

CENTRAL ECONOMIC OFFICE – A CENTRAL INSTITUTION FOR SO-CALLED SOLVING OF THE JEWISH QUESTION IN SLOVAKIA IN THE SPHERE OF ECONOMY

The Central Economic Office (CEO further on) started its work in September 16, 1940, on the basis of the government statute no. 222/1940 of the Slovak Law. In a short time after passing of so-called plenipotentiary law, by which Slovak assembly delegated its legislative power in questions concerning the Jewish minority to Slovak government and which influenced remarkably further development of so-called solving of the Jewish question in Slovakia. For a certain time the CEO had become the central institution, which concentrated all agenda and jurisdiction for realization of anti-Jewish measurements. Establishment of such institution reflected a subordinated position or dependence of Slovakia on the German empire in this period, because institutions with the same filling and character of work were founded also in Germany and Austria (e.g. the Central Office for the Jewish Question Control in Vienna). Its competencies were the best characterised by the establishing law ordering “according to special regulations (i.e. of CEO, J.D.) do all necessary for excluding the Jews from Slovak economic and social life and for transfer of their property to the hand of non-Jews”.¹

In the function of the institution president Augustín Morávek - who was the very active person in politics, but first of all the arrogant and unscrupulous man - started to work. By his working as the president of the CEO Morávek not only provoked many politicians against himself, but he mainly irritated representants of economic circles, who criticised permanently the so-called national-socialistic solving of the Jewish question (that were resolutely pushed by Morávek). In Slovak practice it meant an irresponsible anarchy and a lot of corruption scandals threatening economic interests of the state during the aryanizing process, i.e. during transferring of the Jewish property into the hands of Christians.² Morávek built his office on strict leadership principle and from subordinated workers he asked an absolute obedience and discipline. Morávek created the whole structure and organization system of the CEO and he alone initiated many anti-Jewish regulations. He was well known also owing to his rich publishing and lecturing activities.

Speaking about the CEO work, we can observe two phases or periods in its activities. They differ one from the other not only by the CEO relations to another organs and institutions of state administration, but they are reflected also in the organization structure of the Office. The first period lasted from 16th September 1940 till 30th June 1942. The second one continued till the CEO deceased in 1945.³

In the first phase of its existence the already mentioned A. Morávek led the Office, with direct responsibility to the premier Vojtech Tuka. He was authorized to issue instructions concerning pertaining questions for state offices and ministries. Tasks and ways of their realisation were influenced by a strict course in solving of the Jewish question that became sharp in a political background of Slovakia in those days. Activities of the CEO were organized within ten departments according to their orientation - secretary, legislative, aryanization of enterprises, the Jewish Central Association, aryanization of house property, misappropriating of Jewish property, working permission, supervision and revision, statistics and records, accounting. The second period of the CEO work is characterised by a change of the president – an officer from Ministry of Economy Ľubomír Paškovič was appointed to lead the Office – and by a government regulation no. 122/1942 of the Slovak Law, according to which the CEO got under the control of Ministry of Economy (and was not under the premier’s direct protection). By this way also a privileged position of this institution together with the period of “revolutionary planning” ended. All these changes were also reflected in a new inner organization of the Office, the work of which was divided into four departments – presidium, aryanization, for emigration and moving of the Jews and for disposing with Jewish property, for employment of the Jews, department for revisions and accounting).

¹ The Slovak Law, reg. no. 222/1940, further regulations of the government defining more comprehensively competences of the CEO, reg. no. 303/1940 Slovak Law concerning liquidation of Jewish enterprises, their transfer, i.e. aryanization, appointment of confidants and temporal trustees in these enterprises.

² State Regional Archives Bratislava, Resources of People’s Jurisdiction - Augustín Morávek 4/48.

³ *Ibidem*.

We are informed about results of the CEO activities first of all from A. Morávek's reports submitted on the State Council meetings. Till the end of March 1942 in Slovakia 2,223 Jewish enterprises or crafts with annual turn-over of 1 billion 465 millions of Slovak crowns⁴ were aryanized and approximately 10,000 Jewish enterprises were liquidated. We have to point out, however, that no one case of aryanization was legislatively finished until Morávek's work as the Office president was ended, what for the Slovak state have no economic contribution as it used to be stressed by political radicals - on the contrary, it meant high financial lost.

An interesting problem concerning the CEO is its cooperation with another central offices and institutions of state administration. In my article I am giving more detailed analysis of relations between the CEO and the Jewish Central Association - the organization, where all Jews living in Slovakia were obligatory joined. This problem represents one theme to which I am devoted in my scientific research. The CEO position in the system of central institutions of state administration in analysed here in a complex way, as it was a completely new institution in the political system of Slovakia. I am dealing with relations between the Slovak Assembly, State Council and CEO - the three highest institutions in the state, which had influenced the CEO activities to a great extent. The chairman Morávek had to visit their meetings and to inform about filling the tasks in competence of his office, which were often criticised by the two other institutions. On the other hand, he e.g. influenced activities of the Slovak Assembly through proposals of new legislative regulations against Jews (activities of the legislative and law department of the CEO), which the Assembly had to solve. The most complicated relations had the CEO with the Ministry of Economy that had followed from mutual interventions into their own competences, the most frequently by exceeding the horizon of the CEO competences. This status quo is very well reflected in archive documents and it forms a content of responsible officer's verbal testimony before the National or People's law-courts. The Ministry of Economy reluctantly looked at so-called revolutionary way of transferring the Jewish property to hands of Aryan owners, which threatened economic life in the state, and, moreover, was accompanied with corruption, anarchy and disorganization. In similar way complicated and strained relations lasted also between the CEO and the Ministry of Inner Affairs (first of all with its 14th department, which after its arise took some competences that had belonged to the CEO before, but primarily it had to realize restrictions of social, civic, religious and personal rights of Jewish population). The CEO, that is to say, within its activities in economic sphere, which were in its responsibility, interfere also in social and religious spheres, i.e. made steps to reduce civic and religious rights of the Jews.

As the whole, activities of the CEO oriented toward another central institutions, can be seen as "demonstration of power" (mainly in the first period of the Office existence). Here I think unwillingness of the chairman and so of the whole Office to demands of other institutions apart from those coming from the government. This loath had its origin in the CEO's conviction in its extraordinary and so unshakable position, as it was under the premier's direct control. In the analysis of relations with particular institutions I try to describe also changes in their quality after A. Morávek's removal from the chairman's seat, when he was replaced with L. Paškovič and the CEO became subordinate to the Ministry of Economy.

Now I am analysing only the relations between the CEO and the Jewish Central Association. If the regulations could be effective, similar "concentration" process, i.e. efforts to cumulate all rights for issuing of discriminative regulations against the Jewish population in economic sphere under the CEO control, had to be realised also on the other side of the Jewish minority. This was the purpose the Presidium initiated the rise of the Jewish Central Association (JCA further on), a central organization associating the Jews. Basic activities of the JCA were aimed in "fulfilling of orders of pertaining state authorities". Majority of these orders and regulations was pushed forward through the CEO as a direct superior authority. So if I in following chapter would analyse the mutual relation of these two subjects, its basic characteristics follows from subordinate position of one to another and from a duty to fulfil its demands. As far as its competences are concerned, the JCA was subordinate to the CEO (its 4th

⁴ Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, Bratislava, 1991, p. 112. This information should be taken with some reservation, Morávek reports about 1,888 aryanized and 9,935 liquidated enterprises, L. Paškovič précised the numbers on 2,223 and 10,025.

department). Ivan Kamenec even moves this relation into the level “the JCA as an executive bar of the CEO in realization of anti-Jewish regulations”.⁵

The new central Jewish organization was established according to the government order no. 234/1940 of the Slovak Law in September 1940⁶ and it became obligatory for all inhabitants living in Slovakia, which “had to be considered the Jews according to valid law regulations”. Authors found a model for its development and activity in similar institutions that were working in Germany and other countries under the German occupation.⁷ At the time, when the JCA had been founded, another Jewish organizations and associations, of religious or sporting character, were abolished (existence of Jewish religious communities was preserved). The JCA took the property of all extinct associations under its control.⁸

The JCA was led by its chairman that had been appointed by the CEO. The first person in this function was Heinrich Schwarz, who was after his recall in May 1941⁹ replaced by Árpád Šebestyén. The JCA organization statute divided its activities into particular departments according to their aims within “the solving of the Jewish question”. Number of departments had been stabilized on nine plus the JCA Presidium department. The main task of the Presidium department was to receive all orders from the CEO and to control their realization in pertaining departments. In the opposite direction the Presidium department had to provide communication among the JCA, CEO and central authorities and to ensure realization of other administrative affairs. I can state that just the Presidium department and the chairman were so-called “a litmus-paper” showing a recent relation between the CEO and JCA. The departments were divided into several divisions according to kinds of their work: divisions for retraining, for emigration, for social affairs, for education and culture, register division, financial division and division for non-Israelites.¹⁰ Divisions consisted of another parts and subsidiary offices. This richly ramified structure reflected wide extent of work and plenty of tasks, which the JCA had to solve and which were asked from it by the CEO first of all. The mentioned departments and divisions formed the central institution established in Bratislava that cooperated with another district and local branches.¹¹ Detailed analysis of work of separate JCA departments is documented in regular reports of the JCA chairman written for the CEO and sent on the CEO order from February 1941.¹² A central secretary with its legislative department provided work of the JCA departments with legislative background and with legal advices e.g. in questions concerning employment of the Jews, aryianization and liquidation of their property, or interpretation of new laws and regulations. Whereas the JCA was the only institution through which the Jewish inhabitants could intervene on behalf of their own in different offices, the central secretary lodged their complaints to particular offices or institutions.

The JCA within the framework of its work supported numerous activities that could help the Jews in an unfavourable time of gradual reduction of their civic as well as personal and human rights. It organized retraining courses of agricultural and craft activities that could help them hypothetically to obtain new work. Till the end of March 1942 more than 10,000 participants had finished these courses, on April 15, 1942 the CEO these classes and centres closed. The division for emigration ensured all possible ways of legal emigration of the Jews from Slovakia. Within two offices - the Palestinian office and “HICEM” office - it tried to establish contacts with foreign immigration organizations; wide cooperation was developed with the American organization HIAS (it helped in obtaining documents necessary for emigration as well as finances from American relatives), contacts with supporting organization Joint were deepened. Intensive relations existed also with immigration organizations in the Protectorate.¹³ The Palestinian office, of course, was oriented on emigration of the Jewish

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

⁶ The Slovak Law, 1940, reg. no. 234/1940 Sl. l.

⁷ In Germany Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland worked, in Austria Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung, in the Protectorate this function was fulfilled by Židovská náboženská obec in Prague. Ladislav Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom štáte 1939-1945*, Banská Bystrica, 1990, p. 70.

⁸ The Slovak National Archives, resources of the CEO, 11,706/1941 the JCA.

⁹ I did not succeeded in finding the Letter of recall among the archive documents, I found only an indirect remark about the recall and imprisonment of him and another members of the JCA Presidium – the SNA, the CEO resources, 13,917/1941, 29,121/1941 the JCA, possible also April 1941 – the SNA, the CEO resources, 25,833/1941 the JCA.

¹⁰ The SNA, the CEO resources, 15,293/1941, 28,207/1941 the JCA.

¹¹ According to Ivan Kamenec 58 district and 9 local branches worked in Slovakia. Ivan Kamenec, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹² A duty to inform the CEO about its activities had the JCA laid down in its statute of organization (§5, no. 4).

¹³ The SNA, the CEO resources, 15,844/1941 the JCA, 61,033/1941 the JCA, 26,128/42 the JCA, 1,383/1941 Pres.

inhabitants into Palestine¹⁴, which became more complicated in connection with changing international situation. From April 1941, when the last group of emigrants was legally removed, the JCA followed in mediating of information with relatives abroad and after the transports had began it tried to find addresses of relatives in General Gubernate and exchange of letters with deported persons.¹⁵

The JCA paid a big attention to social and activities of charity controlled by the Social division. As a result of discriminating measures that were passed, so as a result of intensive activities of the CEO in aryanization of the Jewish property, a number of the Jews dependent on the JCA financial support grew. This financial means gave the JCA from its own budget that was sanctioned by the CEO. The JCA was provided with the money from blocked Jewish deposits in picked financial institutions. In this connection is necessary to say that there was no interest of the CEO to support the JCA activities of charity and its increasing demands in connection with the already mentioned worsening situation of the Jewish population. Its aim was to form “a social problem” from a group of poor and unemployed inhabitants that could be solved by removal exclusively.¹⁶ In November 1940 the JCA supported 7,444 persons, in March 1941 9,172 destitute persons were registered at the JCA and in August of the same year it was 23,887 Jews.¹⁷ Apart from this the JCA provided organized various special supports¹⁸, its workers looked after existence of social institutions like people’s canteens¹⁹, orphans institutes, old people’s homes, they set up dispensaries and advisory centres. Extraordinary painful chapter of their work was care about transports of Slovak Jews, i.e. the JCA’s own members from March 1942, for whom the Association tried to make all possible. The CEO in majority of cases boycotted efforts of the JCA and as any activity had to be approved by the CEO, endeavours of the Association were doomed. Even before the transports started to be organized (16 March 1942), the JCA turned to the CEO with a demand to release financial resources of 1 million Slovak crowns for their material equipment. The CEO rejected the request as irrelevant.²⁰ Means for social aid the Association obtained from property of former Jewish societies and organizations, from foreign organizations – first of all from the Joint²¹ – and from obligatory contributions of the JCA members.

In evaluation of the JCA activities from a present-day standpoint, the register division with its section for evidence and statistics played the most negative part. This division made precise statistics of Jewish population according to various criteria, e.g. districts, towns and villages, names, religion, age, sex, family status, nationality, profession, ability to work; the division made statistics of non-Israelites, it had full tax and social evidence. In this sphere the JCA cooperated also with the State statistical institute (of course, with the approval of CEO) that provide the Association with a lot of information and data, e.g. unpublished results of population census in 1940).²² The Jews were obliged to report changes of their movable and immovable property, which were further worked up with the statistical section. By this way actual statistics of flats in the Jewish ownership on the whole territory

¹⁴ Emigration activities often ended unsuccessfully, e.g. the case of emigration of 700 Slovak Jews to Palestine at the beginning of 1940. The JCA then had to ask the CEO to release money for repaying travel expenses to these persons. The SNA, the CEO resources, 31,283/41 the JCA. In April 1941 the last group of Slovak Jews, consisting of 82 members, removed successfully to Palestine (they came to Haifa in May 10, 1941. The SNA, the CEO resources, 27,284/1941 the JCA, 34,808/1941 the JCA.

¹⁵ The SNA, the CEO resources, 26,128/1942 the JCA.

¹⁶ Ivan Kamenec, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ From the total number of 9,172 Jews 6,348 were adults and 2,824 children that got financial aid of 3 Slovak crowns (adults) and 2 Sl. crowns (children) per a day. In March the JCA paid 668,934 Sl. crowns for the aid. The SNA, the CEO resources, 20,763/1941 the JCA, 59,954/1941 the JCA.

¹⁸ For example it looked after providing the transports of Austrian Jews passing the Slovak territory with food, medicaments, and another necessary things. The CEO tolerated this activity “without a word”. The SNA, the CEO resources, 13,928/1941 the JCA.

¹⁹ People’s canteens were founded and supported by the JCA in 15 towns, where every day 35,000 men used to eat. The SNA, the CEO resources, 20,763/1941 the JCA. From April 1942 the CEO made efforts to cancel or even to reduce their number. The SNA, the CEO resources, 15,838/1942 the JCA.

²⁰ The SNA, the CEO resources, 12,378/1942 the JCA.

²¹ From October 1940 to February 1941 the JCA received 26,500 US dollars of financial aid. The SNA, the CEO resources, 15,293/1941 the JCA.

²² The section of register had in its files 88,958 statistical forms, what was in accordance with the number of Jewish persons living in Slovakia to 12 December 1940. The SNA, the CEO resources, 15,293/1941 the JCA, 20,763/1941 the JCA, 34,808/1941 the JCA, 27,284/1941 the JCA, 34,796/1941 the JCA.

of Slovakia were done, together with those documenting the course of liquidation of Jewish enterprises including their annual turnover (the reports had to be presented regularly in the CEO, who published the data on liquidated enterprises in the Office news). These lists with full information then became basic documents in elaboration and realization of further discrimination regulations concerning the Jewish population.

When the deportations had started, the Section for special tasks was established in the JCA. Its task was “to realize administrative, technical and transport works in permanent centres situated in Bratislava-Patrónka, Sereď, Nováky, Žilina and Poprad up to departure of concentrated persons”. In the time of its foundation the Section had from 35 to 58 employees.²³ In its head stood Karol Hochberg, the person who was sharply criticised by other JCA members for his collaboration with representants of contemporary regime. In his own words, the section “had to work to a full satisfaction of all state institutions”. Importance of the section had grown step-by-step, what was reflected also in a number of its employees - in 1943 already 152 persons worked there.²⁴

The staff of employees in the JCA was formed step-by-step. In January 1941 majority of them were volunteers working in former Jewish societies and organizations, which worked without pretending regular payments.²⁵ In May 1941 the mayor presented the list of employees in the CEO. According to this list, 328 persons worked in the JCA,²⁶ at the beginning of 1942 their number increased to 348. Ladislav Lipscher²⁷ divides the JCA staff in three groups in connection with an extent of free acting and personal standpoint of every individual to fulfilling the orders of superior institutions, i.e. the CEO. The first group was consisting of honest people, whose aim was to work for protection of the Jewish community. The second group is that of bureaucrats and soulless executor of official orders - as an example he gives the person of the JCA second mayor A. Šebestyén. The smallest third group is formed by “dangerous elements” able to do anything in their own interest protecting themselves.²⁸ The fact that the JCA did not formed a homogenous unit resulted from ideological fragmentation, because being the only one obligatory organization it joined representants of the both religious congregations in Slovakia – orthodox as well as neologists. Activities of its leading persons were not easy at all. They were forced to work under the supervision of their employers and at the same they were under press of their own members. They often had to resist attacks from the both sides. We can say that criticism and attacks from the own rows were hardly accepted by the JCA officers, namely when they issued from only from personal needs and did not bring a constructive criticism - on the contrary, by this way they helped the CEO to increase pressure on the JCA members. Archive documents are full of “character tests”, which did not ended very positively alas.²⁹ On the other side we have to state that also the JCA took hard actions against indiscipline of the members, who refused to fulfil all its orders obediently. The mutual relation was damaged also by the fact that the JCA in such cases asked help in superior institutions and did not try to solve the problem under its own steam.³⁰ As I have mentioned above, attacks came also from the other side, but they were in the given situation that was generally very hard for the Jewish population more expectable and so easier acceptable. They emerged mostly from violation and reduction of the JCA competences, i.e. of the authority of its officers, as a result of initiatives of local institutions. The JCA solved such initiatives with interventions and complaints at the CEO, which representatives - defenders of strict line against the Jews - received these initiatives with pleasure and supported them, the CEO representatives approved activities of local institutions and reasons for these measures they saw in necessary defence of institutions against “bad opinions with the Jews”.³¹ That’s why the CEO

²³ The SNA, the CEO resources, 26,128/1942 the JCA.

²⁴ L. Lipscher, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

²⁵ The SNA, the CEO resources, 3,561/1941 the JCA.

²⁶ Lists of the JCA employees passed to the 4th department of the CEO on 30 May 1941. The SNA, the CEO resources, 11,787/1941 the JCA.

²⁷ L. Lipscher, *op. cit.*, p. 99-100.

²⁸ As an exemplar of such people can serve Karol Hochberg, the head of the Section for special tasks.

²⁹ The JCA as a public legal corporation with tasks given in the §2 of the Statute of organization had proved by its activities that ... the leaders are not able to do the work put on them... The administration is undisciplined...I feel responsibility and power in myself to bring the JCA to order and discipline...” The SNA, the CEO resources, 25,833/1941, dated 28 April 1941, another the SNA, the CEO resources, 29,121/1941.

³⁰ The SNA, the CEO resources, 47,654/1941 the JCA.

³¹ The SNA, the CEO resources, 19,778/ the JCA, 42,647/1941 the JCA.

in any case did not meet the JCA officers and did not respect their “privileged” position in comparison with the rest of the Jewish population. The CEO refused to create appropriate conditions for their work e.g. by giving exceptions from persecution regulations that affected and worsened their social position, dispossessing of movable property, solving of question of living and first of all granting of exceptions from duty of work (in accordance with §22 of the Jewish Codex).³² Cynical and slighting attitude of the chairman Morávek to complaints of this kind is expressed by his notice on a list the JCA officers (for which the JCA mayor had asked protection again) “already unreasonable”³³, what proves Morávek’s efforts concerning deportation of all Jewish inhabitants from the territory of Slovakia. The CEO also denied intervening at other central institutions to the benefit of its subordinated members. The CEO officers permanently disturbed and influenced activities of the JCA by abusing of its power and by installing willing people into the JCA structures.³⁴

As a result from uncoordinated organization of transports of the Jewish inhabitants, the JCA had to complain not only to protect its own employees but also numerous another persons “illegally” placed to deportations (the Jews protected by various exceptions). The JCA these complaints passed to the CEO and to the Ministry of Inner Affairs. Majority of demands and complaints remained unnoticed by the CEO, that’s why the initiative gradually moved to in substance unofficial illegal activity of the JCA that was organized by so-called working group inside the Association. In written documents it is called also “side or shadow government”.³⁵ Its endeavour was aimed first of all in limiting or stopping mass deportations of Slovak Jews. To reach positive results, the group had to use all possible means, also to collaborate with the “devil”³⁶ alone, who in this case was German plenipotentiary for solving the Jewish question in Slovakia Dieter Wisliceny. Contacts between him and the group were mediated by the already mentioned Hochberg (his appointment into the function of the head of the section for special tasks is presupposed to be initiated just by Wisliceny). The scale of activities performed by the working group was very wide and it depended on recent need of help or rescue of the Jewish community.³⁷

In general we can state that all activities of particular JCA departments substantially facilitated the work of relatively incapable officers of those institutions, which had controlled and realised anti-Jewish regulations, mostly those at the CEO. In spite of the fact that the JCA regularly intervenes to the benefit of its employees and its other members as well, it had mostly yield in its efforts and submits to demands and orders of its direct superior. And, on the contrary, it had to pressurize other Jewish inhabitants to help to fulfil these orders and all regulations with discipline. In any appearance of the revolt the JCA leading officers were willing to act against the Association’s own members and asked help of the CEO. This line was held by the JCA already during organizing deportations of the Jews from Slovakia from March 1942. Its particular departments and divisions worked out lists of persons who had to be removed. Although it in a small extent tried to protect interests of gradually decreasing Jewish community, the JCA in its substance became an executive bar of the CEO.

During the year 1942 several personal changes were realised also at the CEO, e.g. the change at the chairman’s seat. The new chairman Lubomír Paškovič was replaced for Morávek, what was reflected also in changed relations between the JCA and the CEO. The Association obtained a relative independence in acting; its space for protecting interests of the Jews, which still succeeded in avoiding the deportations, became wider. Similarly, the working group alone gained more space for its activities within the JCA. These activities continued till the end of the JCA in September 1945.³⁸

In this short contribution I have tried to expose activities of the CEO in its relation to the JCA mainly in the period from 1940 to 1942, when the leading personality there was Augustín Morávek.

³² The JCA several times intervened at the CEO, because “some of its employees were called for work and transported ... although they were included into the lists of protected officers of the JCA”. The SNA, the CEO resources, 16,921/1942 the JCA, 61,906/1941 the JCA.

³³ The notice is from 27 April 1942, when deportations were very quick. The SNA, the CEO resources, 61,906/1941 the JCA.

³⁴ The SNA, the CEO resources, 61,943/1941 the JCA, 785/40 Pres.

³⁵ On the working group see Katarína Hradská, *Prípady Wisliceny. Nemeckí poradcovia a židovská otázka na Slovensku*, Bratislava, 1999; Ivan Kamenec, *op. cit.*; Ladislav Lipscher, *op. cit.*

³⁶ This comparison Katarína Hradská used in the cited work.

³⁷ Ladislav Lipscher says about financial aids for high state representatives who in the given moment were able to influence the deportations, e.g. the head of the 14th department A. Vašek, The Ministry of Inner Affairs Presidium chairman I. Koso and first of all D. Wisliceny. The financial aid for the working group was ensured mostly by the American Joint.

³⁸ See Ivan Kamenec, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

Activities of the CEO were much more heterogeneous, of course, but there is no place to analyse them in this brief study.

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