

ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND NATIONAL SECURITY

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Introduction¹

Religious believe was gradually permitted in the year 1990. After 1992 reconstruction of cult buildings, which were not destroyed and the establishment of new buildings began. In this time missionaries of different religions overwhelmed our country and began to interfere the religious life of our country without respecting our tradition.²

Many foreign citizens mostly Arabians, who were members of different charitable organizations, came in Albania to help the recovery of Islamic religion. We should accept that they made extraordinary contribution to the reconstruction of cult buildings, but many of them began to propagate those fractions of Islamic regions that they exerted in their countries, but these fractions clashed with the tradition of Albanian Islamic religion. They began to require the radicalization and the Arabisation of Islamic region in Albania; they began to stimulate the schism and to disseminate the Islamic fundamentalist sects, which could bring forth the birth of offsprings of Islamic terrorism. Due to the jeopardy of this phenomenon this study undertakes to analyze the causes, tendencies, efforts, ways, and methods that are used for the dissemination of Islamic fundamentalism in Albania, the consequences and risks for National Security, to propound the strategy, the ways and methods for the prevention of this phenomenon and to inform state institutions, religious community and civil society about this problem.

1. A historical approach. Religious demography in Albania

The dissemination of Islamic religion in Albania is related to the extension of Turkish Empire in Balkan and the occupation of Balkan princedoms one after another. Albanian princedoms were completely invaded after the death of George Kastriot in 1468. In this period Christian Albanians began to convert to Muslims (2¹) in order to avoid the grave Turkish taxes. Despite of that certain regions in Albanian territory kept on having their religious faith; they were the Christians and Orthodox. In certain districts such as in Shpat in Elbasan it is noticed that the so-called 'mix' region. People owned 2 names, a Muslim name for the relation with state authority and a Christian name-the name of their origin.^(2/2)This indicates that Albanians are pragmatist; they are not fanatic in relation to faith.

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After the proclamation of Independence of Albania in 1912, during the reign of Zogu I and during the fascist occupation of our country, the coexistence of 4 communities of the 2 main religions had continued in Albania.³⁾ The peaceful coexistence of the 4 communities (muslim, sunni, bektashi, orthodox, and catholic) of the 2 main regions: Islamic and Christianity is uncial and is a rare national fortune, if we take into consideration the small number of population and the development of Albania in that period.

From 1945 to 1960 communist regime imprisoned clerics of 4 communities (who were considered as opponents of this regime), although religious faith was permitted. After 1960 the attack against religious faith began, being inspired from the cultural Chinese Revolution. In 1967, 2171 religious institutions were closed and ‘the establishment of the first atheist state in world’ is proclaimed.⁴⁾ About 200 clerics ended up in jails. The constitution prohibited religious faith in 1976. The Penal Code of 1977 sentenced religious propaganda to 3-10 years of imprisonment. Some clerics are penalized and sentenced for religious propaganda. ⁵⁾

The beginning of democratic processes and the religious faith found the clerics older and shocked by jail. So the Muslim believers, who account 70% of the total number of the population in our country, were hopefully expecting the emissaries who came from Arabian countries, thinking that these emissaries would help the re-establishment of their religion according to up-to-date standards.

But after this enthusiasm, the division between the preachment of traditional Muslim faith and the preachment that emissaries from Arabian countries and Albanians who imposed to people, were obviously seen. They called themselves “salaphy”, ‘followers of Mohammed’ or ‘superior for understanding the explanations of Koran.

Religious demography in Albania for 1945 ⁽⁶⁾ and 2000 ⁽⁷⁾

VITI	BESIMI ISLAM	SUNI	BEKTASHI	BESIMI KRISTIAN	ORTODOKS	KATOLIK
1944	70%	50.8%	19.2%	30%	18%	12%
2000	70%	49%	21%	30%	20%	10%

2. Salaphism. –The beginnings and tendencies of their spread in Albania.

In 1992 the religious school “El Faruk” was established in the town of Cerrik. A group of Islamic Sudanese missionaries were the initiators of the establishment of this school. ‘Al Vakef Al Islamia” association, which has its central office in Saudi Arabia and its branches for Europe in Einthoven in Holland, has financed the activity of this school. The aim of this school was the preparation of preachment for Islamic religion. The persons who were admitted in this school belonged to 14 up to 18 years old boys, especially orphans or boys who came from very poor families and from rural areas.

There were essential differences between the religious subjects, which were taught in this school and the traditional Islamic religion in Albania. They called themselves “salaphy”. According to Islamic doctrine, “salaphies” were followers of Prophet Mohammed; they are the example of human behavior and faith for all the Muslims.

Recently, the name ‘salaphy’ is occupied by a movement, which tries to impose its closed interpretation of religion round the remodeling of Islamic teaching. The followers of such movements are called ‘salaphies’. Such an action means a deceit because even the real salaphies did not recognize such a movement. They have never called themselves with such names. The only general name that they recognized for themselves is “Muslim”.

Salaphism is not a well-known school of Islamic thought. In reality, such 30 years movement is a renovation of a heresy spread 2 centuries ago by Arabian learned man Mohammed ibn’Abdl al-Wahab (1703-1792). That is why this movement is known in many places as “Wahabi-Salaphy”⁸⁾ movement.

2-1. Salaphism. -The movement, which leads to Islamic fundamentalism.

This movement is different from the main directions of the exertion of Muslimanism, which are officially known all over the world. They are spread all over the world and constitute a small percentage of Islamic religion. ***This current is taking the worst part of Islamic region. They do not preach jihad in thoughts, but they preach jihad in actions; they say they should be irreconcilable to Christians and they justify the recourse to means of violence. According to them, conviction is unacceptable.***

Seen from ***the social aspect***, this current preaches the return to way of living of centuries ago, the same way Mohammed lived (including the way of dressing, eating etc).

Seen from ***the political aspect***. Salaphies do not reconcile with lay state. They require a state, which is related to religion and a state, which puts into execution the Sheriat (a sacred law).

Seen from ***national aspect***, this current aims to give up Albanian traditional Muslimanism and her Arabism. According to this current, the symbols and National Days, which do not respond to the religious holidays, are irreconcilable.

“Salaphy” movement is an Islamic Conservative Fundamentalist movement, because it imposes the close interpretation of religion and the remodeling of Islamic teaching, it also stimulates the schism between Albanian⁹⁾ traditional faiths, it doesn’t accept the up to date scientific views of the world, it stimulates jihad on actions and it is also against the lay state.

Students from the school of Cerrik were activated in concrete actions in order to put into execution their lessons. Some of them were activated to break the Roods on the distance from Elbasan to Tirana, on July 7, 1994. ¹⁰⁾ Students of Islamic University “Faik Er

Merzug” in Korca damaged the frescos of “Saint Mehill” church in Voskopoja, on August 1996.

Based on the complaints of believers, the Albanian Muslim Community closed the school “El Faruk” in Cerrik, on 1994.

The organizers of this school adopted measures for the students to continue their studies in Medire, Saudi Arabia. Some pedagogues from Cerriku were waiting for their students there.

Other schools were established in different towns of Albania, so the number of supports of salaphies began growing almost in all the districts where Muslims dominated.

Albania is considered, as a proper base for the members of Islamic terrorist organization who are declared wanted, because of a series of factors and because of the presence of “salaphy” movement’s supporters.

3. The factors, which enabled the display of such movement in our country

Based on this phenomenon’s analyses, we think that these are the factors “

a. Political factors. After the World War II religious faith was permitted in Albania despite of the communist regime. A decree sanctioned this on 1949. After some years, the restriction of such religious freedoms began and the decree NR.4337, on November 13, 1967, repealed the decree of 1949 “on religious communities” and other decrees, which approved the statutes of religious communities. All the religious institutions were closed. A part of the clerics were old and some of them died during the 25 years period of the lack of religious freedom. The preparation of religious staff was interrupted for 25 years. By the beginning of democratic processes in Albania, when the religious faith was permitted, there was a total lack of clerics. So the Albanian believers used to hear the preachment of Arabian missionaries who were followed by an interpreter. Foreign Arabian associations were preparing Albanian clerics within and without the country in order to fill “the vacuum” in the leading circles of Islamic religion, but a part of these clerics have supported “salaphy” movement and they aim to impose the same to the believers.

Even the political crises that our country ran through in 1991,1992,1997,1998 associated by the total lack of legal state and by continuous impingements on public order and security, have enabled the operation of such movement in Albania and the easy entering of different Islamic fundamentalist persons in our country.

Members of the “salaphy” movement in Elbasan gained advantage from the lack of state on March ’97 and decided to test the power, to occupy by force and to establish the “Myftini” of Elbasan under their control. After they failed in this attempt they put under their control the religious university “El Hagi” in the same town and dispelled from jobs the employees of this institution. Later, this religious institution served as the central office for “salaphy” movement in Elbasan.

b. Economic factors. The closing of religious institutions in 1967 was associated by such nationalization of properties that religious communities owned in our country, such as: lands and objects. Because of the administrative demographic movements during the 25 years of the lack of religious freedom, the real assets of religious communities were used for building houses. By the beginning of democratic processes, a part of their properties was privatized and there was no other possibility to restitute them back to the owner. Even those, which could be restituted, except the cult objects that were used for religious aims, were not still restituted because of the lack of legal base. So when the religious activity began, the Islamic religious authorities were poor and without any economic base. The state did not finance them, so religious authorities were obliged to expect humanitarian aids from abroad, mostly from foreign Arabian associations. We should emphasize that during the reign of Zogu and the communist regime in 1967, the activity of religious communities is partly financed by state. The resistance of Albanian clerics toward “salaphy” movement is decreasing because the Arabian associations financed the greatest nr of new mosques and they also paid the wages of Imam (Moslem priest).

The economic poverty of believers obliged them to become slave of the influence of other sects or different fundamentalist movements.

c. The lack of legal acts has always played and is still playing a negative role in the normal development of religious life in our country. We should emphasize that during the reign of Zogu and during the communist regime up to 1967, there existed laws, which enacted the position of religion in account with state, the functioning of communities and their hierarchy, while after the beginning of democratic processes up to now, no law is enacted for religious communities; they are only enacted on the constitution. That is why different kinds of sects and religious movements, the activity of which is prohibited by law in many countries, come to Albania. It seems that we have actually chosen the position of “passive neutrality”, so the state does not interfere legally in the religious problems. Under the conditions of a society where different kinds of sects and faiths exist, the state should not only be an active organizer of these freedoms. So, state might pass from “passive neutrality” toward “an active laicity”.

d. Geographical factors. The position of Albania as a state between the East and West and being one of the rare countries where the largest part are Muslims, has drawn the attention of many Arab associations and foundations to come to Albania. Because of the armed conflict which accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia, involvement of the Muslim population of Bosnia in such war, brought about that many associations and fundamentalist elements used Albania as a springboard to pass to Bosnia. They had the same interests in Albania, even during the Kosovo and Macedonia crises.

e. Lack of efficient state structures

which should deal with the management of legal relations of state toward religious community leads to the position of “passive neutrality”? There exists only one State Committee of Cults in Albania from 1992, which is a structure with a definite statute up to 1999. For the first time, the decree of Council of ministers of Albanian Republic, NR.459, on September 23, 1999 “on the establishment of State Committee on Cults’

defined the duties of this structure. This structure now consists of 4-5 employees. In many other countries especially the countries of ex-communist East, such structures are in the level of ministries.

f. The lack of experiences of law enforcement agencies on the control of foreign and especially the lack of their experience on crimes such as terrorism especially when it has international collaboration. The follow of the terrorism, which has international relations, requires an international collaboration of law execution agencies. Due to the problems that Albania ran through after the years'90, the Albanian law enforcement agencies were lacking of such a partnership almost up to 1998, the period when prestigious Agencies such as American CIA, offered their assistance.

4. Islamic humanitarian associations, which financed salaphism in Albania. The camouflages used to hide the terrorist elements.

After 1992, a series of humanitarian foundations and charities have run their activity in Albania. A part of them have their center offices in Arabian countries and owned great funds. These funds are donations from different private owners from the countries of Persian Gulf such as: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and United Emirates.

Their activity was concentrated on these main directions:

- a. In the field of investments, such as the building of waterworks, hospitals, medical centers, etc.
- b. Their activity was concentrated on building cult objects, and on the spread of Muslimanism. This is realized by establishing different religious schools, courses, and by financing their scholarships abroad.
- c. Their activity was concentrated on giving a monthly financial aid for orphans or poor people.

We should accept the contribution of these associations on establishment of cult objects, mosques, and religious schools in our country. They have also supplied the poor people and orphans with humanitarian aids. But in many cases these contributions were given under other conditions. If 25\$ were given to an orphan, he was obliged to attend the courses of Islamic faith, which in many cases belonged to "salaphy" current.

The greatest part of these organizations, which came from the countries of Persian Gulf, are infiltrated in Islamic terrorist organizations such as "Egyptian Islamic Jihad", "Egyptian Islamic Group", "the Front of Algerian Salvation" and "Islamic Algerian Armed Group". All these organizations were grouped in "International Islamic Front of War for Jihad" led by Ossama Bin Laden. These organizations have not only infiltrated in the humanitarian foundations but have also run their activity in order to spread Islamic fundamentalism.

4.1 Islamic humanitarian foundations and charities, which have operated in our country.

“Islamic world organization of aids” has the central office in Saudi Arabia. It has exerted its activity in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya. It has been related to Islamic fundamentalist circles and suspected financiers are noticed. It has also exerted its activity in Tirana, in the central Albania and in the southeastern part of the country. It has exerted its activity in Malesia e Madhe but has gradually reduced its activity. Many of its employees got employed in other associations or left the country.

“Al-Haramein” foundation has its central office in Riad, in Saudi Arabia. It has begun its activity in our country in 1963. It has exerted its activity in Tirana, Elbasan, and Peshkopi. Ahmad Ibrahim Al Najar, an Egyptian who is known in Albania as Mohammed Fouda or Ebu Mahmudi was employed in this organization. It is related to the organization of Bin Laden. He was detained on June 25, 1998 in the university “El Hagri” in Elbasan and was extradited in Egypt. In 1981, Al Najar had participated in the organization, which killed the Egyptian President Al Sadat, and he was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment. In 1994 he participated in the organization of blowing up Khan Al Khalil in the center of Cairo. He is sentenced in his absence to death punishment. ¹²⁾

“The organization of Gulf Goodness” is established in our country in 1992 and is financed by an organization in Kuwait, which has the same name. The Jordanian, Abdul Latif Saleh has been the director of this organization. Gaining advantage by the statute of the organization, he sheltered in Albania different Algerian terrorists. He left Albania.

“The foundation of Islamic Revival and Heritage” has its center office in Kuwait. Its main activity was to give orphans 25\$ per month. It has operated in Elbasan and Shkoder. It has also financed the scholarship of Albanian students in Arabian countries. It has financed the “salaphy” movement in different towns in our country. This is a typical case, that terrorist organizations use these foundations as a camouflage. Shawqi Salamah Mustafa, known as Mexhid Mustafa; Muhamad Hasan; Issan Abd Al-Tawab Abd Al-Alim; Ahmad Ismail Othman Saleh, known as Mohammed Khalid have worked for this organization. They were members of “Islamic Egyptian Jihad” and are detained in Albania and then are extradited in Egypt. Their leader Al Zawahiri was the right hand man of Osama Bin Laden and is killed during the American attack on Afghanistan.

“Al Wakef Al-Islamia” foundation has its center office in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Sheiks financed this foundation. It has built cult objects in Tirana, Kavaja, Cerrik and Berat. It has financed the scholarship of some Albanian students in Arabian countries, has financed the university “El Hagri” in Cerrik. It has financed the “salaphy” movement.

“Muafaq” foundation has its center office in Saudi Arabia and the businessman; Jasin Abdullah Kadi has financed it. He came in Albania in 1993 and has exerted its activity in Tirana, Kukes, Has, and Tropoja. A branch of this foundation is used as a camouflage for arms traffic.

4-2. Ways, methods that terrorist organizations use and the problems they solve by using humanitarian foundations and charities.

1. Humanitarian foundations and charities hoard lots of funds from donators in Arabian countries and from zecati (according to the Islamic Faith, the rich should donate 3% of their income to the poor). Terrorist organizations get a part of these funds through their members who were infiltrated in the leading boards of these humanitarian foundations and use these to finance Islamic extremism terrorism.

2. Some foundations are used as camouflage for illegal activities such as: the forgery of documents, sheltering terrorist elements, and illegal traffics. Some of the foundations have exerted their activity in Albania and are used to exert such illegal traffics. These foundations are a secure shelter for those who are declared wanted in other countries for terrorist activity, because people think that these foundations will reduce poverty, so they are easily supplied with the necessary documents.

3. The legal statutes of humanitarian organizations give them the opportunity to be in continuous contact with different ages and classes through the programs used for courses and schools, and to spread humanitarian aids. The terrorist organization, which are infiltrated in these foundations realize the extremist education of young believers, to support and to finance such fundamentalist movements as “salaphism”. Gaining advantage from the lack of state structures control, these associations financed a lot of religious illegal courses in different towns of Albania.

4. By using the programs of foundations on the students’ education abroad, these terrorist organizations send their members in order to widen their organizations and to realize their recruitment and their training even in military courses.

5. After years of intensive activity in our country and by financing the “salaphy” movement, in 1998, Arabian associations tried to put the official structures of Albanian Muslim Community under the control of this movement. They aimed to realize the political programs and the establishment of state, which should put into execution the sacred law.

6. Terrorist organizations have used the activity of foundations to be present in the focus of crisis and to camouflage their activity. They have operated in Bosnia and Chechnya. Arms traffic is realized through them and many mujahidins have moved, characterizing the war in these countries as religious war.

Such efforts were made during the crisis in Kosovo and Macedonia where the warriors used in Bosnia, tried to enter the Liberation Army of Kosovo through the humanitarian foundations, but the Albanian leaders were too clever and did not permit the terrorists to characterize their liberation’ war as an Islamic terrorist war (as Serb and Macedonian were trying to present). ¹⁴⁾

5. The cell of Islamic Egyptian Jihad and what they aimed in Albania

The terrorist organization of Islamic Egyptian Jihad could establish one of its main committees in Albania, using all the above-mentioned possibilities. The members of this committee occupied important positions in Islamic humanitarian foundations in our country. They have inspired and have been in continuous contact with members of “salaphy” movement in our country.

5.1. The structure of Islamic Egyptian Jihad

This organization operated as an intergraded structure, groups, which were divided in some committees.

a. The guiding committee was assigned to commits armed terrorist operations in Egypt.

b. The security committee was assigned to train and to get deals with security institutions in order to avoid the penal prosecution. The security institutions should be silent during the interview.

c. Shariat committee taught the members the ideas of organizations, its social ideas, and took care of the families of detained members.

d. The committee of documents' forgery has its center office in Tirana and Ahmed Ibrahim runs it. The duty of this committee was to prepare the documents in order to facilitate the movement of its members during their duties. Many organization sessions are held abroad and are followed by the leader of the organization Ajman Zavairi and by others who lived in London; persons who used falsified travel documents.

5.2 The activity of the organization in Albania

The aims of activity of “Islamic Egyptian Jihad” foundation in Albania are:

1. To use Albania as a safe base for sheltering the members of organization who were identified from the Egyptian intelligence and who were sentenced in their absence. They thought they were safe in Albania but at the same time they could not continue to serve the organization. They supplied the members of the organization with the necessary documents. A part of the members got married to Albanian citizens in order to camouflage their actions.

2. They aimed to stimulate Islamic extremism by supporting “salaphy” movement and by using the charities where they were infiltrated.

3. The realization of young Albanians' recruitment, which aim to use them in their further operations.

According to the plan of the organization, the recruitment passed 2 phases:

- a. First phase.* They gather young men and send them to attend studies in Arabian countries.
- b. The second phase.* It includes the selection, recruitment, and the military training for the realization of the duties of the organization.

The transportation of identified members of Islamic Egyptian Jihad from Albania to Egypt was accomplished based on the perfect collaboration of Albanian law enforcement agencies to Egyptian agencies. In his own testimony (of 143 pg) before the authorities of the country, Ahmad Ibrahim Al Najar declared the names of members of the organization and gave explanation for anti-American strategy of the organization, the position of Ajman Zawahiri and his relations with Ossama Bin Laden.¹⁵⁾

The attack against the group of “arabian of Albania”, as the trial against them in Egypt was called, is appraised as one of the most successful operations of CIA against terrorism.

After the attack on members of Islamic Egyptian Jihad in Albania, the international Front of War for Jihad (established by Union of some Islamic terrorist organizations led by Bin Laden) published on August 15, 1998, a statement in the Arabian daily newspaper “Al Hajat” in London, where it promises revenge against USA. Two days later, on August 17, 1998 this organization attacked embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.¹⁶⁾

6. Passive neutrality and national security

I think the influence of Islamic terrorism on national security should be seen in 3 main aspects:

- 1.** Islamic Extremism itself does not reconcile with the existence of other religions and is ready to fight against them. Jihad is the main principle of Islam, but extremists misinterpret it and preach only Jihad by means of sword. Permitting such Islamic extremism would lead in the religious unbalancing and it would lead in schism and religious war.
- 2.** Islamic Extremism would also influence on the strategic alliances of our country. Western Europe, where we want to go and the USA our main strategic ally are sensible toward the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism. If extremism were permitted to gain ground, our strategic allies would gradually leave us. This would influence negatively on our national security.
- 3.** Each extremist movement tries to be supported by a moderate political group. Since the victory of Islamic Iranian Revolution, Islamism is turned into a political movement in many other eastern countries. If Islamic extremism is permitted, with the passing of the time it will require to have its own political movement. Under these conditions, they

would require establishing political parties on religious bases and this would be an impingement for national security.

In the session held in Tirana on February 2000, “foreign experiences on the relations of state to religious communities” the German representative said: Religious sects constitute so many problems as we should think that they may throw down the German democratic system”. Think about it, if the German state feels such a risk, where would the “passive neutrality” lead us?

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** We are positioned among the coalition of anti-terrorist countries led by USA, by evidencing and analyzing the efforts, which are made for stimulating the Islamic terrorism and by taking precautions for its prevention. We recommend that the phenomenon of Islamic extremism’ stimulation in our country should be the object of analyses of National Security Council, and a strategy should be drafted for the prevention of such phenomenon.
- 2.** After the years’90 no law is enacted for the communities and religious organizations, so the drafting of such a law is necessary. This law should be drafted based on the good experience of the law of 1929; on the order in council of 1949; on the Universal Statement on Human Rights, on European Convention on Human Rights, especially on the experience of different countries, which have run through the same problems.
- 3.** The signature of the deed of arrangement between the government and 4 main religious communities is necessary for the legal regulation of relations of state to community and each pair should undertake its responsibilities as by law enacted.
- 4.** The restitution of properties to religious communities is a problem, which should be legally solved and it is necessary to help the rapid economic reinforcement of religious communities in order to increase their independence from foreign suspected financiers. So the state should also plan to partly maintain the activity of 4 religious communities in our country with its subsidies. The law of Reign of Zogu in 1929 and the order in council of communist regime in 1948 had sanctioned such a thing.
- 5.** Taking into consideration the great vacuum created by the 25 years-interruption of preparation of religious staff, the state should establish and finance a theological university for training clerics of 4 main communities.
- 6.** State must not be a simple neutral guarantee for religious faith freedoms, but it should act as a promoter of these freedoms, so it is necessary to have an active structure, which deals with this mission. We recommend the transformation of State Committee of Cults into a State Ministry of Cults.
- 7.** Specialized law enforcement agencies should take measures to monitor Islamic foundations, which may be infiltrated and which poses a potential threat for National

Security. They should also monitor all the students who are being sent abroad in suspected ways from Arabian foundations in order to identify the persons who serve to Islamic terrorist organizations. It is also necessary to identify the relations of terrorist organizations, which may still be in our country.

8. In addition to work arrangement for the identification of terrorist organizations' relations within the country, it is necessary to avoid the propaganda that anti Albanian circles, which represent Albania as the base of Islamic terrorist organizations, try to make.

9. Taking into consideration the geographical position of Albania; its commitment on the support of NATO in wars in Bosnia and Kosovo; its readiness to support the USA in other operations against terrorism, we should take the initiative to establish in Tirana a regional anti-terrorism center. This will help our law enforcement agencies to be assisted by foreign powerful agencies, which have experience in war against terrorism.

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