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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the 26th meeting of the PACE Network of Contact Parliamentarians
to stop sexual violence against children

held in Strasbourg on Thursday, 21 April 2016

"Presentation of the Cyprus pilot project: an example of good practice"

Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened by **Ms Stella Kyriakides, Chairperson** of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, who welcomed the new members of the Network: Ms Aaja Chemnitz Larsen from Denmark, Ms Margareta Budner from Poland, Ms Mailis Reps from Estonia and Mr Luís Leite Ramos from Portugal, and the former Contact Parliamentarian for Cyprus, Ms Athina Kyriakidou.

The Chairperson reminded those present that 2016 was the last year of the activities of the Network, subject to the availability of funds. Following the call for funds asking parliaments to contribute to the financing of activities, voluntary contributions had been received from Luxembourg, Switzerland, Portugal and Cyprus, thus enabling the continuation of activities until July. **The Chairperson** reiterated the call for funds in this context, and thanked those parliamentarians who had approached their governments or parliaments with requests for funding, such as the German Contact Parliamentarian, Ms Groth. Thanks to the many contributions received during the five years of the campaign, remarkable and unprecedented results had been achieved. However, in order to eliminate all forms of sexual violence against children, **the Chairperson** urged her colleagues to continue, in their respective parliaments, to fight this grave violation of children's human rights, including on the occasion of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (to be marked each year on 18 November).

Turning to the focus of the meeting, **the Chairperson** recalled that the Cyprus pilot project (May 2013 - April 2016) had been co-funded by the A.G. Leventis Foundation and coordinated by PACE. As Contact Parliamentarian for Cyprus, she had been involved in the project, and was proud that it had led to many great achievements in Cyprus, inter alia: the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus had ratified the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Convention and had adopted a law to fight sexual violence against children in Cyprus which constituted a major step forward. Moreover, the Government had decided to set-up an Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee to draft a National Policy against sexual exploitation, sexual abuse of children and child pornography and had decided to found a Children's House modelled on the Icelandic *Barnahus*. A training programme had been launched in 2015 and was being continued until the end of the project in April 2016. It had been tailored to the needs of the different stakeholders, in order to help design the Children's House and reinforce child-friendly justice for victims of sexual violence. The press conference on the occasion of the first European Day (18 November 2015) had

¹ Draft minutes approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 2 June 2016 in Paris.

been relayed on all Cypriot TV channels and had promoted the new animated video “Tell someone you trust”. **The Chairperson** expressed her confidence in the sustainability of the project, thanks to the staunch support of Ms Anastasia Papadopoulou and the experts recommended by the Council of Europe to design and implement the Children’s House, and trusted that all the partners involved in the project would continue their co-operation. She thanked Mr Bragi Guðbrandsson and Mr George Nikolaidis for having agreed to train Cypriot stakeholders on the Lanzarote Convention’s requirements in case-management, and on the Icelandic Children’s House model. As a foundation for changes in Cyprus, this project was also a great example for all parliamentarians, because it was not only a question of ratification of the Lanzarote Convention but also of implementation.

The Chairperson introduced the speakers of the meeting:

- Mr Anastasios Paul Leventis, Chairman of the Board of the A.G. Leventis Foundation
- Ms Anastasia Papadopoulou, expert appointed by the Council of Ministers to compile a National Strategy and member of the project Steering Group
- Ms Leda Koursoumba, Cyprus Commissioner for Children’s Rights and member of the project Steering Group

and two partners of the pilot project:

- Ms Eleni Karayianni, psychologist at the University of Cyprus, who had participated as an expert in the Network meeting in June 2015 on the issue of the treatment of sex offenders. She had co-ordinated the research on the prevalence rate of sexual violence against children in Cyprus
- Mr Joseph Varughese, General-Director of the Cypriot NGO ‘Hope for Children’ who was an active partner in the pilot project.

Exchange of views with invited speakers

Mr Anastasios Paul Leventis, Chairman of the Board of the A.G. Leventis Foundation

Written speech appended (appendix 1)

Ms Anastasia Papadopoulou, expert appointed by the Council of Ministers to compile a National Strategy and member of the project Steering Group

Ms Papadopoulou stated that the results of the project were very clear. The research by the University of Cyprus had led to a reappraisal of the problem of sexual violence against children in Cyprus. Legally-speaking, condemnation of perpetrators was also an important issue. The ratification of the Lanzarote Convention and the adoption of a law were milestones but were not sufficient, as the issue should be seen in a comprehensive manner, not just from a legal point of view, but also a social one. Appropriate training for all professionals was thus central.

Ms Papadopoulou noted that this was the first time that the Cypriot authorities had recognised their responsibility to protect children. The Steering Group of the project had trained a lot of professionals and created a more coordinated action as well as good co-operation between stakeholders. It had succeeded in its request for a National Strategy to fight sexual violence against children: the National Strategy and a three-year Action Plan had been adopted on 21 March 2016. The National Strategy and Action Plan were comprehensive. They included important provisions such as:

- concerning primary prevention, compulsory sex education for children from the age of 6. All teachers would be trained accordingly and this course would be included in their curriculum. The media would be trained and the advertising association would change its guidelines. A website would promote campaigns;
- concerning secondary prevention, Welfare Services would train professionals and create a new tool. The doctors’ association would create a handbook;
- concerning tertiary prevention, i.e. avoiding the re-victimisation of children, the planning of a Children’s House was well underway, with a multi-functional team which would conduct a special interview of the child victim, by means of new technology.

In terms of research, Cyprus would apply for funds under the EU’s “Daphne” programme.

As a response to a call for an independent evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan, a committee called 'The Voice', comprising representatives of the intergovernmental sector and NGOs, would be created.

In conclusion, **Ms Papadopoulos** stressed that the current situation was the result of the Council of Europe's action in Cyprus. The next step was now the implementation of the Action Plan.

Ms Leda Koursoumba, Cyprus Commissioner for Children's Rights and member of the project Steering Group

Written speech appended (appendix 2)

Discussion

Taking as a starting point that Cyprus was a small country, **Baroness Massey** wondered if such results would have been achievable in a larger and more diverse country like the UK.

Ms Günay announced that the Turkish Parliament had set up an investigation committee to stop sexual violence against children. She would like to share this good practice and those existing around the world.

Ms Kyriakidou, first Contact Parliamentarian for Cyprus, reminded those present that she had attended the conference to launch the ONE in FIVE Campaign in Rome. She congratulated all the members of the project Steering Group which had implemented an excellent programme that led to concrete results in Cyprus. She warmly thanked the Leventis Foundation.

Mr Barilaro congratulated Cyprus on their important advances in the fight against this violation of the human rights of the children, and noted that Cyprus had also hosted a meeting of the Network of Contact Parliamentarians in May 2014. Regarding funding, he said that any voluntary contribution, even a small amount, would be beneficial for the cause and for the continuation of the activities of the Network. He thanked the Leventis Foundation.

The Chairperson agreed that any contribution would indeed be welcome to support the activities of the Network.

Ms Rapti thanked the Network which was of a great support to her work as coordinator of the Greek ONE in FIVE Campaign the last three years. Among her 200 activities, she had distributed leaflets, held 63 meetings with institutions to create alliances and had visited 60 municipalities. She presented two new campaign tools:

- a fairy tale "Kiko" translated into Braille in Greek and in English
- a short animation video "Miki" (which means "Victory" in English) to teach children about body ownership and how to react.

She also informed the Network of two new tools under preparation to be presented at the next meeting of the Network and thanked the Leventis Foundation for the launch of the campaign in Cyprus, underlining the need for private funding.

Answering Baroness Massey, **Ms Karayianni** highlighted the need for data to support public policies. In Cyprus, a survey had been conducted in the framework of the pilot project, thanks to the support of the Council of Europe and the Leventis Foundation. Using the ICAST questionnaire, the research had shown the prevalence of sexual violence against children in Cyprus, something which had been questioned in Cyprus beforehand. The research had served as a basis to change policies and behaviours, unveil taboos and had enabled this excellent result.

Mr Varughese stated that an NGO was able to raise public awareness, but its efficiency relied on good public policy. Thanks to the coordinated action of all the stakeholders, the project had led to the establishment of a good policy in Cyprus.

For **Ms Papadopoulos**, whatever the size of a country, success was dependent on a set of fundamental principles: true co-operation between stakeholders and a strong legislative basis. In this sense, the Cypriot experience was a great example, overcoming a previous lack of co-operation.

Ms Koursoumba emphasised that the Parliament had taken the lead, followed by the Government, with an exceptional involvement of civil society, and it was this which had created such a dynamic in Cyprus. Thanks to the project, all actors had been willing to act quickly. Since 2008, her Office had been working very hard on the same subject, but with no positive reaction at political level. When she had suggested introducing sex education in the curriculum, the media had accused her of inciting children to have sex.

Baroness Massey drew attention to the fact that complex steps punctuated the decision-making process in the UK. The first thing to be done was to convince ministers to support a campaign. In the UK, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for children had achieved good co-operation with all sectors of civil society, but the government had not been involved.

Mr Leventis stated that thanks to the Council of Europe management and to the involvement of all the stakeholders, both the Parliament and the Government had been convinced to act effectively. For the Leventis Foundation, the project had been a great success which should continue. It was a great example for other countries.

The Chairperson then welcomed the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, and gave her the floor.

Update on the recent activities of the Council of Europe to stop sexual violence against children

Ms Battaini-Dragoni started by giving an update on the ONE in FIVE Campaign, which came to an end in November 2015 having achieved many successes and having attained all its objectives. Two more States, Germany and the Slovak Republic had ratified the Lanzarote Convention, thus reaching a total of 40 Parties. Estonia would soon ratify. She called on the parliamentarians of the 6 remaining States (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Ireland, Norway and the UK) to work towards a rapid ratification of the convention. The procedure was well advanced as concerned Morocco's possible accession to the Lanzarote Convention – which was open to non-Council of Europe member States. The European Union had expressed its interest in acceding to the convention, another very positive development.

The first edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse on 18 November last year had been a real success. This European Day had been the occasion for the Council of Europe to launch a new awareness-raising animation on child sexual violence and the Lanzarote Convention: "Tell someone you trust", aimed at children aged between 9 and 13. Partners in 23 Council of Europe member States, as well as international NGOs and other stakeholders, had organised events on the occasion of the Day and many had translated the video into their national language. The Parliamentary Assembly had also been very active in celebrating this Day: the former President, Anne Brasseur, had made a statement on the occasion of the Day, and many parliamentarians had organised or participated in events in their countries. Last but not least, on 9 December 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly had organised a balloon launch in front of the Council of Europe with the participation of local schoolchildren.

Ms Battaini-Dragoni encouraged the participants to look closely at the first implementation report on the "protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust" adopted by the Lanzarote Committee on 4 December last year. This report identified both good practices and possible shortcomings. She also encouraged them to study the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 March 2016, and support its implementation which would be guided by an intergovernmental committee of experts – the CAHENF.

Finally, she congratulated the Network for its excellent work regarding the protection of children.

Discussion

The Chairperson thanked the Deputy Secretary General for sharing the enthusiasm of the Network since the beginning. She agreed with the need to network between different stakeholders at national level.

Ms Pecková informed the meeting that the Czech Parliament had already ratified the Lanzarote Convention last October.

Mr Barilaro considered that it would be difficult to maintain the dynamics of the campaign in 2016, and asked what would happen in 2017, as the problem was far from being solved. Today, more and more adults who had been sexually abused as children were speaking out, but children themselves remained silent with shame and guilt for many years. He urged the Deputy Secretary General to continue to view the situation of these children as a priority. This pilot project could serve as a basis to ask countries to adopt a similar model.

The Chairperson supported this proposal.

Reminding the meeting of the five years of the Network's involvement in the ONE in FIVE Campaign and the expertise provided, **Ms Fataliyeva** wanted to continue the fight for the well-being of the children. She recalled the campaign activities in Azerbaijan. Cyprus was a good example to follow. New challenges, for example for refugee children, should also be tackled.

Ms Battaini-Dragoni confirmed that the question of refugee children was indeed important. With so many ratifications of the Lanzarote Convention, she stressed that the role of parliamentarians should now be to follow up on its implementation, including discussions with the members of the Lanzarote Committee.

The Chairperson recalled that a parliamentarian always participated in the meetings of the Lanzarote Committee. She thanked the Deputy Secretary General, the speakers and all participants for their most valuable contributions and closed the meeting.

Appendix 1

Speech by Mr Anastasios Paul Leventis

Madame Chairperson,

Dear Members of the Committee,

Three years ago the A.G. Leventis Foundation decided to accept a proposal by the Council of Europe to co-fund the One in Five Campaign in Europe, by promoting a pilot program in Cyprus. We accepted, not only because it was submitted to us by a good friend to Cyprus who was also a member of this Committee, Sir Alan Meale, but also because the whole proposal struck our Trustees as of such fundamental importance to society that it could not be ignored.

The primary concentration of the A.G. Leventis Foundation relates to culture, education and, in more recent years, to environmental sustainability, so this proposal would, at first sight, seem to fall outside the normal scope of the Foundation's activities. On deeper analysis, however, our Trustees recognised that the protection of children must be included as a fundamental pre-requisite in any civilised society's culture. As observed by my colleague Anastasia, there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.

At the time the proposal was received, Cyprus had in fact signed the Lanzarote Convention (in 2007), but had not ratified it nor set in train the preparations essential for its application. Our Trustees noted that the proposal defined the primary purpose of this collaboration between the Foundation and the Council of Europe as the placing of Cyprus in a position to ratify and implement the Lanzarote Convention by the end of 2016. This deadline clinched the argument for us, as we like to see projects completed to specification, within a given time-frame. In the event, Cyprus did not ratify the Convention in 2016. It did so in 2014, one year into the execution of our co-operation and the Convention has, in fact, been in effect in Cyprus since the 1st of June 2015.

How was this implementation of the agreement between the Council of Europe and the A.G. Leventis Foundation achieved? A Steering Committee was formed which included not only the Cypriot Contact Parliamentarian, our Chairperson here today Mrs Stella Kyriakides, but also six institutions and organizations selected as Partners to the Council of Europe for the project. These were the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights, the Municipality of Nicosia, the Committee for Combatting Violence in the Family, Unesco, the non-governmental organization Hope for Children UNCRC Policy Centre and the University of Cyprus.

I must confess that I did not expect the Committee to achieve these results in this short period of time, even though I was well aware of the passion and dedication that every single Partner brought to the issue. In these three years, the Steering Committee managed to influence the political discourse to the point where decisions giving effect to a complete overhaul and re-drafting of relevant legislation in Cyprus could be taken. These actions and the public impetus created by the promotion of the One in Five Campaign, led to the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention, following which the Steering Committee took the lead in suggesting to the President of the Republic, the adoption by the Government of Cyprus of a National Strategy. On March 21st, the National Strategy and a complete action plan for the next three years were adopted by the Council of Ministers of Cyprus. Strategy and Plan were designed with the active participation of the Committee to deal with the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in a holistic manner, involving for the first time not only all relevant government services, but also non-governmental organizations, professional associations, sports associations and the media.

As the Chairman of the A.G. Leventis Foundation I can express to you the great satisfaction of our Board of Trustees on the success achieved in Cyprus by your Council of Europe initiative. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Social Affairs Committee of the Assembly and the Secretariat, for this fruitful co-operation and for the opportunity it has afforded Cyprus in moving towards what must surely now be an example of international Good Practice, in the protection of its children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Appendix 2

Speech by Ms Leda Koursoumba



It is, indeed, an honor for me to have been invited, to speak before the PACE Network of Contact Parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children, about my experiences from the implementation of the Pilot Project of the Council of Europe “One in Five” Campaign, in Cyprus.

Honorable members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Despite the long history of efforts to combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, one of the worst forms of violation of children’s rights, this continues to be a major social problem faced by European societies today.

This unpalatable truth, underlines the need to enhance our efforts to eliminate all forms of sexual crimes against children. A prerequisite for states to achieve that, is to have in place an effective and wide-ranging legal framework as well as a comprehensive strategy. Thanks to the Pilot Project of the Council of Europe “One in Five” Campaign, as the Cypriot Commissioner for Children’s Rights, I can stand before you today and, proudly, say that, Cyprus is now equipped with both of these important tools. Nevertheless, to reach that, the road has been long.

The fight against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children was never a terra incognita in Cyprus. The Social Welfare Services and the Police played, for many years, a leading role in this. Their efforts, however, were confined, mainly, to repressive actions using, as their main tool, the penal code. Public awareness raising, if any, was confined to the media coverage of specific criminal cases. It goes without saying that, efforts aiming at empowerment of children were very limited.

The establishment of an independent children’s rights institution, in 2008, is one of the most significant milestones for the promotion of children’s rights in Cyprus in general, but, also, for the efforts to combat sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children in the country. As the first Commissioner for Children’s Rights, I placed very high in my agenda the fight against sexual abuse of children. From the outset, I undertook a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from addressing the Government and the Parliament (in relation to the exercise of both, Legislative power and Parliamentary control) to activities aiming at raising awareness of the society at large, adults and children, and empowerment of children. Actions undertaken by my Office to this effect, included public interventions and communications, aiming, either to raise awareness on the issue and to emphasize the need for measures to be taken or to scrutinize specific practices and procedures (e.g. the manner of taking testimony of children in cases of alleged sexual abuse) and, where appropriate, to express publicly my disagreement with Court decisions on sexual abuse cases

Having identified the lack of planning and coordination among the various stakeholders in the field, one of my main priorities, was to call for the need to establish a National Strategy and an Action Plan for preventing and combating any form of abuse against children; and for child - friendly treatment of the victims, both within and outside the family context. In this respect, I addressed the competent Minister for collaboration in calling upon all stakeholders, both governmental (e.g. Social Welfare Services, Mental Health Services, Police) and non-governmental, in an effort to identify roles/responsibilities of each sector and agency in preventing violence against children.

In November 2010, I attended in Rome, the launch of the Council of Europe ‘One in Five’ Campaign to Stop Sexual Violence against Children in Europe. Thereafter, I felt duty- bound to mobilize all concerned in Cyprus towards achieving the two goals of the Campaign. In this respect, I urged the competent Minister to take the initiative for establishing a “National Committee”, comprising all stakeholders (e.g. government agencies, Children’s Rights Commissioner, NGOs, civil society, local authorities, media, parents, unions of all levels of education) for the coordination of the Campaign in Cyprus. At the same time, I appealed to the Attorney General and the Minister for the need to put in place the legislative framework that would enable the

ratification and implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. Little, if nothing, concrete was achieved, I regret to admit.

However, things began to move only three years later, in 2013, in the context of the Pilot Project “Strengthening national policies to stop sexual violence against children: a Council of Europe project involving pilot initiatives in Cyprus”, under the coordination of the PACE, and co-funding of the A.G. Leventis Foundation.

Thereafter, we witnessed an evident mobilization of all concerned (government Services, independent authorities and civil society), resulting in steady progress with an accelerating pace.

The implementation of the project was carried out by a Steering Group, comprising Ms Stella Kyriakides, Member of the Cyprus Parliament and, at the time, General Rapporteur on Children at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council Europe, Ms Anastasia Papadopoulou, representing the A.G. Leventis Foundation, the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family, the Municipality of Nicosia, the Cyprus National Commission of UNESCO, the University of Cyprus, the NGO “Hope For Children” - UNCRC Policy Centre, and, naturally, the Cypriot Commissioner for Children’s Rights.

The members of the Group worked jointly and separately towards achieving the two goals of the Campaign. They held activities together, but, also, executed their different projects within their respective competences. As Children’s Rights Commissioner, I considered child participation indispensable and, therefore, I caused children to be involved in awareness raising of politicians, society at large and children themselves. My Young Advisors’ Team played an important role in that.

A very note-worthy achievement of the Project was that, we had the first of its kind in Cyprus, epidemiological research by the University of Cyprus, to mark the extent of the problem in the country. That was a deficiency I had often highlighted in my monitoring role. The results, shocking but more or less expected, revealed a ratio of nearly one in four. This provided us, not only with a valuable mapping of the areas needed to be addressed but, also, an additional tool for advocacy, policy-making and awareness raising, purposes.

The major achievement of the project was the enactment of a comprehensive legislative framework, which enables Cyprus to stand against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, more effectively. This was made possible, due to hard, consistent and effective work of members of the Group. As a result, Cyprus adopted a new comprehensive national law in July 2014, paving the way for the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention, which was, in fact, ratified on 12 February 2015. The Convention entered into force for Cyprus, on 1 June 2015.

There is no doubt that, the Project was successful, not only in terms of putting into force an effective and wide-ranging legal framework, but, also, in terms of the awareness raising, sensitization and empowerment of children, their families and society in general, in preventing and combating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children. This was done through a number of events and activities organized Cyprus-wide by all stakeholders, including children. I have to underline here the significant contribution of the Young Advisors’ Team of the Commissioner for Children’s Rights, in reaching out children and youth, but, also, in advocating for a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education.

Very important is, also, the training programme for key stakeholders, in particular, professionals, such as, judges, prosecutors, police, social workers, etc. undertaken by the Steering Group members within the Project.

Honorable members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Before the close of the Pilot Project, the Council of Ministers appointed an Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee comprising 4 Ministers (Welfare, Education, Health and Justice) to take up the task of preparing a National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Child Pornography. Ms Anastasia Papadopoulou, who was appointed, at the same time, Adviser to the Ad Hoc Committee, has recently delivered the draft of an extremely comprehensive National Strategy, taking on board all important elements. The Strategy was approved by the Council Ministers on 23.2.2016 and is now in force. I honestly believe, and have stated so publicly in Cyprus, that, this Strategy answers to all shortcomings to the system I have been identifying throughout in my monitoring of the issue. A very important outcome of the Strategy, is the decision to establish a Children’s House (on the basis of the Islandic Barnahus model), which will answer to the need for introducing child-friendly procedures, as regards support and treatment of the child-victim and family, on the one hand, and prosecution procedures, on the other.

Dear friends,

I started this morning, by saying that the protection of children from all forms of violence and abuse and, especially, the prevention of sexual violence, had been very high in my priorities and one of the main focal points of my activities, since taking up my mandate as Commissioner of Children's Rights. This had been a very lonely road for many years. But not anymore!

Thanks to the institutional support of the Council of Europe and the financial generosity of the A.G. Leventis Foundation, the successful implementation of the Pilot Project on the "One in Five" Campaign, became possible, laying the foundations for an effective fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children in Cyprus, which will enable us to address the shortcomings we have been facing for many years. Thus, I feel duty-bound to express, on behalf of the children of Cyprus, my utmost gratitude to the Council of Europe, the PACE and the A.G. Leventis Foundation, for making this Project available to Cyprus. Allow me to express, also, my gratitude and thanks to those individuals, here present today but also those not present, who have worked very hard to make the implementation of the Project in Cyprus a success. We have now reached a stage, which allows us to feel more optimistic that we can work effectively towards the protection of our children.

Thank you very much.

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

Strasbourg, 21 April 2016 / 21 avril 2016

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