to the institutionalized uncertainty of Przeworski; the new definition widens the procedural definition providing it with subjective dimension; for the democracy to work the institutionalized uncertainty must be internalized by the actors. Using the vocabulary of Max Weber, the democracy is not just a mechanics; the democracy is before all an "ethics" in the sense of "life roadmap" that includes the world comprehension in a special way with consequences for actions of the actors that result from this comprehension. The European integration may affect the democracy through influencing this "ethics". The European integration is not only the moment of joining the Union, but also a process that spreads over years, that begins before the membership with the integration identified as goal by the Union and by the country in question, a process that continues with the negotiations on the conditionality, and ends with the accomplishment of these conditions.

2. Cases.

As for the cases, there is a certain tendency in the literature (Vachudova 2005; Levitsky and Way 2005a; Bideleux 2001) to use cases from Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia). As these cases (with the exception of Slovakia) were democratized before the beginning of the European integration, it is difficult to prove the EU influence in this development among all the others factors. I am looking instead to the Balkan region, a region in which the democracy was and remains a lot slower and painful. In this region, the cases are not over-determined as in Central Europe; over-determined in the sense that all theories can explain certain effects, in our case, democratization. Bulgaria is an interesting case as main case study; this country is passed through the process of European integration and it is now a member of the European Union since 1st January 2007. This country challenges the simple logic of West-East transfer of institutions. Even after the formal membership, Bulgaria poses serious questions as far as the democratic quality is concerned. Macedonia, as a candidate to EU, still waiting to begin negotiations for membership, represents an interesting secondary case study in the framework of comparative research.

3. Evaluation of the conventional approaches.

The first results of the case studies concern mainly the evaluation of the conventional approaches in the literature on Bulgaria and Macedonia. These are institutional, strategic, and traditional cultural models. The expectations of the institutional approach are that it is institutions and their transfer that produce political behaviors; this means that certain quality of democracy as well as fluctuation in this quality are due to the existence or to the lack of institutions and of their transfer. Within this approach, the institutions are easily transferable between the states, in our case, between the EU and the transitional countries. The role of the interests of the actors, just as the role of the symbolic perceptions, is conceptually not very important. The strategic

approach expects that interests of the main political actors, and especially in the countries that pass through a process of European integration are responsible for the political behaviors; which means that a certain quality of the democracy would be a result of certain constellation of interests at the level of the political elites. The political actors are not anymore simple agents of the institutions; they are true actors that decide if the European integration is to be done as well as over its modalities and results (Tomescu-Hatto 2008). The institutions are transferable only if there are important strategic interests in the post-communist countries that campaign in the same direction and that wish this transfer to succeed. The integration results follow the interests of the national political elite. The expectations of the cultural approaches of the type "prerequisites for democracy" are that the presence of ideas and rather static attitudes in time, shared by the population are responsible for the political behaviors; which means that a certain quality of the democracy is a result of a certain constellation of cultural prerequisites. This last approach is well illustrated with polls on the values as in the World Value Survey and in Eurobarometer survey. The political actors become again simple agents of the forces that cannot be easily handled. The institutions are not transferable unless there are cultural norms that facilitate their transfer.

The evaluation of the conventional approaches was done on the basis of the existing literature (Ganev 2001, 2006, 2007; Bojkov 2004; Andreev 2006; Noutcheva and Belchev 2008; Petrovic 2008; Spirova 2008), and also on the basis of official texts by and on the European Union, speeches of the Bulgarian and Macedonian politicians after the end of communism, and different survey in the two countries on the peoples' attitudes regarding the EU, and on ethnographic studies. The preliminary results of this evaluation of the conventional approaches show that: 1. The political behavior does not always follow the simplistic logic of the institutional approach; the formal institutions are not simple stimuli that act regardless of the subjective perceptions; 2. The strategic interpretative framework is not the only one or the principal avenue of understanding the reality; 3. There are no cultural norms that prevent the population from understanding the nature of the institutional transfer West-East; the cultural norms can be changed in the framework of social interaction. 4. The conventional approaches are too imprecise to give a definitive response to the initial question; they are all hypothetico-deductive, constructed outside the context of the real political development; an alternative approach, this time more inductive, based on the concrete political development, becomes necessary.

4. Presentation of an alternative model.

The following sections present in brief the road to follow. The alternative theoretical model that I will use is inspired by the logic of the model of McFalls (2002). He is interested in value changes East Germany in the years after the reunification. These changes occur in the framework of the asymmetric power relations between the two parts of the country. The nature of these relations resembles the asymmetric relations between the EU and the applicant countries. For this reason I am confident that the model of McFalls can bring more light to the value change as a result of the interaction between the two parts of the European integration process. This model starts from the premise that the functional imperative social structures or the instrumental actions are not capable of

explaining entirely many major events for the political science (2002: 80). For this reason it proposes an alternative model (2002: 80-85), associated with the works of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, that in turn relies on the sociological tradition of Max Weber. McFalls notices the creation of a new separated identity in East Germany as a result of the new hegemony, in the sense of Gramsci, imposed by West Germany; this separate identity of the East is nevertheless the first step towards the acceptance of the western consumerist value domination (2002: 89). This value change is not a result of the imperative functional social structures or of instrumental actions. It is the result of a dialogue between the East and the West, a dialogue that produces similarity in the behavior in the two parts of Germany. McFalls makes his observations based on series of interviews between 1990 and 1998. This is a period of 8 years that is sufficiently long to observe a change at the level of values. I cannot afford such a long period of observation to confirm or infirm value changes through dialogues. For this reason my dissertation will use, in addition to interviews, some other techniques in order to identify the role of the European integration, not in a precise moment, but also as a dynamic process.

The field study in Bulgaria and in Macedonia will look for responses to the main question: which is how is exercised the role of the European integration in the democratization. These two countries will show the value change at two separate levels: the level of the political elite and the mass level. The level of the political elite can be subdivided into two groups: the politicians that make political decisions (to join the EU and at which moment) and the small officials that manage the different files more and less directly related with these relations. As far as the politicians are concerned, the best method to reconstruct the relations between their countries and the Union is to analyze their official texts; these texts must belong to different moments in the European integration. As a supplementary technique, I can also use the biographies of the politicians. In a diachronic perspective I will compare the official speeches in Bulgaria and in Macedonia on the European integration in different moments of integration. Furthermore, I will show the interactions with the EU in the dynamics of change of discourses. As far as the small officials are concerned, the favorite method will be the opened or semi-opened interviews. As long as I identify the democracy as an "ethics", I will analyze its presence in at least two different domains, one that has direct effects on the quality of the democracy and another as far as possible of the domains conventionally associated with the quality of the democratic process.

Another way to analyze the process of integration and of his influence on the democracy is "to recreate" this process in real time. Interviews will "set up" social relations between the actors related to their specific roles in the process of integration. The interviews will try to reproduce the discourses regarding the Union and regarding the other actors in the framework of the political process linked to the integration. By that, I mean to put me in the position of an imaginary interlocutor and, from this hypothetical position, to ask an interviewee to reproduce his own position. This will allow me to see the construction of discursive norms, more democratic or more authoritarian, norms that will show up under the form of dynamic constructions during these interviews. The interviews main goal will be to restore the way in which the actors see themselves before, during, and after the impact of the European integration.

There are at least two groups of techniques to analyze the political culture and its change at the mass level. In the first one, the logic follows the opened and semi-opened

interviews with the officials. I will look for the role of the European integration based on the influence that this process plays in the symbolic world of the ordinary people. As in the section that analyzes the politicians, the interviews with people can also include biographical dimensions. Given that for most of the cases the people on the street have not direct relations with representatives of the Union, their specific moments of reference with the past will be different and specific for each country. Moments of reference during the process, specific for Bulgaria, can be the elimination of the tourist visas for the countries of Schengen in 2001, the formal membership to the Union and the liberation of the Bulgarian nurses (with the EU assistance) that awaited death penalty in Libya in 2007, but also the problems with financing coming from the Union some months later. For Macedonia, these points of symbolic references can be the conflict with Greece over the name of the republic and the conflict with the Albanian community in 2001 that was terminated with the mediation of the EU.

Another technique to understand the role of the European integration would be to analyze certain visual representations, such as caricatures in the press. The caricatures are a way for their authors to express their collective identities and to show their attitudes with regard to some personalities and ideas. They are capable also, and this is important for me, to show how, from intentionally stressed visual representations, people are constructing new reality, including their new collective identity (Hunt 2003).

Once the field study results in both countries are finished, I will analyze them in a comparative perspective with the results of analysis of more conventional approaches.

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