

## MISIJA EVROPSKE UNIJE ZA USPOSABLJANJE V MALIJU – SODELOVANJE MADŽARSKE

## THE EUROPEAN UNION TRAINING MISSION IN MALI – HUNGARY'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE MISSION

**Povzetek** Po omejenem vojaškem posredovanju v Maliju leta 2013 se je Evropska unija odločila začeti misijo za usposabljanje za posodobitev vojske malijske vlade in zagotovitev vojaške pomoči v državi. Glavni cilj tega prispevka je predstaviti podrobno analizo misije EU za usposabljanje v Maliju (EUTM Mali). Avtor začne prispevek z opisom dogodkov, ki so privedli do oblikovanja misije, ter nadaljuje z opisom misije in njenega izvajanja do zdaj. V njem preučuje vzroke za krizo, ki jih misija poskuša odpraviti, in situacijske izzive, s katerimi se EU spoprijema v Maliju, ponudi pa tudi vpogled v vlogo Madžarske v EUTM v Maliju.

**Ključne besede** *Mali, Evropska unija, misija za usposabljanje, vojaška pomoč.*

**Abstract** Following the limited military intervention in **Mali** in 2013, the **European Union** decided to launch a **training mission** tasked with the modernization of the Malian government army and the provision of **military assistance**. The essay's main goal is to provide a detailed analysis of the EU's training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), beginning with the events leading up to the creation of the mission, then proceeding with the description of the mission and its execution so far. The article examines the underlying causes that the mission strives to solve, as well as the situational challenges that the EU faces in Mali. It also provides insight into the role Hungary undertakes in EUTM Mali.

**Key words** *Mali, European Union, training mission, military assistance.*

**Introduction** One of the major events this year was the internationalization of the conflict in Mali, and then the intervention of France against the Islamist extremist groups. The consolidation of the country is now in progress, following the successful French-Malian

military operation, Operation Serval. The European Union, and Hungary in it, participates in the consolidation not only on a political-economic level, but also militarily, as the EU initiated a training mission (EUTM MALI) in the country. Within the framework of this operation, the experts of the member states perform the training and restructuring of the Malian army.

The involvement of the European Union in Mali is not without precedents, as in previous years it cooperated with the leaders of the country in the fields of diplomacy, economy, and security policy. After the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) and the joining Islamist extremist armed groups declared the breakaway state of Azawad in April 2012, the representatives of the EU indicated instantly that they do not support any move that leads to the disintegration of the country of Mali. The organization did not approve sending a military force to Mali, or joining in the French operations,<sup>1</sup> but accepted a plan to provide training and logistical support for the government forces by European soldiers. However, the launch of the mission was delayed by the lengthy talks until the spring of 2013, when “Operation Serval” almost reached its end.

The French managed to eliminate or rout the extremist armed groups, and forced the rebelling Tuaregs and the government in Bamako – with the assistance of the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) – to conclude peace.<sup>2</sup> The reconstruction of the capabilities of the Malian military could start only then. The EU played a significant role in this with its training mission. This is right now one of the most important tasks, as only a strong, well-trained, well-prepared government army can safeguard the reconstruction and guarantee the safety of the country’s populace.

## 1 THE TRAINING MISSION ORGANIZED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012, the President of Mali approached the leaders of the EU, requesting their help to restore the territorial integrity of the country. As the situation in the country was alarming, the meeting of the EU<sup>3</sup> member states on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012 voted to support the territorial integrity of Mali and the restoration of the democratic government and order. The possibility of the launch of a training mission was also raised. The concept of the operation was approved on 10<sup>th</sup> December, and after that Dioncounda Traoré, the temporary head of state of Mali, officially asked the

<sup>1</sup> *A minor group of European states – independently from the later EU Training Mission – provided logistical support for the French operation. These countries are the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Sweden and Denmark. In the early rounds of coordination, Hungary offered a 10 man medical team for Operation Serval that the French acknowledged, but in the end they did not request the sending of the unit. Source: Besenyő 2013, 126.*

<sup>2</sup> *While the peace treaty was considered a substantial success, it does divide the society of Mali. It is thus a question if the case of the former treaties does recur, when the government simply ignored them. In this case, however, another Tuareg rebellion can be expected that could pose a serious threat to the greatly weakened country. Source: Whitehouse 2013.*

<sup>3</sup> *Part of the information used in this chapter originates from the operation’s own webpage. See: <http://www.eutmali.eu/>*

leaders of the EU to launch the mission to train and retrain a part of the Malian army (Council of the European Union 2013e). On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013, at the meeting of the EU's foreign ministers, the representatives of the European countries approved the formation of the training mission to launch in Mali (Council of the European Union 2013f). On the same day, they also decided that the EU would – if necessary – provide logistical and other support for the UN-supervised, but African-led AFISMA (African-led International Support Mission to Mali), too (European Union 2013c). The seriousness of the European initiative is also demonstrated by the fact that the European Union offered 50 million Euros for the operation of the AFISMA in the Mali Donor Conference in the Ethiopian city of Addis Ababa, and asked the other participants to follow suit (Council of the European Union 2013d).

The European Union Training Mission in Mali is planned for a term of 15 months, with a budget of 12.3 million Euros. French Brigadier General Francois Lecointre, who has major experience in Africa, was appointed as the commander of the operation (European External Action Service 2013a). He already conducted a preliminary situation assessment between 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013 to learn about the prerequisites to initiate the mission. After the assessment, the General made quite a disappointed statement about the status of the Malian military, and expressed his opinion that the 15-month mandate of the mission would not be enough for the EU to achieve lasting results in Mali (Reuters 2013b). According to him, the army of Mali should be trained to a level similar to the Chadian troops, experienced in desert warfare (International Crisis Group 2013, 8). The General warned against applying the NATO or the Western model to Mali, as it is less adapted to local circumstances than the Chadian. This is also supported by the failure of the former training activities of the US in the area that was also acknowledged by their political and military leadership. For the same reason, the European Training Mission focuses on unit training instead of individual training. In this framework particular emphasis would be put on forging together the soldiers arriving from different backgrounds (Reuters 2013a). It is a question, though, if the 12.3 million Euros intended for the expenditures of the mission will allow the EU to conduct its activities more efficiently than the United States that spent almost 40 times of this sum (about 520 – 600 million USD) on the training of the Malian soldiers (Nossiter, Schmitt and Mazzetti 2013). In January 2013, the majority of European states – except for the Southern European countries – did not favor the sending of troops to Mali, but their position changed by February 2013. Furthermore, the non-EU member Norway also joined the operation (Marchal 2013). Although the initially planned budget was doubled and the mission received a stronger mandate, the organizing went on slowly. At that time they only planned to train 2500 Malian troops together with the soldiers of the ECOWAS, and decided only later to launch an independent mission. Less than 50 soldiers were originally tasked with force protection, and Belgium was reluctant to offer for the mission its A109 rescue helicopters that provided support for the French in “Operation Serval”. These questions were settled after multiple rounds of coordination, and on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2013 a decision was finally reached about the launch of the training mission (Council of the European Union 2013b).

On 25<sup>th</sup> February, the European Union and Mali have signed the agreement regulating the operation of the training mission (European Union 2013a). The EU originally planned to send 250 military trainers and 200 soldiers responsible for logistics and force protection (European External Action Service 2013b). In the end, the actual EU Training Mission launched with 200 training personnel, a 150 men strong unit providing medical and logistical support and handling administrative duties, and another 150-strong unit tasked with force protection (Council of the European Union 2013a).

The headquarters of the mission are located in Bamako, their work is assisted by a support team set up in Brussels. The training activity itself is not conducted in Bamako, but in the city of Koulikoro, 60 kilometers north-east of the Malian capital. The EU provides only the costs of the operation, while the contributing nations provide for the equipment, salary, and travel of the delegated troops. The military trainers of the EU cannot take part in combat activities - that task is reserved for the French and AFISMA/MINUSMA units - but are authorized to use weapons in self-defense.<sup>4</sup> The mission does fulfill not only training, but also advisory functions – in the fields of leadership and management, logistics, human resource management and human rights – to speed up the reconstruction of the military of Mali and restore the territorial integrity of the country. However, they do not provide financial-logistical support for the Malian government forces.<sup>5</sup> The mission has to cooperate closely with the EU operation in the neighboring Niger (EUCAP SAHEL Niger), as well as with other international and regional organizations participating in the reconstruction of the country, most importantly with the UN, the African Union and the ECOWAS (Council of the European Union 2013c).

The mission supports the country's government in achieving the following goals:

- Restoring of the constitutional and democratic order in Mali,
- Securing the free elections of 2013, according to the plan approved by the Parliament on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013 (Roadmap for Mali's Transition),
- Negotiating with armed groups that reject terrorism,
- Restoring the power of the government in the entire territory of the country,
- Making peace between different communities and ethnic groups,
- Observing and enforcing human rights,
- Neutralizing organized crime and terrorist threats.

<sup>4</sup> *The only problem with that is that the training and equipment of African troops fall considerably short of expectations, thus their deployability – except for the Chadian troops led by the son of the President of Chad, Idriss Deby – is very limited. Possibly these troops would also need the training provided by EUTM MALI. Many have criticized the operational capabilities of the AFISMA operation, funded almost completely from Western sources. Among them, Michael Shehaan, a leading official of the US Department of Defense warned that African units are „completely incapable” that should change (Bamat 2013a). Probably that is why the UN decided that, merging the AFISMA operation, it will create with a politically and financially better founded, broader mandate another, 12600-strong own peace support operation (MINUSMA – UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013 (source: United Nations 2013).*

<sup>5</sup> *Informatics and logistical experts participate in the establishment of the logistics system of the Malian army, but this is financed from EU funds instead of the mission budget.*

The first group sent by the EU, consisting of 70 experts, arrived in Bamako on 8<sup>th</sup> February, where they started to set up the headquarters of the mission, as well as the professional coordination with the authorities in Mali (European Union 2013b). The contingents sent by European states arrived continuously until early in April, when the training itself started. The task of the European instructors, arriving from 22 European states, is to train 2800 Malian soldiers in a way to be able to stand up to the currently better motivated, better equipped and better paid radicals.<sup>6</sup> And let us be clear, there is a serious need for that, since the government forces are so demoralized that they can perform military activities only to a limited extent. In addition, France articulates more and more resolutely that it does not wish to station almost 4000 troops in Mali and that it will withdraw them by the end of the year. It can be seen clearly that the French political and military leadership does not trust the abilities of the reconstructed government army, thus it wants to station a 1000-strong force in Mali which, together with the African troops of the MINUSMA operation created by the UN, would secure the stability restored by the French at a high price (Kolster 2013). According to certain opinions, in order to protect their political and economic interests and maintain the stability of Mali, the French want to bring the EU's training mission to success by any means, and they requested for the same reason to lead the EUTM MALI. In exchange, they provide the largest national contingent for the operation.

The military's restructuring itself will not be an easy task, since there is a chaotic situation in the ranks of the military of Mali, similarly to most of the African countries (Smith 2013). The members of the army are on the one hand underpaid, inadequately equipped, trained and appreciated. On the other hand, they are a serious threat to the country's political structure, which is also represented by the high number of military coups. Maybe due to this, many high-rank soldiers serve in the Malian military, whom the politicians tried to bribe with various positions and promotions, even though they do not possess real military qualifications, experience, and some of them are not able to even read a map. According to a government soldier, 9 out of 10 officers are the sons of officers, thus they are literally "born to be officers" (Thiénot 2013). A considerable part of the army is not suitable for military service because of its age, but the government does not risk pensioning them off, since as unemployed they could instantly take up arms against the leadership of the country. Thus they rather pay them to remain in their barracks. The numbers, training and morale of the military ranks is not satisfactory, as the 2012 events proved. It poses another problem that the 2012 military coup has divided the military of Mali, provoking bloody clashes between the troops loyal to Sanogo, the leader of the coup, and those loyal to the former president, Amadou Toumani Touré (International Crisis Group 2013, 14-16). During the current reconstruction of the army, mixed units are formed,

<sup>6</sup> These countries are the following: France (207 men), Germany (71 men), Spain (54 men), the United Kingdom (40 men), the Czech Republic (34 men), Belgium (25 men), Poland (20 men), Italy (19 men), Sweden (14 men), Finland (12 men), Hungary (10 men), Ireland (8 men), Austria (7 men), Bulgaria (4 men), Greece (4 men), Slovenia (4 men), Estonia (2 men), Lithuania (2 men), Latvia (2 men), Luxembourg (1 man), Romania (1 man) and Portugal (1 man).

consisting of Tuareg, Arab and Black African soldiers,<sup>7</sup> who should trust each other, which, in light of the events of the latest conflict – the execution and “treason” of Tuareg soldiers serving in the military of Mali – will not be easy (BBC 2013). Another problem is that the members of various armed militias fighting against the Tuaregs for years (Ganda Izo, Ganda Koy, etc.) can also join the army, where it is unlikely that their former opponents will greet them warmly. Such a composition of the army incorporates later infightings that could affect the deployability of the army negatively. The majority of the soldiers of the battalions awaiting training have been soldiers for 2-3 years. Several of them have real battle experience, but the military trainers did not insist on that to avoid weakening the troops stationed in the North that are part of the fight against the extremists. They did, however, insist on excluding soldiers that participated in atrocities against the civilian population.

According to the EU plans, after the 15-month-long training, four light infantry battalions would be created that would operate under unified command and training, incorporating artillery, engineering, and logistics brigades, capable also of independent action. During the training, the soldiers of the Malian battalions are prepared in 10-week intervals.<sup>8</sup> They need to get forged together during this time in a way to be able to execute common tasks as a battalion or a company. During the preparation of the troops each nation undertook a different task. The training group created by the Baltic states (Finland, Sweden, Lithuania and Estonia) and the 31-man group composed of British and Irish instructors provide mostly light infantry training, another British group prepares artillerymen, the Greeks provide intelligence training, the Hungarians train snipers, while the Germans medical (Hettyey 2013, 5) and engineering-demolitions (Drechsel 2013; Deutsche Welle 2013) units, the Spanish provide special operations (Naranjo 2013), while the Polish logistics training. There are also other nations that carry out other logistical-administrative tasks besides the training, as well as those which, although not actively taking part in the training, have an important role in securing the mission. For instance, the Germans and the Austrians have set up together a field hospital at the training base, the Belgians operate the helicopters of the mission (Bamat 2013b), while the paratroopers of the Czech Republic protect the headquarters, and the French and the Spanish are responsible for the security of the training center. But there are also countries that provide “only” material support, like Cyprus, that sent 2400 pieces of 7.62 mm “Zastava” (a Yugoslav variant of the Kalashnikov) assault rifle for the government soldiers (Bata 2013). Naturally, also those nations that have provided material aid are interested in all aspects of the operation. The French and the Belgians have provided mainly uniforms and other military equipment for the reorganizing units of the Malian military. The logistical-material support provided

<sup>7</sup> *After the previous Tuareg rebellions, the government attempted to coopt Tuaregs into the government forces, and later the Americans in the framework of the “Pan Sahel Initiative” program, but apart from a few exceptions, these initiatives ended with failure. Source: Besenyő 2013, 110-114, 121-122.*

<sup>8</sup> *This time might seem insufficient in the light of the fact that the training of an ordinary battalion lasts 27 weeks. The main problem is not posed by the individual skills of the soldiers, but if they would be able to act as a coherent, well-cooperating unit after 10 weeks of training, and strengthen the positions of the government in the northern territories.*



for the reconstruction of the military is as important as the training of soldiers, as the soldiers of Mali lost a significant part of their equipment last year. As a result, during the joint French-Malian operations several African soldiers may have been waiting for possible action unarmed. Currently the training and equipment of Islamist radicals largely surpasses that of the government troops who would be unable to fight any battle against them. The equipment of the government forces is not financed from the EUTM MALI budget, but through the bilateral agreements of European and other states, as well as through the offers of donor states. The supplying of the Malian soldiers with equipment began simultaneously with the training, which, however, hindered the work of the Polish instructors, as they had to balance the training of the logistics squad with the receiving and commissioning of new vehicles, as well as the dispensing of weapons and equipment to subunits (Chojna-Abarchan 2013).

During the training, additional emphasis is put on the topic of human rights – the issue of women, children and refugees – as well as on the cooperation and communication with the civilian populace, because not only the Islamist extremist militants, but also the government forces of Mali have committed several cases of crimes against humanity in the course of Operation Serval (Amnesty International 2013), as well as during recent clashes (Lunn, Mills and Lang 2013). Several humanitarian organizations are included in this programme, which strived during their lectures to hand over the relevant information and change the attitudes of the Malian soldiers participating in the training. This is also necessary because the EU cannot afford itself to just train the government forces, but also take an active part in the total restructuring and reforming of the military, so the priority of its members will not be to take revenge against the northern Tuareg and Arab minority for recent events (Lacher and Tull 2013).

The training of the first, almost 700-strong battalion started on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013 and finished on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013, when the soldiers in training received the documents certifying the completion of the 10-week training. The training was sealed by a military exercise that was evaluated well by both the instructors and the EU (Tinti 2013). Following the success, the Netherlands and Belgium have also indicated that, revising their former position, they are willing to send troops to the operation. The “Waraba” battalion<sup>9</sup>, led by Lieutenant Colonel Yacouba Sanogo, left the camp after its training to be deployed in the city of Gao in northern Mali, and the European instructors, after a few days of rest, began the training of the second battalion (Tigner 2013). Whether the EUTM MALI is a success story, it will be decided in northern Mali, when the soldiers of the “Waraba” battalion first fight the extremists...

Besides the training mission, the European Union takes an active part in the rebuilding of the country. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013, the representatives of the EU, France and Mali met in Brussels, where they made substantial financial commitments to aid the restoration of the economy, of the political dialogue and democratic processes (European

<sup>9</sup> The name of the battalion means ‘lion’ in one of the languages (bambara) spoken by the locals.

Commission 2013; Spence and Simon 2013). The EU does not only support the election in July with 17 million Euros, but also takes part in its organizing, and sends observers who monitor the observation of election rules.

## 1.1 Hungarian involvement in the EUTM

Hungary stated already early in 2013 that, while Africa is not a part of its closer sphere of interest; it intends to send 5-10 military trainers to the European Union Training Mission (Delaporte 2013). The actual number and type of experts and instructors sent by Hungary depended partly on the country's commitments, partly on the EU's needs, which was clarified in the force generation process and then at the informal meeting of EU ministers of defense on 12-13<sup>th</sup> February 2013 in Dublin.

The country's involvement in the mission was supported by all parliamentary parties except the far-right Jobbik.<sup>10</sup> Thus, according to the decision of the government, the Hungarian Defence Forces contribute at most 15 servicemen (at most 30 in rotational periods) to the mission (Government of Hungary 2013). The Hungarian involvement lasts for a period determined in the mission's mandate, but no longer than 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014. This does not include the time allotted for deployment and extraction. In order to execute the tasks associated with EUTM MALI, the government decided to reallocate a one-time amount of HUF 555 million from the reserve funds for emergency measures.

The preparation for the mission started already in February, where, besides the special (sniper and instructor) training, the assigned troops received training in peacekeeping operations, battlefield knowledge, engineering and medical skills, among others (Markovics 2013). The lack of accessible data about Mali presented a problem; therefore, the Geoinformation Service of the Hungarian Defence Forces created a 220-page "Mali country review" for the liaison officer's takeover in August. The material was already used at the preparation of the senior officer (Besenyő and Miletics 2013). Of the 10-strong Hungarian contingent in Mali, the liaison officer was serving at the mission's headquarters already in March, the medical team of 3 arrived on 18<sup>th</sup> March, while the 6 sniper trainers on 13<sup>th</sup> April. The Hungarian medical specialists are assigned to the German field hospital, along with their German and Austrian colleagues (Fuchs 2013). The members of the Hungarian sniper instructor team started the training almost immediately after their arrival, which they conduct together with the Portuguese (HVG 2013, Székesfehérvár 2013).

During the training it could present a problem that a part of the Hungarian soldiers do not speak French, even though they received language courses during their

<sup>10</sup> The representative of the far-right Jobbik party has vehemently opposed the Hungarian involvement in the EU operation, referring to the fact that Zsolt Németh, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, has offered Hungarian soldiers and equipment (helicopters, etc.) imprudently, and that Hungary has no business in a conflict that erupted due to the fault of Western states, and due to French colonialist interests. Thus they did not vote for the resolution that approved Hungarian participation in the mission.



preparation. However, they are not the only ones, as the military trainers of several countries conduct the training in English. Their briefings and taskings are translated by interpreters for the Malian soldiers (UK Ministry of Defence 2013). Thus, the leadership of the mission has organized a language course for those trainers that speak only English. Another problem is presented by the adaptation to the different climate, as well as the high number of malaria infections. Still, the leadership of the mission is satisfied with the professional performance of Hungarian soldiers.

**Conclusion** In the light of the events thus far, it seems that, while the EUTM MALI can succeed in training the four Malian battalions, the EU cannot withdraw from Mali after 15 months. The country of Mali is still divided, and while they speak about reconciliation and the political-economic integration of the northern regions, the ensuring of the rights of the Tuareg minority still seems uncertain (International Crisis Group 2013, 27-32). The security situation in the country is not stable yet, as a number of refugees have not yet returned to their dwellings (UNHCR 2013), and the decentralization process has yet to begin. There are too many unaccountable, corrupt and incompetent politicians in Malian politics, who are responsible for the recent state of Mali (IRIN 2013). The MNLA still has not laid down its arms,<sup>11</sup> the military is still divided, and the salary, equipment and reliability of Malian soldiers are still and will remain well below expectations, and the soldiers trained by the European instructors will not be sufficient by themselves to secure the country's sovereignty and repel the attacks of the Islamist extremists and other terrorist groups. If the whole military does not undergo a complete restructuring, is not paid well enough and separated from various political groups, then the soldiers will occupy themselves once again with politics and their personal livelihood – including such illegal, but profitable businesses like arms, drug and tobacco smuggling, etc. – instead of their original mission, the defending of the country. Thus the army could remain one of the main sources of instability in Mali.

In my opinion, the results of the work of the EUTM MALI will be realized only after years, when the French and AFISMA troops have already been withdrawn from the country. The experiences of the EUTM SOMALIA operation also show that, where 3 years had to pass until the Somalian government forces trained by European (including Hungarian) instructors could achieve tangible results – still with significant international support! – against the Islamist radical groups. Since the training of soldiers can only achieve partial results, the reconstruction of the country and the restoration of the state apparatus by international – including

<sup>11</sup> This creates a very dangerous precedent, as the French do not let the government forces to enter the region of Kidal, thus the territory is controlled by MNLA militants. Thus there are in fact two militaries operating in Mali. It is not known, when and with what guarantees will the Tuaregs lay down their arms, even though the government and the MNLA have officially concluded peace in the end of May. Source: International Crisis Group 2013, 10-12.

EU – aid and subsidies are also needed.<sup>12</sup> This has already started according to the plan created by the government of Mali, the ‘Plan for the Sustainable Recovery of Mali 2013-2014’ (Republic of Mali 2013), but for the realization more time is needed than the 15 months of EUTM MALI. The region and Mali in it can be stabilized only by a long-term, detailed – economic, social, migration, humanitarian, security – “action plan”, supported by the investment of substantial financial resources. But, if the EU wants to assure that the Malian government does invest the provided financial support efficiently, then it must remain in the country and actively influence the reconstruction and restructuring of the country. The exact details of that must be determined by the decision-makers of the European Union.

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<sup>12</sup> To make Mali operational, the wider Sahel region (Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, Libya, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria) must be supported, due to the vulnerability of these states and the security vacuum that was present in the region for decades – and reduced only temporarily by the French military intervention. If this will not happen, the Islamist extremists – as the “multinational” rebel and terrorist groups cannot be withheld by the otherwise unguarded borders – will simply move on to the next country, for instance Niger, and start over all that led to the intervention of the international community in Mali. The use of aid must be supervised strictly, of course, as, according to experiences; the majority of earlier aid was not used for purposes meant by the donors (Good Governance Africa 2013).

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