

## **THE INTEGRATION OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*THE AIM OF THIS PAPER IS TO EXPLORE THE EXTRAORDINARY DIVERSITY THAT CHARACTERIZES THE EUROPEAN UNION NOWADAYS AND HOW STATES RESPOND TO THIS CHALLENGE, THROUGH POLICIES DESIGNED TO INTEGRATE MINORITIES EXISTING WITHIN THEIR OWN SOCIETIES. AFTER THE 2<sup>ND</sup> WOLD WAR, THE EU MEMBER STATES HAVE NOT ONLY ALLOWED BUT ALSO ENCOURAGED IMMIGRATION AND UNTIL TODAY, THIS UNSTOPPABLE PHENOMENON LED TO THE CREATION OF AN IMPRESSIVE MULTICULTURAL LANDSCAPE. EUROPEAN MUSLIMS BECAME PERMANENT RESIDENTS AND WERE SUBJECT TO INTEGRATION POLICIES WITHIN THE HOST COUNTRIES. OF COURSE, NOT ALL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES WERE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY BE INTEGRATED, THEREFORE THE EUROPEAN UNION CONFRONTS ITSELF WITH A PARTICULAR NUMBER OF PROBLEMS. SOME FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES NEED TO BE ADRESSED AND QUESTIONS NEED TO BE ANSWERED. WHAT DETERMINED THE MASSIVE MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS WAVES? ARE THE EU MEMBER STATES, ESPECIALLY THE WESTERN ONES, ABLE TO INCORPORATE WITHIN THEIR STRONG SECULAR SOCIETIES, A COMMUNITY THAT IS DEFINED MAINLY BY ITS AFFILIATION TO THE ISLAMIC RELIGION? IS THERE A REAL MUSLIM PROBLEM?*

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**KEY WORDS:** INTEGRATION, MUSLIMS, EUROPE, IMMIGRANTS, ASSIMILATION, ACCULTURATION

### **INTRODUCTION**

Europe today is characterized by a diversity never seen before, which resulted because of the ideals of creating a space of tolerance, of understanding, of diversity, in terms of ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious factors, that do not need to represent a barrier, but an element that enriches each nation individually. The European Union, a modern version of the Tower of Babel, was thought to represent a building designed to create a de facto unity between various nations, focusing on mutual respect and unity.

This phenomenon imposed new types of challenges to the European identity, especially in terms of its structure. Beyond the ideals that sit proudly on the highest pedestal, Europe is still in search of a complementary identity, trying to trace the guidelines for action and create one voice that matters in a greater extent, in the game of international relations. Because of the non-European

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immigration Europe, especially the Western continent, had to face decisions involving the rethinking of values that are believed to be essential for Western societies and to reconsider its position towards these “others” who “refuse” to be integrated.

One of the objectives of the EU common policy on the phenomenon of immigration is about creating a policy that targets a specific immigrant populations’ integration which implies, in particular, to ensure non-discriminatory treatment on their territory and guarantee certain rights and obligations comparable to those of the European Union citizens.

The concept of integration is one very difficult to define, being understood and applied in different ways, but in order to make a conclusive analysis of the situation of the Muslim population in the European Union member states, an overview of the phenomenon of integration is at least required<sup>2</sup>.

### THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION

The interest in analyzing the integration of immigrants can be correlated with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was at first limited to the US, but then extended to the Western European countries, once they began to encounter the massive waves of immigration. During the first half of the century, it was believed that the immigrants can be assimilated for a period of two or three generations.<sup>3</sup> It was also believed that at the end of the assimilation process, the traces of the visible differences between the newcomers and their children, on the one hand, and the host society, on the other hand, would vanish, with the exception of their resemblance and their names, perhaps.<sup>4</sup>

Another vision is summed up by the “melting pot” metaphor, whose result is the formation of a new culture. Assimilation requires both abandonment, by all parties involved in the process, of certain elements of identity and culture, as well as the preservation of others, which will combine with other cultural elements of either the immigrants or the majority. Assimilation was considered by some as being a largely unilateral process, conducted in several stages, leading to the compliance of the immigrants with the dominant cultural model.<sup>5</sup>

The 60’s marked a reassessment of the so called assimilation. In addition, a second conclusion was drawn, about the fact that despite their integration in the host society and their participation in the institutional framework, the immigrants cannot completely abandon their identity and cannot help but to maintain specific cultural elements of their country of origin. Thus, there are two dimensions of the assimilation process, that do not necessarily coincide: a structural dimension and a different culture<sup>6</sup>.

The first one corresponds to the increasing involvement of individuals and groups into the society and was defined broadly, focusing on an institutional level, while the second one refers to processes of the reorientation of values and the cultural identity of immigrants. When referring to the increasing levels of institutional participation, specialty literature uses the terms integration and acculturation, in order to highlight changes in the cultural perspective. Acculturation is not

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<sup>2</sup> See Ina Raluca Tomescu, *The role of The Security Council in the maintenance of peace and international security*, în revista *International Journal Of Juridical Sciences*, nr. 1/2010, Editura Universității Agora, Oradea

<sup>3</sup> Entzinger, Han & Biezeveld, Renske; *Benchmarking in Immigrant Integration*, European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> The assimilationist models are rooted in the ideas of the Chicago School of Sociology, being particularly related to one of its founding members, namely the American sociologist Robert Park. Costoiu, Andrada, *Modes of Minorities’ Integration: Explaining Historical, Economic and Political Factors*, Journal of Identity and Migration Studies, Volume 2, number 2, 2008, pp. 3-8.

<sup>6</sup> Entzinger, Han & Biezeveld, Renske; *Benchmarking in Immigrant Integration*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

similar to a total assimilation into the culture of the state where the immigrant is settled, but the term rather targets a gradual process by which immigrants take a number of the major elements of the cultural environment in which they entered, without totally abandoning their original cultural identity.

The integration of immigrants is very complex and was understood in different ways throughout the EU member states. The diversity of visions was due to the particular social and political circumstances and contexts in which different countries have made contact with the phenomenon of immigration. However, to have a coherent process we must distinguish between its three major areas: the socio-economic dimension, that has to do with the level of participation in the labor market, the income levels or access to social services, such as housing and education; the political and legal dimension, that has to do with the involvement of the civil society, through the creation of enrollment organizations or a participation policy; and last but not the least important, the cultural dimension, that has to do with the attitudes of the immigrants towards the main rules and norms of the host society, as an example, their language skills<sup>7</sup>. There might also be a fourth dimension that can be added to the previous three, that is the host societies' attitudes towards migrant communities or the host countries' citizens' attitudes towards immigrants, such as discrimination, different perceptions of the majority of the population and the role of media in shaping attitudes towards immigrants. Any policy that aims at promoting the integration of immigrants must have regard to the four issues listed above.<sup>8</sup>

### **INTEGRATION MODELS**

Taking into account these dimensions, several authors have built models that cover a very complex integration process, although these models tend to simplify the actual reality. For example, Hollifield, quoted by Entzinger & Biezeveld<sup>9</sup>, distinguishes between the following three models for Europe: the seasonal worker, the assimilation and the ethnic minorities.

Massive waves of immigration began to be observed, especially at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, encouraged by the labor shortage and conditions offered by the welcoming member states of the European Union. In terms of the post-war period, it was one of reconstruction and industrial development, the simplest solution to the immediate labor shortage was encouraging foreign workers to move to Europe and work. Thus, the Western and Northern Europe as well, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Germany and Sweden received immigrants from Africa, Asia or the Caribbean. Waves of immigration from outside Europe had a strong impact on the colonial heritage of countries such as Britain, France, Belgium or the Netherlands. Along with Germany, France and the UK are the countries with the highest number of immigrants of Islamic faith.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>9</sup> Entzinger, Han & Biezeveld, Renske; *Benchmarking in Immigrant Integration, op. cit.*, p. 15.

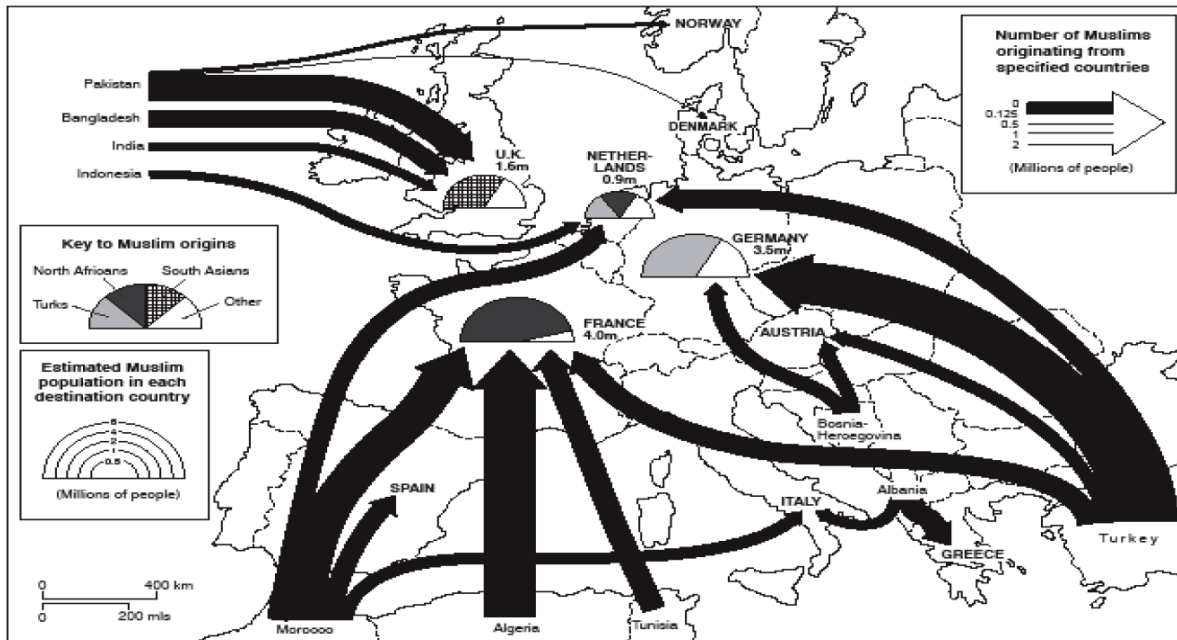


Figure 1: The main European countries welcoming Muslim immigrants<sup>10</sup>

The immigration phenomenon that started around the 50's and 60's continued during the following decades under different forms, either by reuniting families or by hosting refugees. After 1990, virtually all of the European Union member states, including the former communist countries, became targets of the migrants. Today, the immigration phenomenon is almost impossible to halt, the circulation of people taking different forms. "Short-term movements are preferred, often as a strategy to increase revenues, but also the increasing illegal migration has become a widespread phenomenon, more than 500,000 people entering the EU every year illegally".<sup>11</sup>

Muslims form the largest religious minority on the continent, being also very diverse, from an ethnic and linguistic point of view, because they are coming from from different African states, Asian states and Turkey. UK comprises mostly of immigrants from Southern Asia, especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Indonesia. Most of the Muslims in France come from North Africa, from countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Many Turks have immigrated to Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, these three states representing an area of attraction both to the Moroccan and the Turkish population. Recent years have brought migration flows from other regions as well, among them being the Balkans, Iraq, Somalia and Syria.

The theoretical concepts discussed above represent a very useful set of tools that can highlight a number of trends that have marked the integration process of the Muslim immigrants in the EU, particularly in the Western European democracies. Furthermore, the same concepts can be used in order to find an answer to the question: to what extent can we appreciate whether or not the Muslim minority managed to become an integral part of these societies?

<sup>10</sup> Peach, Ceri; *Muslim Population of Europe: A Brief Overview of Demographic Trends and Socioeconomic Integration, with Particular Reference to Britain*, in *Muslim integration: Challenging conventional wisdom in Europe and the United States*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Tartler, Grete; *Identitatea europeană*, Cartea Românească, București, 2006, p. 159. Duță Paul, "The free movement of persons and the borders of the European Union", *Research and Science Today* No. 2(6)/2013, Academica Brâncuși Publishing, Tîrgu Jiu, 2013, pp.96-108.

The situation of the Muslim population in Europe has been much discussed, and most of the conclusions drawn in this respect are leaning towards the view that the member states did not make enough of an effort to host and to integrate these immigrants and therefore they failed in many respects. Giovanni Sartori<sup>12</sup>, claimed that this issue is not properly dealt with by the authorities, that the integration is not done properly and that the authorities are dealing with this issue in a superficial manner. He claimed that it is not enough to nationalize someone and also, that immigrants are useful. Sartori argues that we should not limit ourselves to looking at things essentially in economic terms, because immigrant Muslims mostly, played an important role during the European reconstruction after the war, responding to the labor scarcity that Europe was facing at that time<sup>13</sup>. The problem must be tackled by firstly taking into consideration the factors of social and ethnical policy, essential in a society that incorporates minorities.

The whole process of integration is marked by a high degree of complexity. To portrait a truthful picture of the actual situation of Muslim residents in the member states of the European Union by policies and the way in which each state sought to address the problem, we must take into consideration the multiple dimensions of integration: the social-economic dimension, the political dimension, the cultural dimension, or even the attitudes of the societies of the host countries towards the Muslim communities existence within their territory. These dimensions imply the existence of a series of indicators that are designed to provide an evidence of the extent to which this integration in the community is due to fail or to succeed. This paper does not propose an exhaustive analysis of the integration of Muslim minorities, because a complete analysis, would require a much deeper and more detailed research. As I pointed out above, quoting Giovanni Sartori, a society that is struggling to integrate minorities should focus on the conviviality of the population, between the majority and the minority communities. The most important dimensions of the integration and also the issues that are the most difficult to address are related to the social-economic situation and also the attitudes or opinions formed among the majority population, with regard to the Muslim population.

### **THE SOCIAL – ECONOMIC DIMENSION**

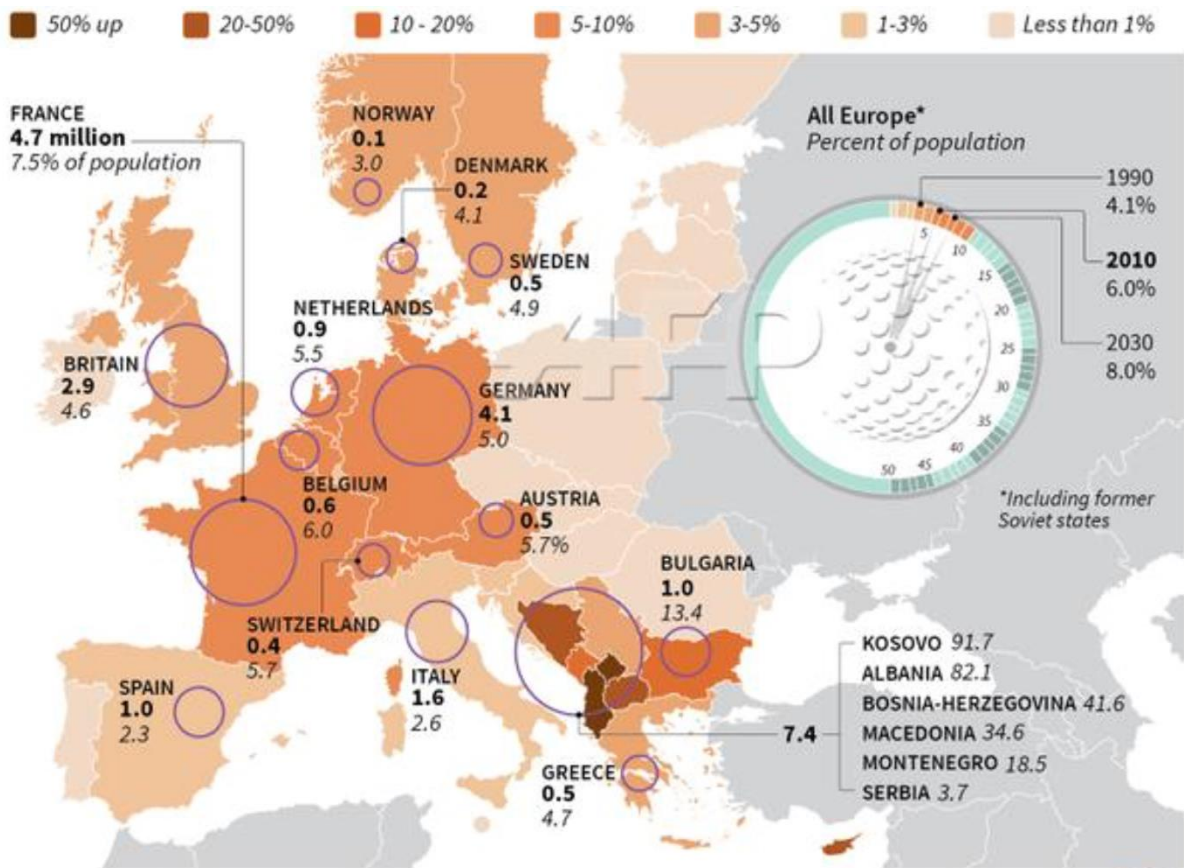
Nowadays, a significant number of the Muslim minority is facing poverty, unemployment, problems with justice and many of them feel discriminated and live with the feeling of cultural alienation, all of the ones above being elements of an unfortunate approach to the integration issue and the failure, at least partially, to find viable solutions to prevent social exclusion, one of the main causes of the extremist actions which are attributed to the members of the Muslim communities.

For example, Austria and Germany perceived the Muslim population as a temporary workforce, for quite a few decades. The question of integration was almost neglected, resulting in parallel societies of immigrants within these countries. On the other hand, Great Britain and the Netherlands have embraced the notion of multiculturalism, focusing on the inclusion while preserving their cultural identity as a difference. In practice, the result was the strengthening of the communities that were isolated from the cultural point of view. Finally, another significant example is the one of France, which adopted the assimilationist model, focusing on achieving equality publicly. Slums, discrimination, unemployment did not spare this part of Europe either.

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<sup>12</sup> Sartori, Giovanni; *Ce facem cu străinii? Pluralism vs Multiculturalism: eseu despre societatea multi-etnică*, București, Humanitas, 2007, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

Figure 2: Muslims in Europe<sup>14</sup>

The data gathered by the OECD<sup>15</sup> indicates the fact that in France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands, individuals having their origins in Muslim countries show significantly worse outcomes in terms of education, compared to a better situation registered in the UK or in Italy. In Germany, around 70% of those with a Muslim background only have secondary education or less, while for the general population there is a rate of 25%. Only 5% have a university degree, compared to 19% of the population at large. In France, 56% have secondary education or less, compared to 46% of the general population. In Spain, 76% have not even completed their secondary education in comparison to the 63% nationally, while 11% have a high education, compared to 20% nationally. Netherlands shows a divergent situation: 50% of those with Muslim origins have no education. In Italy and England, despite the existence of some difficulties, the differences between Muslims and the rest of the population in terms of education level are not so obvious as in the other member states mentioned above.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Greek Reporter.com. Duță Paul, "The migration policies and multiculturalism of the European Union", *Research and Science Today* No. 1(7)/2014, Academica Brâncuși Publishing, Tîrgu Jiu, 2014, pp. 61-81.

<sup>15</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

<sup>16</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne; *Securitization and Religious divides in Europe - Muslims in Western Europe After 9/11: Why the term Islamophobia is more a predicament than an explanation*, 2006, pp. 17-18. Mărcău Flavius Cristian, "Security as a determining factor of quality of life in a state from an insecure regional area," *Analele Universității „Constantin Brâncuși” din Târgu - Jiu*, nr. 4/2015, Seria Litere și Științe Sociale, Editura „Academica Brâncuși”, pp. 77-85.

## ATTITUDES, STEREOTYPES & DISCRIMINATION

The blame for the difficulties of adjustment of this minority cannot be seen from a unilateral perspective. Opinions on this matter are divided based on radical views and are reaching nuanced views that take into account the different contexts and factors that exercised more or less of an influence in the integration process. The European member states needed a long time to really understand what could happen overall, with regard to the immigration problem and Muslim populations in their countries. At first, immigrant Muslims were seen as simple workers, a temporary solution to the problem of the lack of workforce in Europe. Things began to fade from the mid 70's, when considering that Islam started once again to become a benchmark for individuals and societies in the Muslim countries. The situation started to change in the countries where the Muslim immigrants were residing as well. They started to be perceived as individuals with a certain cultural and religious identity features and had certain social expectations.

When referring to the Muslim population in Europe, we must take into account the high degree of diversity that exists among the different communities, not only regarding their origin, but also their language or culture, most of them coming from countries or regions where the Sunni version of the Islam is practiced: Maghreb, Turkey, India or East Africa. Italy and the Scandinavian countries host a significant number of Shiites immigrants that have their origins in Iran, either students or political refugees. Despite of these sensitive differences, the Muslim population in Europe is regarded generally as a whole, religion being the main link between them.

Sartori makes a distinction between Islamic states and Muslim countries, the first being strongly marked by religion, like Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran and Afghanistan, while others are less indoctrinated, some may even aspire to the status of a secular state, Turkey being a conclusive example, or at least incorporating some elements of secularism as a result of the Western influence, such as Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

Sartori analyzes the situation of Muslim immigrants in Europe, considering them the most “foreign” and the most difficult to integrate, “the trauma of the transplantation is for him (the Muslim immigrant) stronger than for others and, therefore, the uprooting makes him particularly receptive to change. But here is the question, in which direction?”<sup>18</sup>

The Italian theorist adds that the notion of Islam means abandonment “in the arms of the Divine Will”<sup>19</sup>. An Islamic state is theocratic and religious, therefore Sartori suggests a certain number of incompatibilities between Western states and the Islamic values. The evolution of these incompatibilities depends on their desire to be integrated into the societies in which they live.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was to prove that, despite the postulates of “unity and diversity” of the EU member states, there is a problem of approaching the minorities situation. In particular, most challenges come from the Muslim communities carrying a big set of apparently irreconcilable differences, with the traditional values of the Western countries. The answer to the previous addressed question, which of the two approaches was the most inspired and had the most favorable results, is extremely difficult to answer. France, on the one hand, opted for ignoring the difference and therefore, today the Muslim community claims power and recognition in the public space and

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<sup>17</sup> Sartori, Giovanni; *Ce facem cu străinii? Pluralism vs Multiculturalism: eseu despre societatea multiethnică*, București, Humanitas, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> Sartori, Giovanni; *Ce facem cu străinii? Pluralism vs Multiculturalism: eseu despre societatea multiethnică*, București, Humanitas, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

a series of specific rights. On the other hand, the English multiculturalist model was accused of having encouraged the creation of minority enclaves in the society. The problems in the two countries are similar, as in most of the countries where there is a quite high number of Muslim residents, even though they opted for different approaches when it comes to the integration models. These issues relate to a significant degree of socio-economic marginalization and development of stereotyped images about the Muslim community in the host societies, images which degenerated into the development of discriminatory attitudes.



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