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## Phenomena of Radicalism, Extremism, and Terrorism: Conceptual-Theoretical Landmarks

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**Abstract:** *At the present stage, the study of the phenomenon of radicalization continues to attract significant interest, which is due to the processes taking place in the modern world, including various conflicts associated with the use of extremism and terrorism.*

*The aim of this work is to analyse the concepts of the triad “radicalism” – “extremism” – “terrorism” through the prism of the use of violence to achieve political goals. The concept of “terrorism” is not identical to the concepts of “radicalism” and “extremism”.*

**Key words:** *EU, radicalism, radicalization, extremism, terrorism*

**T**he phenomenon of terrorism is closely linked to such phenomena as radicalism and extremism. The increase in the activity of modern radicals who resort to extremist and terrorist actions requires a deep terminological analysis of these dangerous phenomena.

The last decade has been marked by a sharp rise in the influence of right-wing and left-wing radical parties on the European continent. However, radicalization actions do not always lead to extremist and terrorist manifestations, but sometimes fall within the framework of legality (by participating in electoral processes) or are expressed through street protests, especially by supporting manifestations of social dissatisfaction.

The tendency towards radical social changes, xenophobia, and aggressive nationalism has become a growing trend in European politics. There is a difference in the path from radicalism to extremism and terrorism depending on religious affiliation: Christian religious radicals tend to remain at the level of extremism, while those of Muslim religion may move on to terrorist actions. Radicalism proves to be an ideological support for extremism and terrorism.

Before considering the relationships between the concepts of “radicalism,” “extremism,” and “terrorism,” it is necessary to examine their definitions.

Radicalism would mean breaking away from an already recognized tradition, specifically through fundamental or radical change. Radical (from lat. radix – root) means supporter of fundamental and decisive actions. The concept of “radicalism” defines the socio-political ideas and actions aimed at key and decisive changes of the existing social and political institutions and norms. In a broader sense, the concept of political radicalism is seen as a special socio-cultural phenomenon, caused by specific historical, social, economic and religious factors in the development of a state, aimed at changing it at a fast pace.

Analysis of the scientific literature focused on the study of radicalism allows us to state the fact that the main part of the literature is centred on the study of the history, causes of emergence, and peculiarities of various radical parties and movements (right-wing, left-wing), religious radicalism, namely Islamic radicalism, rather than the study of the concept of “radicalism” itself and the definition of its main determinants that distinguish it from other ideological, socio-political phenomena.

The term “radicalism” is used in literature as a synonym for the concept of “extremism”. This is not entirely accurate word usage: there is a certain difference between these concepts.

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Although radical ideas and actions have existed since ancient times, the concept of radicalism emerged in England in 1832 among opponents of the Bill on electoral reform, as a characteristic of supporters of innovation. Later, the founder of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, and his followers were called supporters of radicalism. In the 19th century, radicalism began to be interpreted more broadly, as a political, philosophical, religious, cultural, and educational movement. Finally, the characteristics of modern understanding of the term “radicalism” were defined in 1930 by the American scholar Horace Kallen: “Radicalism is a distinct philosophy and idea of social transformation aimed at the systematic destruction of what is hated and its replacement by art, faith, science or society, which is logically regarded as right, good, beautiful, and just.”<sup>2</sup>

In its original meaning, the term only defined the unacceptability of compromises and did not necessarily imply a violent component directed solely at destruction. Many authors viewed radicalism as a catalyst not only for destructive, but also for positive phenomena, accelerating progress.

However, in some works dedicated to the problems of radicalism, there are other approaches to defining and understanding this term. By calling aggressiveness and destructiveness essential elements of radicalism, they believed that it transitions from an idea to radical, often illegal activities<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, throughout history, the meaning of “radicalism” as a concept has significantly changed. In the 19th century, many political parties were reformist rather than revolutionary, called themselves radical, and advocated only for the introduction of democracy, and were mainly non-violent activists. It should be noted that some radical demands of the 19th century have become part of the foundational human and citizen rights today. In other words, the content of the term “radical” has changed quite sharply in just over a century: if in the 19th century the term “radical” referred primarily to liberal, anti-clerical, pro-democratic, and progressive political positions, modern usage tends to encompass more anti-liberal, fundamentalist, anti-democratic, and regressive agendas<sup>4</sup>.

Radicalism is not linked directly with any specific ideology. In the political dimension, it is customary to distinguish between left and right radicalism. Left radicalism includes social democratic, socialist, communist, and anarchistic ideas. Right radicalism can be represented by a wide range of ideas, from fascism, national socialism, racism, and anti-Semitism to various forms of xenophobia. Speaking about other significant forms of radicalism for the current period, it is impossible not to mention religious radicalism. In this case, the use of the term “fundamentalism” is appropriate, which denotes an unconditional imperative to follow the dogmas of religious sacred texts, the domination of religious institutions in society, as well as the impossibility of any innovations in the connotation of canonical documents. One of the common forms of religious radicalism is Islamic radicalism, which is defined as an ideological doctrine and the political practice based on it characterised by the normative and value-based consolidation of ideological, politico-ideological, and armed opposition of the “true Islam” world to the world of “unbelievers” externally and the world of “false faith” inside Islam, and require absolute social control and mobilisation (serving the idea) of their supporters. Some authors suggest using a compromise term, such as the radicalization of the Islamic movement, which refers to the process of the formation and

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<sup>2</sup> Grebenshchikov Ivan, Vliyanie gosudarstva na razvitie diskursa ob ekstremizme. Dissertaciya na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni kandidata sociologicheskikh nauk. Moskva, 2020. p.36.

<sup>3</sup> Ajtzhanova Dinara, Opyt evropejskikh stran v protivodejstvii religioznomu ekstremizmu Dissertaciya na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni kandidata filosofskh nauk. Respublika Kazahstan Nur-Sultan, 2021, p.20. <http://repository.apa.kz/xmlui/handle/123456789/571> (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>4</sup> Schmid A.P. Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review, ICCT Research Paper, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013, 91 p. <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCTSchmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf> (accessed 10.03.2023)

consolidation of Islamized political groups using Islamic slogans and elements of doctrine as an ideological platform, which distinguishes them from other public formations in the struggle for power with the goal of changing, on this basis, the existing socio-political order, in one region or another<sup>5</sup>.

The term “extremism” (from the lat. *extremus* - extreme, last) means an attachment, in politics and ideas, to views and actions that belong to extremities. If the phenomenon of “extremism” has been known since ancient times, the term “extremism” does not have a multi-century history. It has been used in the political press in England since the middle of the 20th century. In the U.S. this concept appeared during the Civil War (1861-1865). In France it started to be used during World War I (1914-1918)<sup>6</sup>.

According to the Russian researcher S. Fridinskiy, the term has been actively used to refer to the followers of extreme views since the beginning of the 20th century, and in that period such characteristics was attributed to be the representatives of the left wing of the “Indian National Congress” party, who were consistent supporters of the struggle to achieve complete independence of India<sup>7</sup>.

The American researcher at the University of South Florida Randy Borum, in his article “Radicalization into Violent Extremism: a Review of Social Science Theories” brings the following definition of extremism, taken from Palgrave Macmillan dictionary of political thought: “Extremism can be used to refer to political ideologies that oppose a society’s core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies this could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and universal human rights. The term can also be used to describe the methods through which political actors attempt to realize their aims, that is, by using means that show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others”<sup>8</sup>.

Russian professor S. Sergeev conducted an analysis and systematisation of dissertation research in the period of the 1990s and 2000s in the Russian Federation on the problems of extremism and radicalism, and noted the fact that many authors consider the concepts of “radicalism” and “extremism” as one indivisible concept.

In our opinion, unlike extremism, radicalism is primarily oriented towards the substantive side of the ideas being proclaimed, which are not always “extreme” and do not necessarily advocate for terror or violence.

The Russian researcher D. Olshansky justly points out that in contrast to terrorism, radicalism is focused on the content of one or another side of the ideas, but not on the methods of carrying them out. Radicalism can be entirely based “on ideas”, and, unlike extremism, not on actions. Extremism primarily focuses itself on the methods and ways of fighting, pushing the ideas on the second level<sup>9</sup>.

Radicalism is usually referred to in relation to ideologically, politically and socially extreme-oriented organisations, parties or party factions, political movements and groups, individual leaders, etc., assessing the ideological direction and extent of expression of such inclinations. Regarding

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmedova Kulisum, *Religioznyj faktor v politicheskom kontekste protivodejstviya terrorizmu*. Dissertaciya na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni kandidata politicheskikh nauk. Rostov-na-Donu, 2014, p. 39-40. Natea Mihaela Daciana, *Disinformation crossing borders. The Multilayered Disinformation Concerning the War in Ukraine*, L’Harmattan, Paris France, 2022

<sup>6</sup> Kornilov Serghei, *Mezhdunarodnye aspekty protivodejstviya ekstremizmu*. Avtoreferat dis. na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni kandidata yuridicheskikh nauk. Moskva, 2011, p.13.

<sup>7</sup> Fridinskiy Serghei, *Protivodejstvie ekstremistskoj deyatel'nosti v Rossii*. Avtoreferat diss. na soisk. uch. Step. doktora yuridicheskikh nauk. Moskva, 2011. p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Borum Randy, *Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research*, in: “Journal of Strategic Security”, №. 4, 2011, p. 37-62. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1140&context=jss> (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Olishanskij Dmitrii, *Psihologiya terrorizma*. Sankt-Peterburg, Piter, 2002. p.167.

extremism, it usually assesses the degree of the extreme methods of implementing certain aspirations.

Socio-psychological ground for the growth of radicalism is the overall state of uncertainty and instability. On this ground there is a bloom of ultra-left and ultra-right ideas, followed by concrete actions. It is worth mentioning that radicalism develops into extremism if there is use of violent methods and means in a political fight.

According to the Russian political scientist M.K. Archakov, the concepts of “radicalism” and “extremism” differ not in that one phenomenon covers the sphere of ideas and the other – actions: “... the clear criterion that distinguishes political radicalism and political extremism is the use of illegitimate illegal violence by extremists.”<sup>10</sup>

Manfred Funke, in the article “Terrorism – an Attempt to Investigate the Challenge”, states that “a radical embodies a high degree of intensity of a critical system, but does not resort in his arguments to gunshots, and while he looks at the root of “the evil”, he fetishes it in his theory, however, he does not participate practically in the political struggle. He walks with his friends hand in hand during the demonstrations. His relationship with the people make their way through the book “walls”, and at a direct meeting with the masses he has to take decision on his position: to become a revolutionary leader (Lenin, Trotsky) or to go into the area of political philosophy, where one can verbally open new horizons (Marx, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Marcuse)”<sup>11</sup>.

The Russian expert in the field of left-wing extremism I. Morozov sees radicalism as the intention of actors towards a radical transformation of the existing reality in a particular field of activity. Extremism from his point of view is seen as actions (physical or informational and propagandist), whereas radicalism is seen as ideas, a conglomerate of beliefs and theories, which need, according to their creators and followers, a full realisation. Political radicalism is the founding principle of extremist ideology, according to which the current political system is perceived as absolutely unacceptable, unfair, not capable of effective modernization and evolution, and, thus, should be destroyed in the shortest amount of time or immediately<sup>12</sup>.

German scholar Astrid Bötticher, in her study “Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism”, separates the phenomena of radicalism and extremism by highlighting 10 distinguishing characteristics. Summarising the author’s conclusions, it is worth noting the most significant distinctive features from our point of view:

1. Radical movements tend to use political violence pragmatically and on a selective basis, while extremist movements consider violence against their enemies as a legitimate form of political action and tend to embrace extreme forms of mass violence as part of their political credo.

2. Both radicalism and extremism contain a narrative reference to what lies beyond the present.

3. Extremism is, by its very nature, anti-democratic; it seeks to abolish constitutional democracy and the rule of law. Radicalism is emancipatory and not per se anti-democratic.

4. Extremists openly confront the notion of universal human rights and those institutions that serve to uphold them for all. Radicalism is not opposed to equal human rights.

5. Radicalism stands in rebellious opposition to the establishment; extremism, on the other hand, is directed not only against the establishment but against all those who do not embrace its dogmatic prescription for a transformation of society.

<sup>10</sup> Archakov Mihail, *Politicheskij ekstremizm v Rossii: sushchnosti, proyavleniya, mery protivodejstviya* Dissertaciya na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni doctora politicheskikh nauk., Ekaterinburg, 2016. p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Afanasiev Nicolai, *Ideologiya terrorizma*, in: “Socialino-Gumanitarnye znaniya”, №6, 2001, p. 213.

<sup>12</sup> Morozov Iliya, *Levyj ekstremizm kak politicheskij fenomen vtoroj poloviny XX — nachala XXI vekov: evolyuciya strategii i taktiki*. Avtoreferat dissertacii na soiskanie uchenoj stepeni doktora politicheskikh nauk. Saratov, 2010. p.30.

7. The concept of extremism is closely linked to authoritarian dictatorships and totalitarianism. Historically, radicalism has been more egalitarian and less elitist while extremists are supremacists opposed to the sovereignty of common people.

8. Radicalism draws strongly on the political legacy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, with its ideas of human progress and its faith in the power of reason. Extremism, on the other hand, is linked to an irrational, usually religious and fanatical belief system, that claims a monopoly of truth on the basis of which it seeks to transform society according to its retrograde vision.<sup>13</sup>

In essence, radicalism does not yet become an action that goes beyond the legal field, but as a social phenomenon it is characterised by an extreme form of expression of views, ideas, and concepts. Unlike extremism, radicalism does not imply the use of unlawful actions and does not harm public or political institutions. Bearers of radical views cannot be held criminally or administratively responsible for expressing their radical views unless they are capable of causing illegal acts or can have a negative impact on social processes.

Terrorism (from lat. terror - fear, horror) can be defined as systematic, socially or politically motivated, ideologically justified uses of violence or the threat of using violence, by which the intimidation of individuals controls their behaviour in a positive direction for terrorists and contributes to the achievement of the goal pursued by terrorists.

According to the view of Russian philosopher N. Afanasiev, extremism has its own social practices. The difference of terrorism from these practices is in the fact that a terrorist goes till the logical end in the purpose of social destabilisation of society, halfway through which an extremist stops. An extremist throws stones, but a terrorist starts throwing bombs. An extremist blocks street, railway lines, and roads, but a terrorist takes hostages. An extremist threatens with death, but a terrorist causes death. In certain cases, extremists may turn into terrorists, because the terrorists recruit their members from among extremists. For terrorists the armed struggle becomes more important than the process of ideological justification<sup>14</sup>.

From our point of view, terrorism is a continuation and further development of extremism. Usually, terrorism is defined as an extreme form of extremism. The fundamental difference between extremism and terrorism consists in the human life factor. When an extremist switches from threatening to use violence to killing innocent citizens, he becomes a terrorist.

Radicalism (including extremism) usually formulates its goals as some sort of ideal (political, social, economic, religious, ethnic, etc.), while terrorism puts forward intermediate goals<sup>15</sup>.

The term radicalism is associated with the derivative term radicalization. M. Sedgwick, a researcher at the Department of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, in Denmark, points out that before 2001, the term “radicalization” was rarely mentioned in the press, although it was sometimes used in academic circles. Then, in 2005-2007, particularly after the Madrid bombings in March 2004 and the London bombings in July 2005, there was a sharp increase in the use of the term “radicalization”, which was linked to the phenomenon of “home-grown terrorism” and the need to explain its origins. Starting in 2005, most Western European countries developed “deradicalization” programs, resulting in the actual institutionalisation of the term “radicalization”<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Bötticher Astrid, Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism, in: “Perspectives on Terrorism” , Published by: Terrorism Research Initiative Stable, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2017, p. 73-77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297896> (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>14</sup> Afanasiev Nicolai, Ideologiya terrorizma, in: “Socialino-Gumanitarnye znaniya”, №6, 2001, p. 217.

<sup>15</sup> Lopushanskij Igor, Radikalizm: teoriya i praktika: uchebnoe posobie dlya magistratury. Sankt-Peterburg, Sankt-Peterburgskij juridicheskij institut Akademii Generalinoj prokuratury Rossijskoj Federacii, 2016. p.18.

<sup>16</sup> Sedgwick Mark, The Concept of Radicalisation as a Source of Confusion, in: “Terrorism and Political Violence”, Taylor & Francis Group, vol. 22, no. 4, 2010, p. 479-494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2010.491009> (accessed 02.02.2023).

Radicalization is a set of methods, ways, and means aimed at fundamentally changing the ideological foundations, forming an alternative system of values by breaking with existing tradition, as well as qualitatively transforming the basic social institutions and/or the political system as a whole<sup>17</sup>.

Currently, “radicalization” is understood as either a) the process by which individuals or groups become adherents of certain radical ideas or supporters of fundamental transformations, or b) the process associated with the use of radical methods to achieve one’s goals<sup>18</sup>.

In scientific literature, there is a viewpoint according to which it is possible to conceptualise radicalization and terrorism within the framework of one continuum, where radicalization is a process leading to the final point – terrorism<sup>19</sup>. We fully agree with the Russian researcher Sakayev V., who notes the inadequacy of interpreting the concept of “radicalization” solely as a process of “turning into a terrorist”. Radicalization primarily appears as a process of spreading radical ideas, regardless of their relationship to violence as a means of achieving goals. The researcher also notes that providing a general definition of radicalization is very difficult, as it has significantly changed over the development of this concept. Since the mid-2000s, the theory of radicalization has undergone a serious evolution – from initial, relatively primitive approaches to modern, more multifaceted and less ideologized ones. Initially, radicalization was understood as the process of an individual or group adopting radical ideas, resulting in involvement in violent, terrorist actions<sup>20</sup>.

Let us also consider the viewpoint of American researcher Randy Borum from the University of South Florida, who emphasises that the link between radical beliefs and terrorist activity is not so straightforward: most radicals do not engage in terrorism, and many terrorists have not been “radicalized” in any traditional sense<sup>21</sup>. A similar idea is expressed by C. McCauley in a recent work, stating that 99% of people with radical views will never move towards terrorist activity, and that many have already taken action without having those same radical ideas<sup>22</sup>.

Currently, in Western literature, several main approaches to the concept of radicalization can be identified.

According to the first approach, radicalization is a process of turning to violence as a means of transformation.

The second approach is related to an attempt to distinguish between the phenomenon of radicalization in the classical sense and violent radicalization.

Supporters of the third approach call for a distinction between the concepts of “radicalization” and “extremism,” recognizing that “radicalization” does not necessarily have to be associated with violence and terrorism, but even if it does, the violence from radicals has a different nature than the violence from extremists.

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<sup>17</sup> Apolosov Denis, Radikalizaciya kak social'no-politicheskoe yavlenie, in: “Obshchie voprosy obespecheniya nacional'oj bezopasnosti”, 2018, 3(23). p. 16–21.

<sup>18</sup> Sakaev Vasilii, Ponyatie radikalizacii: obzor nauchnyh podhodov v sovremennoj zarubezhnoj literature, in: “Antinomii”. 2021. V. 21, nr. 2, p.66. DOI 10.17506/26867206\_2021\_21\_2\_45

<sup>19</sup> Bovina Inna, Bovin Boris, Tihonova Anna, Radikalizaciya: social'no-psihologicheskij vzglyad (CHast' I), in: “Psihologiya i pravo”. V. 10, № 3, 2020. p. 120–142. DOI: 10.17759/psylaw.2020100309 (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>20</sup> Sakaev Vasilii, Ponyatie radikalizacii: obzor nauchnyh podhodov v sovremennoj zarubezhnoj literature, in: “Antinomii”. 2021. V. 21, nr. 2, p.48. DOI 10.17506/26867206\_2021\_21\_2\_45 (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>21</sup> Borum Randy, Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research, in: “Journal of Strategic Security”, №. 4, 2011, p. 37-62. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1140&context=jss> (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>22</sup> McCauley Clark, The ABC model: Commentary from the Perspective of the Two Pyramids Model of Radicalization, in: “Terrorism and Political Violence”. V.34, nr. 3, 2020. p. 1-9. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2020.1763964

Supporters of the fourth approach argue about the relativity of the concept and its dependence on the specific context<sup>23</sup>.

The following levels of radicalization should be distinguished: individual (radicalization of a person); microsocial (radicalization of a particular group); macrosocial (radicalization of society).

Radicalization includes the following stages:

1. Emergence and circulation of radical ideas in society;
2. Achieving a critical mass of supporters of radical ideas in society;
3. Transition to non-violent radical actions;
4. Transition to violent actions.

It is obvious that these stages do not always follow each other, and the process of radicalization does not necessarily include all four stages. It is quite possible that the processes of radicalization in society, having found their practical expression, will stop at the early stages. Therefore, considering the stage of development of radicalization processes, we can predict its potential risks<sup>24</sup>.

Based on our analysis, we have come to the following conclusion: in scientific understanding, radicalism is a broad sociocultural phenomenon that encompasses most spheres of life, including political, social, religious, economic, and so on. Radicalism is primarily characterised by goals, ideas, and values that are in deep conflict with reality and includes strategies for overcoming the identified contradiction.

Extremism actions aimed at a profound transformation of the current socio-political reality in accordance with the ideologically substantiated methodology of the ideal type, implemented in forms that are defined as illegal according to the state's legislation.

Radicalism in its most extreme form can only pose a threat to the stability of the regime, because it is, in essence, a worldview, theory, philosophy, judgement, methodology. Extremism poses a threat to the very existence of the state and tends to implement this threat through violent methods.

Radicalism is related to the process of radicalization as an ideological attitude to the process of its implementation.

The concepts under consideration – radicalism, extremism, and terrorism – essentially follow each other in the order of increasing social danger from radicalism to extremism and ultimately to its extreme manifestation – terrorism. However, neither radicalism nor extremism are necessary stages towards terrorism. Terrorism from the perspective of political science can be a method for solving extremist tasks which, in turn, are the extreme manifestation of radical political goals.

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<sup>23</sup> Sakaev Vasili, Ponyatie radikalizacii: obzor nauchnyh podhodov v sovremennoj zarubezhnoj literature, in: "Antinomii". 2021. V. 21, nr. 2. p.48-49. DOI 10.17506/26867206\_2021\_21\_2\_45 (accessed 02.02.2023).

<sup>24</sup> Sakaev Vasili, Ponyatie radikalizacii: obzor nauchnyh podhodov v sovremennoj zarubezhnoj literature, in: "Antinomii". 2021. V. 21, nr. 2. p.67. DOI 10.17506/26867206\_2021\_21\_2\_45 (accessed 02.02.2023).

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