

# TERRORIST ATTACKS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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Public transport represents the first choice of a great part of global population when selecting a mode of travel, because it is, above all, economical. On the other hand, precisely due to its mass, this system is vulnerable. Data from 2017 show that the Moscow Metro is used by 6.9 million passengers a day, and the passenger flow in the morning is 6 passengers per second. It is not difficult for terrorists to remain unnoticed in this crowd. The events of previous decades show that public transport was a frequent choice when selecting the target of an attack, primarily because public transport is mass, relatively unsecured and easy for infiltration. In addition, such attacks are reported in the media.

The paper considers the concept of terrorism and tactics used during attacks on public transport. Motives that inspire individuals to undertake such destructive actions are also discussed. With a theoretical emphasis on previous terrorist attacks, the objective of the paper is to provide guidelines that can mobilise all social factors in order to prevent such attacks in the future, primarily through the education of individuals.

Key words: *public transport, terrorism, terrorist attacks, violence, radicalization, victims*

## Introduction

On November 2, 2020, the citizens of Vienna felt the horror of indiscriminate violence during a nine-minute attack. Islamic terrorist Kujtim Fejzulai killed four civilians and wounded twenty-three. The attack was executed with an automatic

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weapon, and Kujtim also had a gun, a machete and a belt with explosives, which turned out to be fake (Saal&Lippe, 2020). Instead of this scenario, the attacker could enter any means of public transport of Vienna and carry out an attack. In any case, the goal would be the same - as many killed and wounded as possible, causing fear in society, where anyone can be a target of an attack. The background of such attacks ranges from political to religious, where violence occurs as a form of communication with target audience. Thus, the fight against terrorists is conducted in two ways – by a direct action and causing media attention, which serves to make a specific event a global sensation.

## Public transport

The Law on transportation of passengers in the road traffic of the Republic of Serbia defines public transport as "transportation that is available under equal conditions to all users of transportation services and for which transportation service is charged". In addition, it is mentioned that public transport can be domestic and international, as well as that limo service is also recognised as public transport.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, using terms such as *mass transport*, defines public transport as the movement of people in urban areas using means of transport to transport groups of people such as buses and trains.

Public transport includes line, non-line and special line traffic. The examples of means of transport that are a part of public transport are buses, trams, trolleybuses, metro, trains, ferries, planes, taxis.

In the period from 2010 to 2019, passenger vehicles accounted for the greatest share of internal passenger transport in the European Union, between 82% and 83.1%. This trend continued and even increased in 2020 to 87%, which can be interpreted as a direct consequence of the coronavirus pandemic. In the period from 2010 to 2019 buses, trams and trolleybuses were represented between 9.5% and 10.4%, but that number dropped to 7.1% in 2020. In 2019, railway traffic was represented by 8%, and in 2020 it fell to 5.4%.

Although the percentage of railway traffic is small, in 2021 5.2 billion passengers in the European Union, who travelled a total of 250 billion kilometres, used this mode of transport. In relation to the population size, this averaged 560 kilometres per inhabitant on national journeys.

The coronavirus pandemic also had a strong impact on air traffic, which was particularly reflected in airports, where international traffic was more prevalent due to the restrictions imposed to contain the pandemic. In 2021, the greatest number of flights was executed from the European Union member states to other countries on the European continent, and vice versa, i.e. 53.5% of all flights. This is followed by flights to the republics of the former Soviet Union – 9.4%, North America – 9%, North Africa – 8.2% and West Asia – 6.9% (Key figures on European transport, 2022).

## Terrorism

Nowadays, terrorism is one of the most extreme forms of political violence. Terrorist groups view the victims of their actions as a pledge to strengthen the message they are sending or to make the goal they strive for more certain. Terrorism is a means of communication. It is a phenomenon whose goals and their accomplishment cannot be clearly defined as evil, because they are not so for all social groups. Precisely due to these characteristics, the concept of terrorism is very difficult to define.

Author Paul Kamolnick has developed a theory called "Terrorist Quadrangle Analysis". The goal of this analysis is to define four key elements of a terrorist organization. According to him, these are religious and political goals, media warfare, strategic goals and terrorist actions. Religious and political goals refer to the ultimate and immediate state required by a terrorist organization, i.e. the establishment of a state in which all authorities and laws would be subordinated to religious interpretation of Islam by terrorists. Media operations include the use of all available media and services to achieve goals and monitor the undertaken actions. Terrorist actions are all actions, operations and campaigns that have been carried out to accomplish religious and political goals. Strategic goals are general goals that a terrorist entity will achieve by undertaking all the previously mentioned operations and actions (Kamolnic, 2017:127). As an example of a strategic goal, we can mention the establishment of the so-called Islamic state.

Mladen Bajagić emphasizes that the key elements of the concept of terrorism are acts of violence; political, religious and ethnic motivation; political, religious or ethnic goals and messages; illegal and criminal act; criminal character, unpredictability, cruelty and recklessness; creating an atmosphere of fear, terror, panic and mistrust; innocent victims, civilian victims; the public, the desire for publicity (Bajagić, 2012: 90).

Terrorism, thus, includes the deliberate and calculated use of illegal force in order to achieve a political goal. Illegal force, in this case, can be undertaken by terrorist organizations or individuals.

The threat posed by the mentioned entities can be classified into several groups. According to the National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism for 2017–2021, terrorism can be religiously inspired, ethnic-nationalist, separatist, left-wing and right-wing.

Suicide attacks are a specific characteristic of modern terrorism.

One of the most active terrorist groups is Al-Shabaab, which operates in the territory of several African countries: Somalia, Kenya and Yemen. In the period from 2006 to 2017, the aforementioned organization, with 216 suicide bombers, carried out 155 terrorist attacks, during which more than 2,000 people were killed. Attacks were most often directed at representatives of the authorities and institutions of the countries where the attack was carried out, then at representatives of international organizations and missions, as well as facilities where persons from the

aforementioned groups were located, e.g. restaurants and hotels where they stayed (Warner&Chapin, 2018).

Terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab caused the greatest number of victims during suicide attacks, amounting to more than 14 people killed per attack. It is characteristic that civilian victims are avoided during attacks. There are several reasons for this. The first one is that Al-Shabaab imposes itself as an alternative to the current authorities in the countries where it operates, almost as an opposition, and does not want negative publicity among the resident population. This confirms the thesis that terrorism cannot be viewed unilaterally, because what is an act of terrorism for someone is an act of martyrdom and resistance for someone else. The other reason lies in the alliance of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab and a kind of instruction issued by Aymanal-Zawahiri, the current leader of Al-Qaeda, in his work "A Guide to Islam", which calls for restraint from attacks on Muslims.

One of the main characteristics of murders committed by terrorists is that they are multiple and mass. Mass murder can be defined as the killing of more than four people in a location, during an attack, without a great time difference between murders. The attack on the World Trade Centre on September 9, 2001 in New York is one of the most mass murders, when 2,998 people were killed. A characteristic example of mass murder is the bombing of the train in Madrid, when 191 people were killed. When it comes to this type of murder, the attacker or attackers do not have any personal contact with victims, they do not know them (Đurđević, 2014).

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be viewed only through the prism of violence; it is necessary to understand the method of indoctrination that forces a person to carry out an attack during which, in addition to multiple victims, they most often kill themselves. The emergence of modern communication systems, such as the internet, has failed to fulfill its educational role. On the contrary, radical teachings and beliefs have become available, so in a vicious circle of brutal violence, religion and politics soldiers are recruited and created, who, sacrificing for the sake of achieving goals, will not have any brake, not even when one's own life is at stake. "Terrorism has to be viewed as a global phenomenon and a threat that, due to its continuous actions, has all the characteristics of guerilla warfare" (Jeftić et al., 2018: 36).

On the basis of the data presented in the previous part of the paper, it could be said that the most appropriate definition of terrorism has been given by Stephen Vertigans: "Terrorism is the targeted and intentional use of violence for political purposes." (Vertigans, 2008: 3).

## Violence as a form of communication

Research has shown that radicalized individuals are not uneducated, and often have high school or a university education. On the basis of 172 biographies of jihadists from the Salafi movement, it was revealed that 60% of

them had a diploma. It should also be mentioned that 88% of leaders have a university education. Thus, for example, Osama bin Laden is an engineer, Al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's successor, a doctor-surgeon, while Abu Bakral-Baghdadi, the murdered leader of the so-called Islamic State, has a PhD. This data is an indicator that in some areas, schools and universities represent a kind of recruitment centres for terrorists. In addition to these institutions, prisons and the internet stand out as centres for terrorist recruitment. Further research has led to the conclusion that young men between the age of 15 and 25 are most susceptible to the process of radicalization, which refers to all cultures and regions in the world. The young men who were arrested in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, because they are related to terrorist activities, were between the age of 16 and 24. Furthermore, in the Middle East region, men between the age of 15 and 25 were the most susceptible demographic group when it came to participating in terrorist-related criminal acts. The process of radicalization can be viewed through four phases:

- pre-radicalization;
- self-identification;
- indoctrination; and
- Jihadization.

In the first phase, a person has no interest and is not exposed to radical and extremist ideas. In the second phase, they begin to identify themselves with radical ideas, primarily through contact with radical teaching through social networks, acquaintances, literature, etc. In the third phase, radical convictions are ubiquitous and formed, and a person begins to view violence as a legitimate way of fighting for their convictions. In the last phase, a person undertakes violent actions (Sas et al., 2020).

During 2014, the Government of the United Kingdom removed 15,000 online documents that served as propaganda of the so-called Islamic State. Among them, the recruitment video "There's No Life Without Jihad" stood out in particular, in which the fighters, English citizens, invited others to join them in the fight. In another available video, the former leader of the so-called Islamic State Al-Baghdadi called on young Sunnis to join Jihad. In order to spread the propaganda of the Islamic State, an application for Android operating system called "The Dawn of Glad Tidings" was created. The application served as a direct form of communication with wider audience, which it was otherwise impossible to make a personal contact with. Via it, it was possible to see pictures, videos and read propaganda messages. The ultimate goal of using internet propaganda was to spread hatred in cyberspace. As a starting point, terrorists used social learning theory. The idea was that individuals will accept deviant behaviour that is propagated to them via the internet and that in this way an extremist will be created out of a harmless individual. Some social networks, such as Twitter, were used to spread the impression that there were many more extremists. Thus, a user

of this network posted a picture of decapitation, using the World Cup hashtag (#WorldCup), so that the mentioned picture would be available to as many users of this platform as possible before being removed. In addition, special online chat rooms were created and used to communicate directly with supporters (Birmingham, 2017).

A special role in the recruitment of individuals is played by political and religious leaders, who, through their actions, influence the spread of radical beliefs. All the mentioned factors lead to an emotional trigger with an individual. When it comes to personal factors, they are most often related to the individual's mental health and can include conditions such as anxiety, depression, social isolation, loneliness, certain personal crises. Such individuals may have a criminal record, a history of violent behaviour, military experience gained in war conflicts or training camps, where they learn to handle firearms and arme blanche, as well as explosive devices. These characteristics were particularly pronounced with "lone wolves" (Vergani et al., 2018). "Starting from such methods, which classify terrorism as a violent crime, international law condemns all terrorism and prohibits it as a method of political struggle" (Jasikovac, 2018: 321).

## Terrorist attacks on public transport

When choosing a target to attack, terrorists are guided by the following criteria: high mortality that the attack will cause, poorly secured target, popular places with a great number of visitors, media coverage, places where the attacker can remain unnoticed, locations where it is not easy to organize evacuation of casualties and potential victims, as well as rendering emergency medical assistance (Kaewunruen et al., 2018).

Public transport, due to its characteristics, such as availability, low cost and the overall share in the population's transport, represents an ideal target for indiscriminate violence. A terrorist attack in a densely populated urban areas produces great material damage, human casualties and panic. The attackers have an advantage that passengers do not know each other, so it is easy for them to remain unnoticed.

In the period between 1920 and 1970, 15 attacks on public transport were registered, and after 1970 there were at least 477 terrorist attacks on public transport and accompanying infrastructure. Attacks began to intensify in the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century. They were usually carried out at stops and in passenger vehicles. During attacks on trains and railway stations, an average of 5 killed and 21 injured were registered, and in attacks on buses and bus stops, 4 were killed and 10 injured. (Jenkinsetal, 2010).

A half of the registered attacks took place in Asia, followed by the Middle East and North Africa with 22%, Sub-Saharan Africa with 13%, Latin America with 6%, Russia with 4%, Europe with 4%, and North America with 1% of the attacks. The most affected countries were India with 16%, Sri Lanka with 14% and Algeria with 7%. Road traffic was the subject of terrorist attacks in 53% of cases, and it was primarily targeted in North Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Railway traffic and its infrastructure were attacked in 16% of registered cases. This type of transport was most often the subject of attacks in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Russia. Air transport accounts for 12% of the total number of registered attacks, and these types of attacks most often occurred in Asia and Europe. Shipping is most often attacked in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. The attacks were most often carried out with explosives in 55% and firearms in 33% of cases, followed by kidnapping and hostage-taking (5%), sabotage (2%) and arson (2%). In other cases, the means of the attack remained unidentified or they did not fit into other categories, such as an intentional crash of a plane caused by a pilot. In the past 40 years, 18,769 people lost their lives in the attacks on public transport and accompanying infrastructure, while 32,641 people were injured (Holgrersson&Bjornstig, 2013).

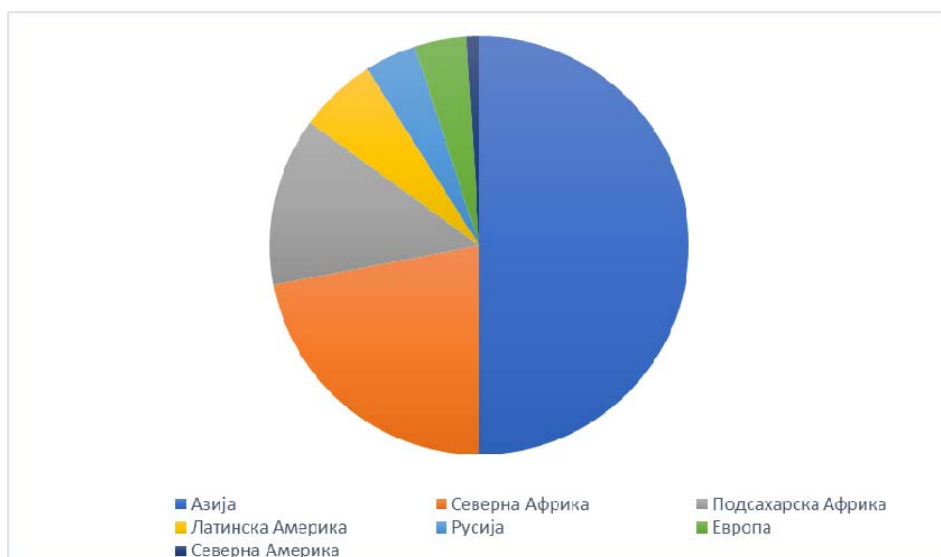


Chart 1 – Percentage share of registered terrorist attacks

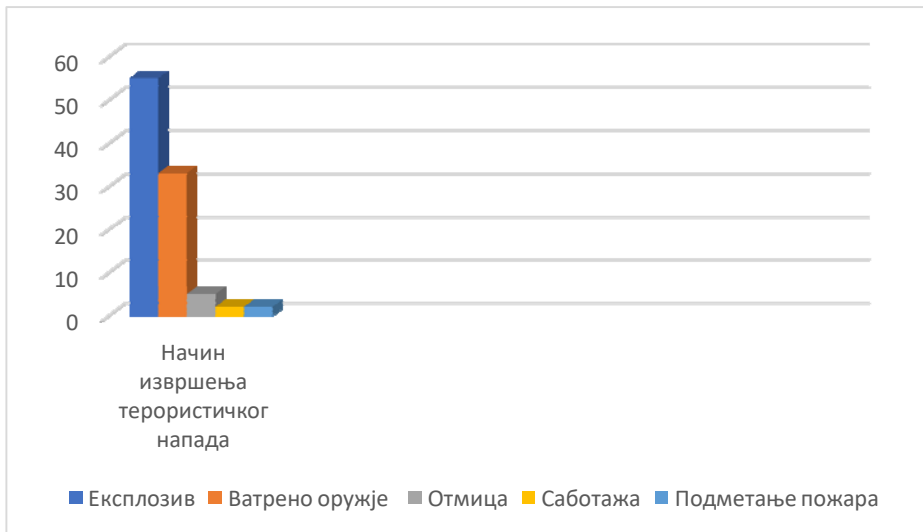


Chart 2 – *The method of the execution of a terrorist attack*

The most famous attacks on public transport since the beginning of this millennium are:

– April 3, 2017 – a suicide bomber killed 16 people and injured more than 40 in a metro station in Saint Petersburg. The suspected Kyrgyz was a member of the terrorist organization "Imam Shamil Battalion", (Clifford, 2017);

– March 22, 2016 – a suicide bomber detonated a bomb in the Brussels metro, killing more than 30 people. The terrorist was a member of the Islamic State (Cordonnier&Luminet, 2021);

– March 29, 2010 – a suicide bomber killed at least 40 passengers in the Moscow Metro (Yu et al., 2019);

– July 7, 2005 - four attackers executed a terrorist attack with explosives in the public transport system of London. The first three explosions took place in metro trains with an interval of 50 seconds, while the fourth attack was carried out in a bus. 56 people were killed, while over 700 were wounded. This event represents the greatest attack in London since World War II. Three attackers were of Pakistani origin, born and raised in Great Britain, while the fourth was of Jamaican origin, married to a British citizen. Explosives were in their backpacks (Sageman, 2019);

– March 11, 2004 – thirteen bombs, packed in sports bags and activated by a mobile phone, exploded in four passenger trains in Madrid, at three different railway stations. The greatest number of passengers were students and workers, and due to the morning rush hour, there was a large crowd. 191 people were killed and 1857



wounded. Three months later, Egyptian citizen Rabei Osman Syed Ahmed was arrested in Italy as the organizer of these attacks. The events in Madrid are considered the greatest terrorist crime in continental Europe. Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack (Munoz, 2017).

## Consequences of terrorist attacks

The consequences caused by terrorist attacks are manifold. After the attack that happened in London in 2005, 20% of Londoners say they spend less time in the area of the city where the attack took place, while 11% say they are considering moving out of the city. At the end of 2005, almost half of Londoners felt that their lives were in danger. In the first days after the attack, 46% of residents did not want to travel by metro to work, and almost the same number, 43%, believed that the measures undertaken to prevent future attacks are not effective. This trend did not only affect London. In other major cities of Great Britain, such as Manchester, residents did not feel safe and believed that their cities would surely become the target of attacks. Real estate prices in London fell by 6%, while in Manchester the fall was even higher, 14%. The attacks did not only threaten real estate market, but also companies were affected. The cost of doing business increased, as business owners spent more money on insurance and security. Companies that were located near the place of previous terrorist attacks were particularly at risk. The trend that emerged then is almost identical to the one during the Covid-19 pandemic, namely that business correspondence took place to a greater extent in the form of emails or online meetings (Manelici, 2017).

Three months after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 in the United States, due to a feeling of personal safety, the more mass use of private cars began, which caused several thousand more car accidents than before the terrorist attacks, and thus increased the number of traffic death cases. As this trend continued for more than a year, the number of death cases resulting from the increased use of private cars exceeded the number of people killed in the attack. This claim is based on the fact that air traffic is statistically much safer than road traffic. A similar trend appeared in London after the attacks that took place in July 2005. Instead of using much safer metro transport, the use of bicycles as a means of transport became widespread, which led to the fact that in the second half of 2005 there were 214 more traffic accidents involving cyclists, compared to the number of such cases before 2005. In comparison, the following data can be mentioned: in Great Britain, 9 people on average die in traffic accidents per day, the number of people killed in the July attacks in London is equivalent to a six-day average of traffic accidents. When it comes to the September attack in New York, the death toll is close to the monthly death toll in traffic accidents in the United States. In the March 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid, 191 people died, which

corresponds to an average of 13 days of people killed in traffic accidents in Spain. All those who were killed in the aforementioned cases can be considered subsequent victims of terrorist attacks, because they occurred as a direct consequence of them (Litman, 2005).

On the basis of the mentioned data, terrorist attacks can be classified into primary and secondary. The primary attack is covered by the media, victims and material damage are counted according to it, while the secondary attack forces citizens to change their place of residence, means of transport, even the route to the workplace, creating an atmosphere of fear.

The analyses based on Risk Assessment Methodology - RAM, and which, through the process of identifying risk and its assessment, define steps to reduce risk to an acceptable level, can also be used to assess the risk of terrorist attacks on public transport. Some of them are RAMCAP PLUS, NSRAM, FAIR, SESTRAM, FAIT and RAND. The mentioned analyses can be used to identify critical points, but not as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of technical systems for protecting vulnerable infrastructure. The analysis that could be used for this purpose would consist of two phases. In the first phase, an anti-terrorist protection model would be developed that would rely on technical protection systems that include video surveillance equipment, detectors, etc. The second phase would be based on mathematical calculations of the real risk of a terrorist attack that is present at some location or public transport line (Shvetsov&Shvetsova, 2017).

## *Conclusion*

Technology that could be particularly useful in the field of anti-terrorist protection are biometric systems, especially those that include face verification, but due to public resistance and legal non-compliance, these systems are not yet in mass use. Regardless of cultural differences between national states, the manner terrorists operate will not differ much; their goal will always be to discover and exploit the vulnerability of some system. The paper has emphasized the means of public transport that used to be most often attacked, as well as the manner and weapons for the execution of these attacks. It has been explained how the recruitment of new fighters is carried out and what factors are key to the process of radicalization. Indiscriminate violence has been described through attacks on public transport, where victims were civilian passengers. Such attacks have influenced both the change in lifestyle and the market.

The objective of this paper is to define common risk factors that can be implemented to most public transport systems, that is, can serve as a basis for neutralizing critical points that appear as a consequence of the specifics of some system.

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## *S u m m a r y*

**M**odern society is dependent on public transport. Some economic groups exclusively use public transport as the only form of transport, especially in urban areas. Some countries motivate citizens to use public transport more massively in order to reduce congestion; electric buses are introduced into traffic in order to act socially responsible and reduce global warming.

The use of public transport is highly intensive in the morning when employees travel. This is exactly the time when terrorist actions are planned. The attacks that took place in 2004 in Madrid and in 2005 in London prove this claim. Victims are not the only goal of terrorists, media coverage of an event is also important, followed by taking the blame by some terrorist group, with the message that the attack represents revenge. In this way, the blame is shifted to the officials of the country where the attack took place.

In the future, it can be expected that the targets of attacks will be all systems and strategic resources that are necessary for the normal functioning of a society. Public transport and accompanying infrastructure, energy plants, water supply, hospitals, public squares, shopping malls and all places that are visited massively or whose resources are used are at risk of attack.

Terrorist attacks have a negative impact on economy, the labour market, increase the costs of business in risk zones, require additional financial resources for the extraordinary engagement of personnel, as well as new technical solutions.

In order to make such places safer, it is necessary to create a model, simulate an attack and then define all critical points of a system, from accompanying infrastructure to transport. A theoretical model would not be universally implemented, but would have to include certain risk factors that are unique to everyone, such as

mass use. It should be borne in mind that, in addition to the main attack, there may be later additional attacks when the emergency services arrive, and they may be planned in such a way as to hinder their arrival.

The fight against terrorism should mobilise all social factors, such as schools and religious organisations, in order to educate social and religious groups at risk. This is particularly important because places of recruitment and religious radicalization are schools, religious facilities, penal and correctional institutions and social networks. Society has to be able to recognize radical learning and behaviour and react immediately.

Nowadays, the Republic of Serbia is in a complex security environment. We should not forget that our country is presented in a negative context, with threats in a propaganda video material of the so-called Islamic State. Since the use of public transport is widespread in our country, especially in the city of Belgrade, and the construction of the subway has also been announced, it is necessary to continue to nurture a security culture.

*Key words: public transport, terrorism, terrorist attacks, violence, radicalization, victims*

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