The Reasons Behind Armenia's Normalization of Diplomatic Relations with Turkey (2020–2024)

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Abstract *In 2021, Armenia began the process of normalizing diplomatic relations with Turkish after more than three decades of frozen ties due to historical disputes , including the Armenian Genocide and the prolonged conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In this context , normalization with Turkish became part of Armenia's new foreign policy strategy aimed at avoiding greater losses in terms of security , economy , and diplomacy This research aims to analyze the underlying reasons behind Armenia's decision to normalize diplomatic relations with Turkey during the period of 2021–2024. The study employs a qualitative method , using data collection techniques through literature review of both primary and secondary sources , including official documents , government statements , policy reports , as well as media analyses and academic journals . The findings of this research indicate that Armenia's normalization efforts were driven by several major factors : security threats , economic pressures , and political or diplomatic challenges posed by Turkey . However , the study finds that the influence of political or diplomatic threats was not as significant as the other two factors .*

Keywords : *Normalization , Diplomatic , Threat , Security , Economic , Political*

Introduction

The relationship between Armenia and Turkey is one of the most complex and historically fraught geopolitical dynamics in the Caucasus region. Both have a long history of conflict , particularly concerning the Armenian Genocide of 1915 perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against ethnic Armenians . [1]Armenia and the international community consider this event of a genocide that resulting in the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Armenians , while Turkey has until now rejected the use of the term " genocide " and called it part of the chaos resulting from the civil war in the midst of World War I.[2] Turkey's denial of this event has been a major stumbling block in bilateral relations between the two countries since Armenia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.[3] Furthermore , Turkey's involvement in supporting Azerbaijan, Armenia's main geopolitical enemy in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict , has also exacerbated the relationship between the two countries .[4]

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, inhabited by a majority ethnic Armenian population has been on going since the 1980s. During the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–1994), Armenia gained control of the region and seven surrounding districts , which were legally part of Azerbaijan.[5] Turkey's support for Azerbaijan subsequently increased , and in a show of solidarity , Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993. [6]Since then , diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey have been frozen . Although an attempt to normalize relations through the signing of *the Zurich Protocols* in 2009, mediated by Switzerland , failed due to pressure from Azerbaijan and

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domestic opposition in Armenia and Turkey . [7]Since then , relations between the two countries have remained frozen , with no formal diplomatic relations established .

Tensions escalated again in 2020 with the outbreak of the second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In that conflict , Turkey openly supported Azerbaijan diplomatically , militarily , and technologically .[8] Turkey provided Bayraktar TB2 combat *drones* , military training , and significant logistics and intelligence support .[9] Several reports from international organizations even indicated the involvement of Syrian mercenaries allegedly sent by Turkey to assist Azerbaijani forces , although Ankara denied any involvement . [10]Armenia viewed this overt Turkish support as an indirect aggression against its sovereignty , further exacerbating the perceived threat from Turkey .

However , after the 2020 war , a new dynamic emerged that opened up the possibility of reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey . In late 2021, the two countries surprisingly announced the appointment of special envoys to initiate dialogue to normalize relations . The first meeting between the two envoys shop place in Moscow in January 2022, with Russian mediation .[11] While this process did not result in a concrete agreement , it marked a significant shift in Armenia's diplomatic approach toward Turkey . [12]Armenia, previously highly cautious toward Turkey , now appears more open to exploring avenues of dialogue , including the possibility of opening borders and formal diplomatic exchanges .

This shift is interesting to analyze from a security and strategic perspective , especially considering that Armenia is a small country that is militarily and economically much weaker than Turkey . In this context , the concept of *bandwagoning* developed by Randall L. Schweller becomes relevant conceptual framework . Schweller distinguishes between balancers *and* bandwagoners *,* stating that weaker states tend *to bandwagon* with larger powers if they support *the status quo* and lack the capacity to fight directly .[13]

Since the initiation of normalization dialogue in January 2022, relations between Armenia and Turkey have shown slow but consistent progress through 2024. These normalization efforts continue in a complex context , marked by regional dynamics following the second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the domestic political realities of each country .[14] Throughout 2022 to 2024, the two special envoys Ruben Rubinyan from Armenia and Serdar Turkey's Kılıç held several rounds of bilateral meetings , including in Vienna and Moscow . During these meetings , several technical and symbolic steps were agreed upon . One of these was the establishment of direct flights between Yerevan and Istanbul, which were implemented by Armenian airline *FlyOne* Armenia and Turkish Airlines in early 2022.[15] These flights served not only as a symbol of normalization but also as a practical step to facilitate relations between civil society groups .

Additionally , in 2023, the two countries reached an agreement to open their land border on a limited basis to third country nationals , which was seen as a pragmatic step in building trust .[16] This step was significant because the Armenia- Turkey land border had been closed since 1993, and this limited opening demonstrated the political will of both sides to move forward even without a full restoration of diplomatic relations . However , this process was also marred by a number of obstacles and fragility . One of the main challenges was the dynamics of Armenia's relations with Azerbaijan, particularly regarding

the post-war status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Turkey emphasized that full normalization with Armenia remains closely linked to progress in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations , particularly a comprehensive peace agreement . [17]This position was repeatedly reiterated by President Recipe Tayyip Erdogan . Tayyip Erdoğan , who stated that "regional peace cannot be achieved without resolving Armenia-Azerbaijan relations ." On the other hand , the Armenian government under the leadership of Prime Minister Nicole Pashinyan has attempted to separate negotiations with Turkey from bilateral issues with Azerbaijan, although geopolitical realities often complicated this approach . Armenia believes that bilateral relations with Turkey should be able to develop independently as part of a broader regional normalization strategy .[18]

In 2024, despite the lack of a full reopening of diplomatic relations or borders , rhetoric from both sides remained relatively positive . Armenia continued to express its commitment to the normalization process , while Turkey also expressed its readiness to resume dialogue . However , external factors , such as Russia's weakened mediation due to the war in Ukraine , and the increasing influence of actors like the European Union and the United States, also influenced the dynamics of this normalization .[19] Thus , the 2022–2024 period represents a more stable and realistic phase of negotiations than previous efforts , yet it remains overshadowed by geopolitical challenges and historical obstacles that have not yet been fully resolved . This process demonstrates that while the road to full normalization remains long, there is a continued commitment from both countries to keeping diplomatic channels open.[20]

In international relations , *bandwagoning* is a strategic concept that explains state behavior in an anarchic international Unlike a balancing system *strategy* , where states attempt to balance or oppose a dominant power , *bandwagoning* refers to a state's tendency to join or move closer to that dominant power . The goals of this strategy can vary , from avoiding threats to gaining strategic , political , or economic advantages .[21] This concept is widely discussed in the realm of the realistic paradigm , particularly in the concept developed by Randall L. Schweller . In his article " *Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the In Revisionist State Back In* (1994), Schweller criticized classical views such as Stephen Walt's , which saw *bandwagoning* as merely a form of subservience by weak states to strong states due to threats .[22] Schweller expands this concept by suggesting that countries can also bandwagon not only for survival , but also to pursue profit , especially for *revisionist countries* , namely countries that are not satisfied with *the status quo* .[23]

Schweller divides states into several categories , such as lambs (supporters of *the status quo* and unable to defend themselves), jackals (weak , opportunistic *revisionists*), and others .[24] Within this framework , bandwagoning is understood not merely as a passive choice , but as a strategic calculation that can reflect rationality in maintaining existence or increasing state advantages in the face of external pressure or changes in the power structure . This concept is crucial in examining how small states respond to geopolitical dynamics dominated by great powers . More broadly , bandwagoning demonstrates how states ' foreign policy decisions are not always based on principles of resistance or collective alliances , but rather on adapting to the realities of power around them .[25]

Armenia could have balanced the threat from Turkey , but the reality is that it has chosen to engage in dialogue and open up the possibility of reconciliation . This decision also demonstrates that Armenia is adapting to Turkey's regional dominance as a means of maintaining internal stability and the country's existence . This phenomenon is the starting point for the main question in this research : " Why did Armenia normalize diplomatic relations with Turkey in 2020-2024?" Using a *bandwagoning approach* , this research will examine the reasons why Armenia normalized diplomatic relations with Turkey .

Methods

General Background

This study examines the prolonged diplomatic freeze between Armenia and Türkiye, which lasted for over three decades due to historical disputes particularly the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial conflict. Armenia's defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, along with the growing dominance of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan bloc, triggered a significant shift in Armenia's foreign policy. One major outcome of this shift was the initiation of a normalization process with Türkiye in 2021.[26]

Sample/Participants/Group

The research does not involve direct human participants but focuses on state actors (Armenia and Türkiye) and relevant stakeholders such as Azerbaijan, Russia, and international organizations. The unit of analysis is Armenia's foreign policy toward the normalization of diplomatic relations with Türkiye during the 2020–2024 period.

Instrument and Procedure

Primary instrument: The researcher (human instrument), responsible for collecting, evaluating, and analyzing data.

Data sources:

- Official government documents from Armenia and Türkiye (press releases, foreign ministry statements, agreements, protocols).
- Reports from international organizations such as the *International Crisis Group* .
- Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and credible media analyses.

Research procedure:

- Defining the research focus and theoretical framework (Defensive Neorealism & Randall L. Schweller's Bandwagoning concept).
- Collecting data through library research from both primary and secondary sources.
- Organizing data according to thematic categories (security threats, economic threats, political/diplomatic threats).
- Analyzing data using a qualitative approach grounded in theory.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the *Miles & Huberman* model, which consists of:

- Data reduction filtering relevant information based on the research focus.
- Data display – organizing data into analytical narratives, tables, and direct quotations.
- Data verification – cross-checking findings with theoretical expectations and validating them through source triangulation.

This approach was employed to identify the causal relationship between Armenia's defeat in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, its perceived threats from Türkiye, and its decision to pursue diplomatic normalization.

The Reasons Behind Armenia's Normalization of Diplomatic Relations with Turkey (2020–2024)

According to Randall L. Schweller in *Bandwagoning* that it is explained that a small or weak country is categorized as a country with *a state interest* is *value of status quo* (*Lambs*), because according to Schweller , *Lambs* bandwagoning is not for expansion but for survival and to avoid losses . Then in the concept *of*

bandwagoning Schweller also explains that countries can be categorized as Self-Abnegation in its *Goals* , where weak countries are willing to sacrifice their national interests and political identity in order to avoid greater losses . Finally , Schweller explains that countries can carry out *Appeasement and Wave of The Future bandwagoning ; Distancing* , means that the country chooses to avoid direct conflict (*appeasement)*), then follows the new dominant power (*wave) of the future bandwagoning*), and distancing from old partners who are no longer considered effective (*distancing)*), all of these things are in line with *goals : self Abnegation* trying to survive in a harsh environment with limited powers .[27]

Based on Schweller's explanation of the *bandwagoning concept* , researchers view Armenia as a small or weak country seeking to normalize diplomatic relations with Turkey in 2021 because Armenia views Turkey as a threat . Armenia's normalization is intended to avoid perceived direct threats from Turkey , which are security , economic , and political or diplomatic .

2. 2 State Interest

According to Schweller (1994), countries with *lambs* status is a weak country that views the status quo as valuable tall Because focus mainly is endure live . They No look for expansion , but rather avoid loss more continue . [28]Within the framework this , Armenia's status quo before 2020 was depend on alliances security with Russia, maintaining policy confrontational foreign countries against Turkey, and survive in isolation economy consequence closing border since 1993.[29]

However , the war 2020 changed calculation strategic the in a way drastically . Turkey's support for Azerbaijan contributed to the defeat significant Armenian military losses. [30]Data from the International Crisis Group shows that Azerbaijan's use of the Bayraktar TB2 drone was devastating system defense Armenian air and change the way conflict . As a result , Armenia lost control on part large disputed territory , signed agreement ceasefire Russian -mediated weapons , and received presence troops guard Russian peace in the Karabakh region.[31]

Defeat This No only weaken position Armenia's security , but also hit economy national . According to the World Bank, Armenia's GDP experienced contraction by 7.4% in 2020 , partly consequence cost war and its impact COVID-19 pandemic .[32] Isolation from track trading main including connectivity to Turkey to make cost logistics increase significant . Armenia must depend on route via Georgia and Iran, which is more long and expensive, lowering Power competition export national .[33]

At the level diplomatically , Armenia found that rely on Russia as protector main own risk big . Even though formally allies in Organization Agreement Security Collective (CSTO), Russia does not do intervention direct For stop Azerbaijan offensive . After Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, attention and capacity Moscow's military is increasingly divided , making Armenia even more prone to .[34] Condition This bring up awareness strategic that maintaining the status quo does not Again profitable . Armenia is in a position defensive without guarantee credible security , economy depressed , and space diplomacy narrow . Therefore that , realistic strategy is reduce threat with change connection with one of them the previous actor become source threat , namely Turkey.

From Schweller's perspective , the steps This logical : *lambs* tend evaluate that come closer to more power strong although previously hostile can minimize risk .[35]For Armenia, this means start the normalization process diplomatic with Turkey, not For form alliance full , but For create channel communication and reduce potential future confrontation .[36]

In a way practical , shift This start seen in December 2021 when Armenia and Turkey appointed envoy special For start negotiations normalization . Meeting first in Moscow in January 2022 to be step concrete First For dismantle isolation that has been ongoing three decade . [37]This step driven by a combination factors : needs secure western border , looking for track trading new , and reduce pressure military No direct via Azerbaijan.

With Thus , Armenia's *state of interest* in the 2020–2024 period has changed from maintaining a detrimental status quo become look for stability new through *bandwagoning* with Turkey. Changes This No appear from desire ideological , but rather from need urge For endure life in environment geopolitics is increasingly hard .

2.3 Goals

Within the framework theory *bandwagoning* Randall L. Schweller, *self-abnegation* describe condition when the country was small willing sacrifice part interest national , sovereignty symbolic , even identity his politics in order to avoid loss more big . [38]Armenia post-2020 including in category This Because in a way aware choose lower priority issue historical that during dozens year become a political pillar abroad , namely confession The 1915 Armenian Genocide by Turkey, in order to open room normalization connection .[39]

Decline Priority Issue Genocide

For several decade , recognition international on The Armenian Genocide has been at the heart of Yerevan's diplomacy , especially in multilateral forums. However , since defeat 2020 war , the Armenian government started adopt attitude more pragmatic . In 2022, Armenian officials confirmed that the normalization process with Turkey no will conditional on recognition genocide , but rather will focused on interests practical like opening borders and trade cross- border. [40]This step show shift fundamental from approach confrontational going to compromise strategic . Symbolic steps were also taken by the Pashinyan government in 2023, the government introduce Mountain Aragats as symbol new Armenia in document official , replace Mount Ararat which is geographical located in the Turkish region. The shift symbolic This interpreted as a strategy to calm down sensitivity historical and opening road for narrative identity more national inclusive .[41]

Economic and Trade Policy

obvious decision in context *self-abnegation* is revocation prohibition import goods Turkish origin that is enforced since 2020. [42]In December 2020, Armenia banned import goods from Turkey as form sanctions political on Ankara's involvement in Karabakh war .[43] However , the policy This impact negative for economy domestic because Turkey is one of the suppliers main goods consumption , textiles , and products agriculture . Pressure growing economy push government pull out prohibition in January 2022.[44]

Data from the German Economic Team shows that potential Bilateral trade is very large If border opened back . [45]Gravity model projecting Armenia's imports from Turkey could rise to 12.8% of total imports national , whereas Armenia's exports to Turkey could reached USD 185 million in term medium .[46] With pull out prohibition said , Armenia sacrificed position anti-Turkish politics for the sake of economy term long .

Apart from trade , Armenia also shows readiness compromise in project infrastructure . In 2023, the government introduce draft *Crossroads of Peace* , which includes restoration track trains and roads highway

connecting Armenia with Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran , and Georgia. The project This show orientation pragmatic that greater regional connectivity important than maintain isolation politics .[47]

Diplomacy Humanity

Form Another *self-abnegation* is seen in Armenia's response to earthquake big in Turkey in February 2023.[48] For First the first time Since 1993, Armenia has opened border land with Turkey to send help humanity . Government send team rescue and supplies emergency to area affected earthquake . [49]This step viewed as signal political strong which shows Armenia's readiness to defuse tension historical for solidarity humanity . Action This contain risk political domestic . Some of the Armenian opposition and diaspora oppose normalization without conditions , assess that attitude the weaken Armenia's moral claim to the tragedy of 1915.[50] However , the Pashinyan government remains continue policy this , assess that benefit strategic — especially in reduce threat security and opening track trade — more big compared to risk political term short .[51]

Policy *self-abnegation* No without internal challenges . In the election parliament 2021, opposition nationalist accused Pashinyan of giving in to pressure external , especially Because his failure defend Karabakh.[52] Normalization with Turkey often used as ammunition politics by opponents domestic For weaken legitimacy government . However , the results elections show the majority of the Armenian people support stability and reconstruction post-war rather than continue confrontation ideological .[53]

With lower issue genocide , lifting the embargo on Turkish products , opening self at work The same infrastructure , as well as give help humanity to the previous country considered enemy , Armenia in particular aware implementing *self-abnegation* strategies . Choice This reflect effort sacrifice part identity politics in order to avoid loss more big . In the context of 2020–2024, the policy This is road pragmatic going to continuity country life in the middle pressure regional security and isolation .

2. 4 Behavior

If in Schweller's *state of interest* framework explain Armenia's position as *lambs* and *goals* confirm his choice of *self-abnegation* , then *behavior* explain the actual strategies being put into practice in policy abroad . [54]Armenia during 2020–2024 shows three pattern main : *appeasement* (reduce) conflict direct with Turkey), *wave-of-the-future bandwagoning* (merapi to projected power dominant in the region , namely Turkey), and *distancing* (reducing dependence historical in Russia).

Appeasement: Reduce Potential Confrontation

Armenia's *appeasement* strategy is visible clear post- 2020 Karabakh War. Instead harden confrontation , the Pashinyan government actually open channel diplomacy with Turkey. [55]In December 2021, the two countries appointed envoy special For talk about normalization .[56] Meeting First took place in Moscow in January 2022, then continued in Vienna in February , May, and July 2022. [57]In the meeting this , second party agree For continue the dialogue " without prerequisites ", a step significant remember during dozens year connection diplomatic frozen .[58]

Another form of *appeasement* is Armenia's decision to open border temporary with Turkey in February 2023 for send help humanity post earthquake earth in Kahramanmaraş . [59]This is First the first

time since 1993 border land opened , and action the viewed as symbol strong reconciliation . [60]Humanitarian action This lower tension political as well as create atmosphere positive that helps restore bilateral communication .

In addition , in July 2024 the envoy special The two countries met at the Alican–Margara border . The meeting the discuss possibility opening track Kars–Gyumri railway and simplification journey cross-border for holder passport diplomatic .[61] Agreement technical This shows Armenia does not Again adopt policy confrontational , but more prioritize compromise pragmatic .

Wave-of-the-Future Bandwagoning : Docked to Regional Power

Draft *wave-of-the-future bandwagoning* explain small state tendency come closer to the power that is believed will dominant in the future . Armenia post-2020 is increasingly realistic see Turkey as center regional power that is not inevitable . This is reflected in initiative connectivity introduced by the Armenian government in late 2023, namely project *Crossroads of Peace* .[62] Project This covers restoration track trains and construction track transportation land connecting Armenia with Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia , and Iran.[63]

With project this , Armenia sent signal that He willing participate in regionally led network or at least supported by Turkey. [64]This is become shift big from position isolationist previously . According to Caucasus Watch analysis (2024), Armenia's involvement in project projected cross- border can lower cost logistics up to 30% and increase export product Armenian agriculture to the Turkish market as well as more Far to Europe .[65]

On the side politics , *wave-of-the-future bandwagoning is* also visible from Armenia's willingness to hold direct dialogue between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. [66]In October 2022, the two met in Prague on the sidelines of the European Political Community Summit, a meeting face advance First in more from One decade .[67] Meeting This No produce agreement big , but create important momentum that strengthens trend normalization .

Distancing: Reducing Dependence on Russia

Dimensions final is *distancing* . For three decade post independence , Russia became protector Armenian main through membership in the CSTO and existence base military in Gyumri.[68] However , the 2020 war showed limitations Russia's commitment . Armenia is disappointed because CSTO does not give help military direct when its territory attacked .[69] Dissatisfaction This the more in when Russia focused on invasion Ukraine in 2022, so that capacity and attention to South Caucasus is decreasing drastic .[70]

concrete sign from *distancing* occurred in 2024. In October, Russia withdrew his troops from Yerevan's Zvartnots Airport , ending presence during more from 30 years . [71]Armenia also started take step For take over control full on border from troops Russian guards , who are scheduled completed in early 2025.[72] Shift This show Yerevan's efforts to reduce dependence on Moscow, while open room diplomacy new with Turkey and the West. [73]In addition , Armenia is deepening connection with the European Union . In 2021, the agreement *The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement* (CEPA) with the EU has

begun valid full , open road for Work The same more close in trade , political reform , and development infrastructure . Integration with the EU provides alternative strategic besides dependent on Russia.[74]

Armenia's behavior throughout 2020–2024 shows a combination of *appeasement* , *wave-of-the-future bandwagoning* , and *distancing* strategies . Through *appeasement* , Armenia voted relieve tension with open dialogue, give help humanity , and discuss opening border . With *wave-of-the-future bandwagoning* , Armenia adapts self with fact that Turkey is regional power that is not avoidable and choose For participate in project Ankara - supported connectivity . Meanwhile *distancing* reflected in effort reduce dependence on Russia and opening up track new to Europe .

Behavioral strategies this , although controversial domestically , in particular overall in harmony with objective endure live a small country that faces pressure geopolitics large . In Schweller's framework , Armenia displays behavior typical of the country *of lambs* which is more choose compromise pragmatic compared to confrontation ideological .

Conclusion

The researcher 's conclusion get from analysis to normalization connection Armenia–Turkey diplomatic relations in the period 2020–2024 with use draft *bandwagoning* Randall L. Schweller shows that dynamics the No can understood only through One dimensions single , but rather is results interaction between condition structural , objective strategic and behavioral diplomatic . However , the degree contribution from third indicators — *state of interest* , *goals* , and *behavior* — are not balanced .

First , the findings study This confirm that state of interest indicators (LAMBS) are the most dominant factor that drives Armenia to do normalization . Defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the increase vulnerability security , and the absence of protection effective from Russia puts Armenia in a position where maintaining the status quo is not Again rational . Therefore that , change orientation geopolitics through bandwagoning with Turkey seen as the most realistic strategy For reduce threat existential .

Second , the goals indicator (self-abnegation) appears. as consequence logical from change structure interest said . Armenia is willing sacrifice part identity politics and modifying priority diplomacy historical — such as lower demands on confession Armenian Genocide , lifting the embargo on Turkish products , as well as open self to Work The same connectivity cross- border. This is show transformation objective term Armenian medium from symbolism historical going to pragmatism geopolitics .

Third , indicators behavior (appeasement, wave-of-the-future bandwagoning , and distancing) becomes manifestation practical from two indicators previously . Involvement in project *Crossroads of Peace* , shipping help humanity to Turkey in 2023, until the withdrawal process self gradually from dependence towards Russia, reflecting translation of strategy to in action concrete . Although important For maintaining the momentum of normalization , behavior This nature implementative , not determinant main .

With Thus , research This conclude that order strength indicators that explain the reason Armenia did normalization connection diplomatic towards Turkey is : first , the state of interest as the most basic factor ; second , goals as form sacrifice strategic ; and third , behavior as consequence behavior adaptive . Analysis This show that Armenia's decision to do bandwagoning more is choice rational For endure living in the middle shift distribution regional power rather than just choice ideological .

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