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POLISH DEVELOPMENT AID TO TAJIKISTAN –
THE DIFFICULT QUESTION CONCERNING
THE MEANING OF HELP

Keywords: development aid to Tajikistan, Polish NGOs, image of the country

ABSTRACT: No matter what the reasons are for providing development aid, the “how and where” of the countries doing it influences their image in international relations and testifies to the intelligent power of a country. Helping a country such as Tajikistan is difficult, and not only because of its geographic location or high level of poverty. It is hard to make some changes there (especially in the field of democracy) when a donor country has to face the despotic presidency of Rachmon and the high level of support for Putin’s policies. Since 2004 Poland has been providing aid to this country (mainly with the participation of Polish NGOs), regardless of the fact as to whether it was on the list of priority countries or not. What are the main areas of Polish aid there? And what does Poland want and expect to achieve by helping the Tajiks? In this research and analysis the author looks for answers to these two questions.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been an international debate concerning the reasons behind providing assistance to developing countries, whether it is more connected with a liberal or realist point of view (Bagiński, 2009. Stępień, 2012; Riddell 2007). Some countries declare mainly international social solidarity (Swe-
There has also been a second debate on pro-democracy and pro-development directions of aid (Kaca, 2011). Nowadays, looking at the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, the question of the meaning of pro-democratic aid to post-Soviet countries has an entirely new meaning. Especially that, according to new research from the Gallup Organization, in post-Soviet countries such as Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus, over half of the citizens support the Kremlin’s policies. The strongest indicator is in Tajikistan – 93% (Poczobut, 2015).

Poland, which wants to play an important role in shaping EU foreign policy in the east, also takes part in this debate. From 2004, when Poland joined the EU, becoming an official donor country, eastern countries have been very important in Polish development aid policy. Generally, there are two main fields that Poland sees as its specialization and mark in international development aid: democracy and systemic transformation, especially sharing the Polish experience of transformation (MFA, 2012). As the motives of its involvement in development aid there are mentioned: international obligations (including political obligations), international solidarity and support for Poland’s foreign policy and the strengthening of European aid policy (MFA, 2015).

2. REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

Republic of Tajikistan – the poorest of the post-Soviet countries (has the lowest GDP per capita among them) and one of the poorest countries in the world (in the UNDP’s HDI – Human Development Index – in 2014 it ranked 133rd). It has a difficult geographic location – most of the area is mountainous. The ground is threatened by earthquakes, melting glaciers and mudslides (just before my arrival in Khorog, there was a mudslide which destroyed over 70 houses and the main road to Murgab). Citizens are also afraid of the Sarez Lake. Those who live in the area below the lake may be exposed to massive flooding in the event of earthquakes (World Bank installed an early warning system in the locality).
The population is estimated at about seven million, the majority of which are Tajiks, although the problem with their self-identity, which was described years ago by Ryszard Kapuściński in his book “Kirgiz schodzi z konia” (“The Kyrgyz Dismounts”) or Colin Thubron in “Utracone serce Azji” (“The Lost Heart of Asia”), is still current. For me, it was particularly visible in relations between citizens of Dushanbe (the capital of Tajikistan) who called themselves Tajiks and citizens of Khorog (the capital of GBAO – Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province in Tajikistan), who called themselves Pamirs (even though, in fact they are Tajiks). They treat each other with a distance; for example according to the Tajiks point of view, Pamirs are conceited and consider themselves as better and smarter people than them. This attitude also applies to faith – Pamirs define themselves as Ismailies, Tajiks call themselves Shiites; and this division is very important for both groups.

But faith, like work, has become, in this region, like a passport to another world. A lot of Tajiks live outside their home country (e.g. in Afghanistan) and the number of men who migrate for work to Russia is estimated in millions. For many of them working in Russia is the way to survive, they still look at this country as a chance for a better life, even though the situation on the Russian labour market has become difficult in recent times – to work there legally Tajiks must pass an exam in Russian language and Russian history, as well as getting a – quite expensive – work license. Unfortunately, the Islamic State uses it to attract young and unemployed people. The last example when Gulmurod Chalimow, the head of the special forces in Tajikistan, escaped from his country and went over to the Islamic State, shows that situation is serious (Polityka, 2015). Beyond that, Tajikistan is also known as being a drug route from Afghanistan to Europe and from Chinese trucks crossing the Tajik roads to the west.

Despite all of this, the beautiful landscapes of this country, especially on the Pamir Highway from Dushanbe to Oszu (Kyrgyzstan), are attractions for tourists from the whole world. On one hand, the country attracts tourists, but on the other it doesn’t attract international aid from donor countries so much. Development aid to Tajikistan is insufficient, and – according to both the National Development Strategy for 2005–2015 and the Second Poverty Reduction Strategy for 2007–2009 – the country won’t
be able to succeed (it will not come out of poverty) without foreign aid, including humanitarian assistance and concessional loans (Aminjanov, Kholmatov, Kataev, 2009); according to DAC OECD it mainly demands coordination and harmonization of donors activities. The major ODA donors are identified as Japan, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, The Asian Development Bank and EU. Non-ODA providers in Tajikistan are China, India and the Islamic Development Bank (OECD 2012). Traveling through Tajikistan one can see some elements and signs of international aid (for example from Norway, Finland). For a while Tajikistan benefited also from bordering with Afghanistan – the Americans used the territory of Tajikistan when they were stationed in Afghanistan.

3. TAJIKISTAN IN BILATERAL POLISH DEVELOPMENT AID (2004–2014)

For years there was only one official document concerning development aid – the strategy on Polish development aid (2003). It included general assumptions of Polish development aid policy, without specifying individual countries to which development aid would be directed. Aid activities were also carried out on the basis of annual action plans. Finally, when, in 2011, The Development Cooperation Act was adopted, the first long-term development cooperation plan was also prepared (for years 2012–2015). In this document the Polish development aid system is more detailed.

From 2004 to 2012 Tajikistan wasn’t a priority country for Poland, as there were – at various times – for example, Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq, Vietnam and The Palestinian Authority. It also isn’t a country of the Eastern Partnership, the flagship program of eastern policy, not only for Poland, but the whole of the EU. Nevertheless, some actions in development aid to Tajikistan were taken by Poland. Primarily, with the participation of Polish NGOs (they take part in a special grant competition).

It changed in 2012, when both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were defined as priorities and described together (some of the projects were imple-
mented in both countries at the same time). As justification for supporting those countries it was noted that there was a very high level of poverty and relatively little interest within other donors’ activities. It was decided to focus on three priorities: self-governance and strengthening local communities, especially upgrading skills among local communities and local government officials; support for entrepreneurship and creation of new work places; assistance in the area of water and sanitation (MFA, 2012).

**Table no. 1.** Examples of development aid projects to Tajikistan, co-financed by MFA and conducted by Polish NGOs. Own study based on data from MFA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Body responsible for implementation</th>
<th>Project title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005*</td>
<td>Fundacja Edukacja dla Demokracji w Warszawie/ The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED)</td>
<td>Civic education in Central Asia *1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Fundacja Partners Polska/ Partners Poland Foundation</td>
<td>Local coalitions against poverty</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego w Warszawie/ Batory Foundation in Warsaw</td>
<td>Monitoring of presidential election in Tajikistan</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Stowarzyszenie Wschodnioeuropejskie Centrum Demokratyczne (EEDC) w Warszawie/ East European Democratic Centre in Warsaw</td>
<td>Support for independent local press in the Fergana Valley and the Talas Region *2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Stowarzyszenie Wschodnioeuropejskie Centrum Demokratyczne (EEDC) w Warszawie/ East European Democratic Centre in Warsaw</td>
<td>Strengthening the role of the local newspaper as an institution of advocacy in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan *2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Stowarzyszenie Ochrony Przyrody BIOS/ Association for Nature Conservation BIOS</td>
<td>Raising awareness of environmental protection and sustainable development among local communities of Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Polskie Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td>Material and substantive support for institutions and organizations of the civil defense sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Polskie Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td>School youth education on the prevention of the effects of natural disasters</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of GS to support coordinator of educational projects in Tajikistan *3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Body responsible for implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td><strong>Polskie</strong> Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> governance in the face of natural disasters and crisis in Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td><strong>Polskie</strong> Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td><strong>Developing</strong> women’s cooperatives in the Shahrtuz region in southern Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Edukacja dla Demokracji w Warszawie/ The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED)</td>
<td><strong>Let’s</strong> tailor our future – rural development in Sughd Province in Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td><strong>Stowarzyszenie</strong> Wschodnioeuropejskie Centrum Demokratyczne (EEDC) w Warszawie/ East European Democratic Centre in Warsaw</td>
<td><strong>Increasing</strong> the availability of drinking water in the rural areas of Ferghana Valley through technical and institutional support of local water users organizations *2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Edukacja dla Demokracji w Warszawie/ The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED)</td>
<td><strong>Womens’</strong> empowerment through Womens’ Clubs</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td><strong>Polskie</strong> Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td><strong>Support</strong> of existing and creation of new womens’ cooperatives in the Shahrtuz region in Southern Tajikistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td><strong>Polskie</strong> Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td><strong>Initiating</strong> and supporting womens’ micro-enterprises in the regions Shahrtuz and Kabodian in southern Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td><strong>Towarzystwo</strong> Demokratyczne Wschód/Democratic Society East Foundation</td>
<td><strong>Water</strong> – source of changes. Support for rural infrastructure in GBAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Edukacja dla Demokracji w Warszawie/ The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED)</td>
<td><strong>Womens’</strong> empowerment through Womens’ Clubs. Transfer of experience from north to south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td><strong>Stowarzyszenie</strong> Wschodnioeuropejskie Centrum Demokratyczne (EEDC) w Warszawie/ East European Democratic Centre in Warsaw</td>
<td><strong>Increasing</strong> the availability of drinking water in the rural areas of Ferghana Valley through support for local water users organization *2</td>
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</table>

* In 2005 Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies in Warsaw conducted the project “XV Economic Forum in Krynica”, which was addressed to Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia, Montenegro, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.
* 1 This project was also implemented in Uzbekistan.
* 2 This project was also implemented in Kyrgyzstan.
* 3 This project was implemented under the Polish Aid Volunteering Programme.
In 2011 the Minister of Foreign Affairs decided to revive the Polish Foundation for International Cooperation for Development “Knowing How”, established in the 90s as the initiative of the President of the Republic of Poland and suspended in 2005. The Foundation changed its name in 2013 and is known now as The Solidarity Fund PL. As a State Treasury Foundation, is responsible for supporting democracy in countries in the process of political transformation; cooperates with EP countries, Myanmar/Burma, Tunisia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. According to the Act on Development Cooperation (2011), MFA may subcontract the Foundation to operate in this field in countries with specific political circumstances. The Foundation has funds from MFA, but is also funded from other sources, such as US AID, government of Canada. For example it delivers the program “Support for Democracy”, directed inter alia to Tajikistan.

Table 2. Development aid projects to Tajikistan, co-financed by the Solidarity Found PL and conducted by Polish NGOs. Own study based on data from SF PL. In 2015 the amount of 500 000 PLN (125.000 USA) was planned on aid projects to Tajikistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>Body responsible for implementation</th>
<th>Project title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Polskie Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td>The use of the know-how of Polish NGOs for civil society organizations in Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Solidarności Polsko-Czesko-Słowackiej/ Polish-Czech-Slovak Solidarity Foundation</td>
<td><strong>Support</strong> for independent media in Central Asia *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Edukacja dla Demokracji w Warszawie/ The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED)</td>
<td><strong>In step with the times</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Instytut Lecha Wałęsy/ Lech Walesa Institute</td>
<td><strong>Empowering</strong> independent media in Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fundacja</strong> Polityki Rozwojowej/ Development Policy Foundation</td>
<td><strong>Support</strong> of local organization Gulu Giyoh in developing local communities and preservation of cultural heritage of Ishkashim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Polskie Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej/Polish Center of International Aid</td>
<td><strong>Reinforcing</strong> of local communities’ development through institutional support for mahalla committees in Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2015 there were three NGOs successful in the first edition of MFA grant competition. The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED) received 199 975 PLN (49.993 USA) for the project “Womens’ empowerment through Womens’ Clubs. Entrepreneurship in practice”, Democratic Society East Foundation was granted 199 995 PLN (49.998 USA) for the continuation of the “water project” from 2014 and East European Democratic Centre in Warsaw – project giving support for local water users organizations (942 355 PLN – 235.588 USA, but most of the funds for Kyrgyzstan, only 15% for Tajikistan). But that’s not all. Under the program “Support for Democracy”, Foundation for Development Policy has been participating in programs of Iszkaszm School Volunteer – aimed at the transfer of knowledge of local music, instruments and production of pottery (Solidarity Fund, 2015).

In the analyzed period (2004–2014) there were also some aid projects to Tajikistan realized by Polish foreign offices. For example, in 2011 the Polish Embassy in Tashkent in Uzbekistan (Poland doesn’t have a diplomatic post in Tajikistan) conducted a project on occupational and social activation of women. One year later – a project on maternity protection and improving access to high quality care. Further support was transferred by Polish Agency for Enterprise Development with the project on sharing Polish experiences on small and medium-sized enterprises (MFA 2013).
Polish development aid to Tajikistan between 2008–2012 amounted to 2,619,618,97 PLN (654,904 USA), of which in 2012 (when Tajikistan became a priority country) was 733,656 PLN (183,414 USA) (MFA 2015). Moreover, in recent years Poland has launched a scholarship program, addressed at young scientists from post-Soviet countries and from developing countries.

4. OTHER PROJECTS

Apart from activities funded by MFA (and Solidarity Fund PL as well) Polish NGOs apply for funds from other sources. There is a famous program “RITA-region in transition”, financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation and implemented (and coordinated) by The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED). The aim of the “RITA” program is to support democratic and free-market transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and in countries of Caucasus and Central Asia. For example, under the program, in 2012, the Development Policy Foundation conducted the project “Natural products in Pamir. Polish experience of the free market”, and in 2013 the Association of Local Newspapers (SGL) – “Development of Young Journalists Club in Pamir”.

Moreover, NGOs carry out their own activities in (and for) developing countries, encouraging Poles to join in helping and cooperation. One quite well-known action in Poland is “Tajik cow”, conducted – again – by The Education for Democracy Foundation (FED). The foundation organized a special co-funding campaign – thanks to money from Poland the poorest families in Tajikistan got a cow. As it was said in a TV report, for many of them it was the only chance to survive (TVP Info, 2012). Martyna Kwiatkowska, coordinator of FED’s projects to Tajikistan, says about FED’s activities in this country: “I think that, on the whole, Polish aid is about not giving ready rules, we just accompany citizens of other countries in their way to democracy” (FED, 2015).

At this point it is worth noting that FED (as happened with East European Democratic Centre in Warsaw, i.e. two Polish NGOs that are involved in development aid to Tajikistan and to other eastern countries as well)
were placed on a blacklist prepared by the Russian Federation Council. They were found as threatening for Russian national interests, its values and institutions (onet.pl, 2015).

5. FINDINGS

Training sessions and equipment for volunteers involved in rescue operations; increasing the availability of drinking water; support for self-employment of women; cultivation and spreading of regional and local traditions (music, local products – for example under one of the projects website www.gornobadakhshan.org was created, it is about natural herbal products from Pamir) – projects mainly relate to these areas and it is not surprising according to Tajikistan’s geographical location and situation of the population (e.g. support for women when many men are leaving for Russia).

Some of the projects concern media, including independent media as one of the elements of democracy (that Poland wants to promote in the east). But there aren’t free and independent media in Tajikistan and as long as the country is governed by its despotic and pro-Russian president Emomali Rachmon (from 1994), Tajiks have no chance to establish independent media. It is also hard to estimate the results of one, short media project based on development aid.

What is valuable for a project’s participants is the fact that they can discover the functioning of Polish media. But more than that, some of them (within the project) come to Poland. It is, quite often, the first occasion to see a part of Europe, a piece of another world (and other than Russia). One should know that when Poles want to go to Tajikistan they need a visa and a special permit to go to GBAO. When Tajiks want to come to Poland they need not only a visa, but also a special invitation (I also emphasize the fact that coming to Poland means for them a few hundred dollars expense; the average salary – if someone has it – is at about 100 USA). During my visit to Tajikistan I had an opportunity to talk to three of over a dozen participants in a Polish development aid project on media (“Development of Young Journalists Club in Pamir” mentioned
above), as one of them said, each of them dreams about Poland/Europe (Personal interviews by author 25–31 July 2015). Even if living and working as in Poland is now something that they treat as to be beyond reach, we may see it as common point of view with Poles from the communist period, when at the beginning people believed that the possibility of change was beyond reach. And then – with huge help from west – they managed to become independent.

So far, from the (international) solidarity point of view, it is worth helping Tajiks, the same as other nations and also in the same way – at least at the level of declarations – as Aga Chan does for Pamirs.

Referring to him, it is also important to know that after a visit to Khorog (the capital of Pamir) and its region, one may re-evaluate the western concept of celebrity diplomacy (Cooper 2007). Aga Chan is considered to be a descendant of Muhammad and an incarnation of Shiite imam Ismail, whose disappearance led to the separation of Ismailies from the rest of the Shiites (it has also an impact on relations between Tajiks and Pamirs mentioned above). But he is also a rich businessman, who was born in Geneva and studied at Harvard University. He lives in Europe; his organization – Aha Khan Network – is one of the largest aid organizations in Central Asia (Włodek, 2015).

Pamirs don’t know celebrities associated across the world with development aid and its promotion such as Angelina Jolie, Bono or Bill & Melinda Gates as much as they know Aga Chan. When asked about international development aid from western world and its organizations, they usually say: “Yes, they help us a little, but the one who really helps us, is Aga Chan” (Personal interviews by author, 25–31 July 2015). They not only recall times of civil war that erupted after the collapse of the USSR when he provided the Pamirs with food and other basic necessities. They emphasize his current support – for example he pays half of the electricity bills; and according to the authors of Case Study on aid effectiveness in Tajikistan he is the largest private development partner and provides the country with over half all private aid flows (Aminjanov, Kholmatov, Kataev, 2009).

No one is surprised then that they respect and appreciate Aga Chan, and the fact that a photo of him is on the wall in almost in every Pamir’s house is also not surprising.
6. PLANS FOR 2016–2020

According to the Multiannual Development Cooperation Program for years 2016–2020, Tajikistan is not on the list of priority countries for Poland (there are: Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Kenya, Myanmar, Palestine, Senegal, Tanzania and, as announced, they will receive 90% of the funds earmarked for ODA in the state budget). It’s been assumed that to the countries that are no longer priority countries Polish aid can be implemented through Polish foreign offices, Solidarity Fund PL, as well as through contributions to international organizations or agencies of the UN system (MFA, 2015).

So far, it is hard to talk about long-term and stable Polish development aid policy to Tajikistan. At the same time one may see dispensar projects and some inconsistency in development projects to Tajikistan – by the way – the lack of continuity of projects is one of the main Polish NGOs advocacy to the government and refers to the whole Polish development policy (Grupa Zagranica, 2015). It is a pity, especially that current activities may awaken Tajiks hopes for further aid and cooperation. Besides Polish NGOs have already had some experience in working for (and with) Tajiks – it would make no sense to waste it.

On the other hand, with so much support for Putin’s policies and with the huge funds that development of Tajikistan has required, western countries which want to realize their foreign policy and interests through development aid in Tajikistan, seem to have some difficulties to achieve that. It is the same with building a positive image of the country, based on increasingly important public diplomacy (Ociepka, 2012).

So if development aid to Tajikistan is about other things than international solidarity, it demands some real changes. Not only larger financial outlays, but well-thought out and real strategy, combined and coordinated with the assistance of other donors. Then, we can talk about using resources of intelligent power, by which I mean here as a skillful combination of soft power and hard power (Kugiel, 2013), and also about the positive image of the western world. At the same time, if Poland wants to be an important part of this world, shaping the eastern policy of the European Union, it has to emphasize and promote development aid to Tajik-
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istan (a lot depends on results of parliamentary elections in autumn 2015 which may lead to a change of government), as does it about Eastern Partnership countries. It may be a proper moment – the crisis in Russia may mean that Putin wouldn’t be able to conquer new territories. On the other hand – and at the same time – the western world must take into account the growing influence of the Islamic State in those regions (in Dushanbe the largest mosque in Central Asia has been built, financed mainly by the State of Qatar). Then, intelligent power, not only of Poland, but of the whole western world would be very useful.

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