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in networks by weak actors.
The case of hydrocarbons exploration
in Cyprus

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**Exploiting opportunities of decision-making
in networks by weak actors.**

The case of hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus¹

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Summary

Natural gas discovery in Block 12 constitutes a positive prospect for the economy of the Republic of Cyprus that experiences an unprecedented economic crisis. However, the right of Cyprus for hydrocarbons exploration was never taken for granted. Turkey, a powerful country that illegally occupies the 36% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, never accepted this right of Cyprus. Thus, the aforementioned discovery can be characterized as a political success of the militarily weak island of Cyprus. The transition from a bilateral dispute -between Cyprus and Turkey- to a network-structured game and the continuous enhancement of its strategic position in the network enabled Cyprus to explore its offshore area, something unthinkable a decade before. Cyprus needs to maintain and even strengthen its position in the network since the game continuously changes creating both opportunities and threats.

Keywords:

Cyprus, power position, actors, Turkey, network, rounds model

“It takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background information

In October 2008, Republic of Cyprus and Noble Energy Inc. reached an agreement for exploration license on the Block 12, located in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Cyprus. In December 28, 2011, Noble Energy announced that a natural gas field was discovered in Block 12. According to the announcement, '*the natural gas discovery in Cyprus Block 12 has estimated gross mean resources of 7 trillion cubic feet (Tcf)*' (Noble Energy Inc., 2011). The confirmation drilling is now carried out in Block 12 while exploration process in other areas in Cyprus proceeds. The aforementioned natural gas discovery triggered an unprecedented investment plan in the island and constitutes the major hope of Cypriots for economic recovery.

The natural gas discovery is the result of over a decade of efforts and political maneuvers of the militarily weak island of Cyprus to explore its natural wealth in a complex geopolitical environment. The illegal Turkish occupation of the 36% of the area of the Republic of Cyprus and the position of the island of Cyprus in the crossroad of three continents are the main attributes of the aforementioned complex geopolitical environment (Security Council UN, 1974).



Source: (WorldAtlas, 2013)

1.2 Methodology and Structure

The analysis conducted in this paper is an *ex-post* analysis of the decision-making process at international level regarding the efforts of Republic of Cyprus, during the period 2000-2011, to explore its natural wealth. Literature study related to decision-making in networks was conducted before choosing and applying certain decision-making model to the case of hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus.

In section two, the problem definition from the viewpoint of Cyprus, the research problem and the research question are presented. The rounds model and additional useful notions regarding decision-making in networks are introduced in section three. The described

model and notions are used in section four in order the case of hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus to be analyzed. Research question is answered in section five where conclusions from the analysis and recommendations to the Republic of Cyprus for the next rounds of the process are presented.

2. RESEARCH SETUP

2.1 Problem definition and its wickedness

Any genuine problem consists of a gap between an existing or expected situation and a desired one (Enserink, et al., 2010). In the case of the Republic of Cyprus the problem is *how to proceed to hydrocarbons exploration in its maritime area, given the lack of consensus by a powerful neighboring country*. Namely, Turkey threatens that it will never accept hydrocarbons exploration by Cyprus.

The above defined problem is characterized as a *wicked problem* since a number of properties, introduced by Rittel and Webber as characteristics of wicked problems, appear (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Among them, the most prominent in the case of hydrocarbons in Cyprus are the fact that problem is *essentially unique* as well as the fact that decisions cannot be only assessed as *true-or-false*. The former is justified by the fragile political situation in Cyprus while the latter is the result of the existence of different actors with different assessment criteria. Thus, decisions can only be assessed in a normative way (e.g. 'good enough', 'bad').

2.2 Research problem and research question

The aforementioned 'wickedness' of the problem and Turkish attitude in particular led to a *time-extended decision-making process* which constitutes the *research problem* of this article. Despite the fact that indications for the existence of oil and gas fields in Cyprus were known for decades, Republic of Cyprus only recently achieved to explore these fields. The enormous difference in the geopolitical power of the two states was proven -for several years- a stronger determinant factor than the straightforward implementation of International Law.

Given the aforementioned research problem, the research question is composed of two parts:

- a. *How did Republic of Cyprus address the blocking power of Turkey, in order to exercise its sovereign rights in its maritime area?*
- b. *How could Republic of Cyprus proceed with the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons in its maritime area given the continuous threatening attitude of Turkey?*

3. THEORETICAL MODEL

The *rounds model* is used for the analysis of the decision-making process regarding hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus. The theoretical description of this model is presented in this section and its features that make it the most suitable one are highlighted. The theoretical description of the notion of *power position* of actors is presented as well since it is an essential element of the analysis conducted in the next section. *Rounds model* adopts a rather political perspective than an analytical one. The necessity for this perspective is briefly justified as well.

3.1 The inevitability of political perspective

Allison (1971) describes the *rational actor model* in which a single decision maker makes his decision based on a comprehensive analysis that reveals all the consequences associated with each alternative. However, Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) argue that analysis cannot substitute politics. The fallibility of the analysis, the existence of conflicts of values, time and cost issues as well as different problem formulations from different actors are the four limitations, mentioned by Lindblom and Woodhouse, that make the involvement of politics necessary.

3.2 Rounds model

Certain characteristics that appear in the decision making process regarding the exploration of hydrocarbons in Cyprus make the *rounds model* the most suitable for the analysis. *Rounds model* does not imply that there was an initial theoretical model that was followed by Cyprus. Instead, *rounds model* contributes to an ex-post analysis, resulting in the comprehension of the decision-making process and its products up to a certain moment.

According to Teisman (2000), in the rounds model, multiple actors exist. Each one tries to introduce its own perception regarding the problem definition, the solutions and the political aspects. The notion of framing is very important in this process. Stone (1988) interprets *issue-framing* in political decision-making process as the intention of actors to focus on specific parts of a larger situation.

In each round, actors are organized in *networks* rather than in hierarchical structure. Networks are characterized by the existence of *interdependencies*, thus, no actor can unilaterally impose its position (Enserink, et al., 2010). Instead, the result of the decision-making process is the product of a number of decisions taken by several actors during their *interaction* (Teisman, 2000).

Both *vertical* and *horizontal* division takes place in *rounds decision-making processes* (Teisman, 2000). *Vertically*, time is divided according to the rounds. Each round is determined by some *crucial decisions* that are taken for granted and shape the behavior of the actors in the next round. Such crucial decisions at the end of a round are the result of the interactions of the actors in the certain round. At each round, the number of participants can change. *Horizontally*, actors' interactions deal with the same subject.

Indeed, in the case of hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus, such crucial decisions exist while strategies and interactions among actors characterize the whole process, justifying the selection of *rounds model*. The selected model is applied in the case of Cyprus in the next section.

3.3 Further theoretical tools

The notion of *power position* of each actor constitutes an important theoretical tool of the analysis. The three types of *power position* are defined in this section and they will be used as tools for the application of the *rounds model* in the next section.

An actor that can support problem owner's objectives has *production power*. Actors that can only hinder the activities of problem owner have *blocking power* while actors whose position is not clear have *diffuse power* (de Bruijn & ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Power of actors is derived from their resources, relations and repetition of them. Resources can be -among others- funds, expertise, information, or authority (de Bruijn & ten Heuvelhof, 2008). Problem owner critically *depends* on actors with production or blocking power (Enserink, et al., 2010).

The stronger the power of an actor, the stronger its power position in the network-structure of each round is. An actor can impose its framing to a greater extent when it holds a stronger power position. Thus, power position is of utmost importance in the rounds model. Power position of an actor can change over time. In general, dependency of an actor A on other actors weakens its power position. However, fully independent actors do not exist. Blocking power of an actor A towards other actors strengthen its power position. Production power of other actors towards an actor A strengthens its position as well. The ability of an actor A to influence the relations of other actors is also valuable.

4. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR HYDROCARBONS EXPLORATION IN CYPRUS AS DECISION-MAKING IN ROUNDS

4.1 Arena's description

Arenas are the subjects for which actors or networks of actors interact and decide (van Bueren, et al., 2003), (Teisman, 2000). This essay focuses on the international level since neighboring countries, international coalitions and private companies interested in exploration operations are involved in different rounds of this arena.

Safeguarding the rights to explore potential hydrocarbons reserves is crucial for the whole process. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) constitutes the institutional framework in this arena. According to the Law, EEZ is delimited at 200 nautical miles (370km) from the coastal state's baseline. Bilateral agreements are required in cases where the coasts of two states are adjacent to each other. (UNCLOS III, 1982).

4.2. Initiation of the decision-making process in rounds; Issue-framing

The aforementioned institutional framework is not accepted by all the actors. More specifically, trying to hinder hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus, the Republic of Turkey intends to keep off the agenda the UNCLOS. Thus, Turkey frames its claims in Eastern Mediterranean Sea as follows (Republic of Turkey, 2011):

“The delimitation of the continental shelf or the exclusive economic zone in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is indeed a semi-enclosed sea, should be effected between the relevant states in an equitable manner, taking into account the rights and interests of all parties.”

The second participant in the 1st round of the examined decision-making process, namely Cyprus, frames the problem as following (Republic of Cyprus, 2011):

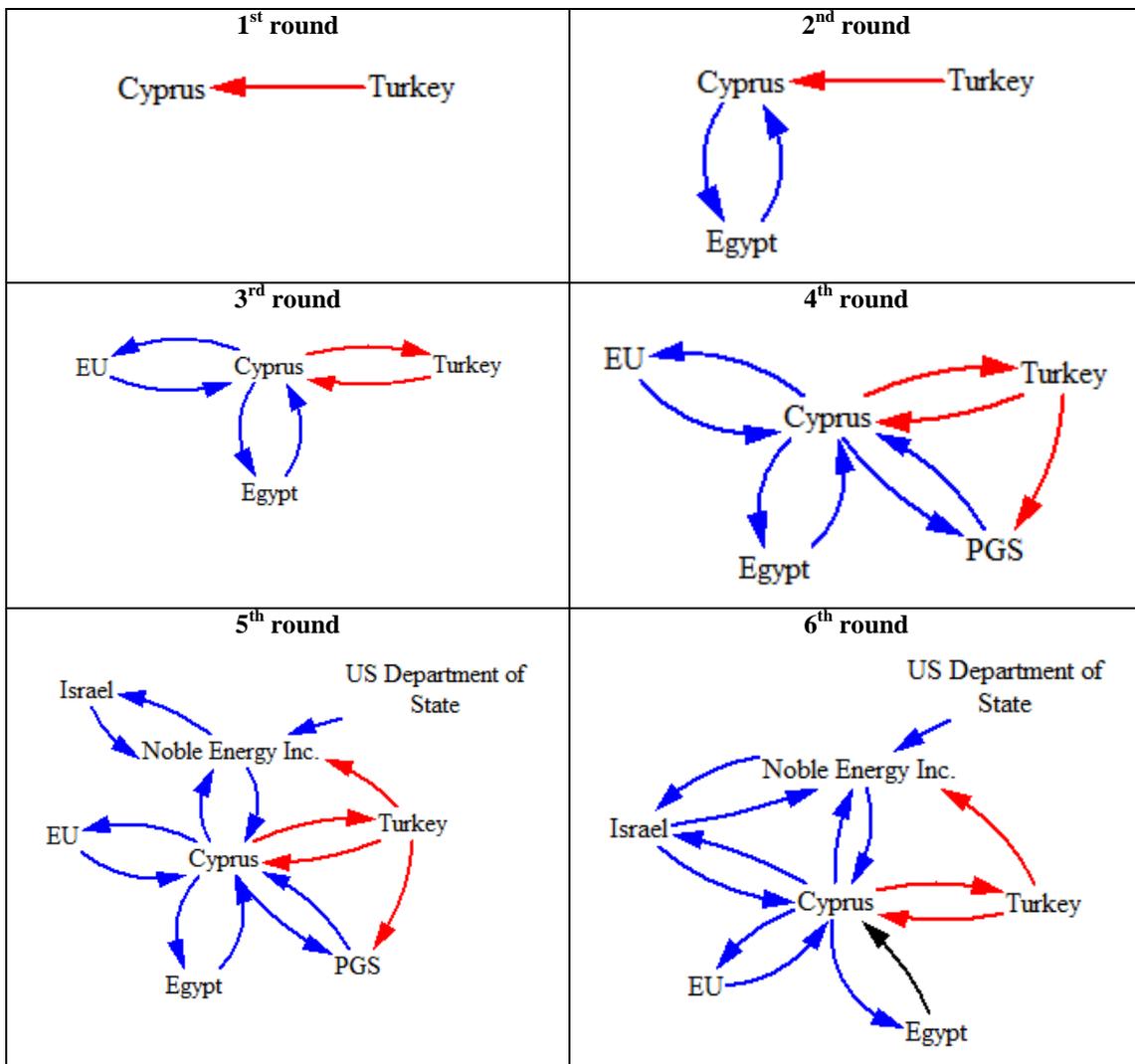
“Each sovereign state has rights for exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing living and non-living resources of the seabed, subsoil and superjacent water according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.”

The above mentioned statements are clear cases of framing in such a way that better serve the interests of each actor. The weak actor, Cyprus, invokes the International Law since knows that it cannot impose its position in a process in which actors' power is the most important determinant of the result. The importance of *issue-framing* is revealed by the different framing of a certain actor in different arenas. Indeed, Turkey, that did not sign the UNCLOS, declared in 1986 an EEZ in the Black Sea, a closed sea, following the method that Cyprus now invokes (DOALOS, 2002). What was considered as an appropriate method in the case of Black Sea is refused by Turkey in the case of hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus. That highlights how the framing changes according to the existence of other actors in the arena and the interests at stake.

4.3 Rounds in decision-making process regarding hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus

The crucial decisions that determine the end of each round and the beginning of the next one are described in this section. In each round, the changes in the number of participants, their power position and the dependencies among the actors are also described. For reasons of simplicity, only dependencies that are closely related to hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus are discussed. However, in a real decision-making process in networks, any kind of relation and information can be used even if they initially seem irrelevant to the case (de Bruijn & ten Heuvelhof, 2008). A graphic representation of the evolvement of the network throughout the process is shown in table 1. An arrow from actor A to actor B indicates that actor A has a power position towards actor B. Blue refers to production power, red to blocking power and black to diffuse power.

Table 1 _ Network evolvement throughout decision-making process in rounds (blue: production power, red: blocking power, black: diffuse power)



1st round

In this round, there are only two actors the power of which is unevenly distributed resulting in a non-network structure. Powerful actor, namely Turkey, imposed its framing, resulting in a long impasse. Despite the indications for potential existence of hydrocarbons reserves in the maritime area of Cyprus, known from the 1980s, the Republic of Cyprus never explores its maritime area due to the *blocking power* of Turkey (Rolandis, 2012). The strong military power of Turkey constitutes the main resource for this blocking power, effectively used in the form of threats of military action (see 1st round in table 1).

Despite the fact that this round actually lasted for decades, the analysis of the decision-making process starts from 2000 due to the long aforementioned impasse. It should be mentioned that this outcome is not interpreted in the same way by the two participants. What is considered impasse from the viewpoint of Cyprus, it is the desired outcome for Turkey.

2nd round

Agreement between Cyprus and Egypt on the EEZ delimitation between the coasts of the two countries demarcates the end of the 1st round and the consequent beginning of the 2nd one. The agreement signed in February 17th, 2003 (DOALOS, 2003). The fact that mutual respect of the agreement is needed in order each state to be able to explore its EEZ creates mutual dependency expressed as production power of both the countries (see 2nd round in table 1).

3rd round

In May 1st, 2004, the Republic of Cyprus enters the European Union (EU) (EC, 2004). From now on, Cyprus is a full member of one of the most powerful unions in the world. Territory of Cyprus is also considered European territory. The evolved dependencies significantly improve the strategic position of Cyprus (see 3rd round in table 1). More specifically, the authority of EU can ensure the security of the island (production power) while potential hydrocarbons in Cyprus can contribute to energy security of EU (production power). At the same moment, Cyprus obtains right of veto (blocking power) regarding the negotiated accession of Turkey to EU a fact that make Turkey to be dependent on Cyprus' attitude (europa.eu, 2013).

4th round

The geopolitical stability in Cyprus is significantly strengthened after the aforementioned decision of the Cyprus entrance in EU. Thus, previous round makes foreign companies more eager to operate in Cyprus. In May 5th, 2006, Cyprus and PGS firm sign an exclusive agreement on seismic surveys in the offshore area of Cyprus (PGS, 2006). PGS expertise contributes to the exploration of maritime area of Cyprus (production power) while Cyprus contributes to the expansion of operations of PGS (production power). However, the dependency of Cyprus on the expertise of PGS constitutes an opportunity for Turkey to try to indirectly hinder the actions of Cyprus through the exercise of its blocking power to PGS (see 4th round in table 1). Indeed, incidents of harassments of the surveys by Turkish warships are reported to UN Security Council and European Commission (Republic of Cyprus, 2011).

5th round

The fact that seismic surveys continued, despite Turkish harassments, resulted in the announcement of the 1st Licensing Round for Exploration in offshore Cyprus (Republic of Cyprus, 2007). During this round, in October 2008, the American company of Noble Energy, already active in Israel, is licensed to explore Block 12 in Cyprus (Ministry of Commerce Industry and Tourism, 2012). PGS still continues seismic surveys offshore Cyprus. The aforementioned relations between a country and an energy company create dependencies between Cyprus and Noble as well as between Israel and Noble. Again, the dependency of Cyprus on the expertise of a company makes it more vulnerable since Turkey can exercise indirect power towards Cyprus. However, at the same time, this dependency strengthens the strategic position of Cyprus (see 5th round in table 1). That happens due to the involvement of an American company and the consequent support of the U.S. Department of State (Nuland, 2011).

6th round

In December 17th, 2010, the Republic of Cyprus and the State of Israel reach an agreement on the EEZ delimitation between the two countries according to the UNCLOS (DOALOS, 2010). The cooperation of the two countries expands to more aspects in energy sector. Israel intends to use the planned LNG plant in Cyprus in order to transfer its natural gas to Europe (production power of Cyprus). LNG plant in Cyprus will be only realized if the exploitation of its natural gas is secured. Due the dependency of Israel on the LNG plant in Cyprus, Israel supports the actions of Cyprus and contributes to the security of the island (production power of Israel). During this round, Egypt's position made unclear, a fact mainly attributed to the upgraded relations between post-Arab spring government of Egypt and Turkey (Sarah, 2013). The current political instability in Egypt confirms the unpredictability of the bilateral relations of the two countries and consequently of the attitude of Egypt towards Cyprus (Suzan, 2013).

Due to the wickedness of the problem, the efforts of the Republic of Cyprus to explore and exploit its natural wealth continue. However, the analysis of the decision-making process in this paper stops in December 2011, when the natural gas discovery from Noble Energy was announced. That was a crucial moment in the decision-making process, indicating the achievement of a weak actor, namely Cyprus, to impose its framing to a powerful actor, namely Turkey. However, the game continues. Turkey still intends to hinder the exploitation of the discovered natural gas and the exploration of other areas in Cyprus (Republic of Turkey, 2011). The conclusions derived from the aforementioned process can be the basis for the recommendations to Cyprus towards future rounds.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The above described decision-making process reveals that Cyprus alone could never explore its natural wealth. The existence of a powerful actor with blocking power constituted an insurmountable barrier for decades. The involvement of a network in which other powerful actors can support the interests of Cyprus was the answer to the Turkish blocking power. Especially, the developed relations of Cyprus with EU and Israel can be characterized as the most important decisions towards the realization of the goals of Cyprus.

The continuous reinforcement of the strategic position of Cyprus after its EU entrance reveals that an enhanced strategic position attracts more supportive actors that further enhance the position of the actor, resulting in a reinforcing feedback loop. However, that means that a possible weakening of the position of Cyprus could trigger an inverse mechanism in which position of Cyprus continuously deteriorates.

The dynamic character of the problem created opportunities for Cyprus to change the game. However, the dynamics of the game can also create threats for Cyprus. Actors may enter or leave in future rounds while the attitude of actors cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, Cyprus has to continue to make decisions in network-like environment where actors with different goals, interests and resources depend on each other.

5.2 Recommendations

De Bruijn and Ten Heuvelhof (2008) suggest a number of strategies that contribute to the realization of actors' goals in a network-like environment. The recommendations that apply in the future rounds of the decision-making process regarding the exploration and exploitation of natural gas in Cyprus are presented in this section.

Actors with production power towards Cyprus should be involved in the process. EU constitutes one of the most powerful actors with production power in the case of Cyprus. However, the ongoing debt crisis in Cyprus and the relevant tough measures decided by European Commission trigger anti-European attitude among people and political parties in Cyprus. At the same time, the analysis of the process regarding hydrocarbons exploration in Cyprus highlights the strong dependency of Cyprus on EU authority. A possible exit of Cyprus from EU could significantly weaken the strategic position of Cyprus in the network. Such an event could lead to undesired situations in which blocking power of Turkey could result in a new long impasse.

The second recommendation has to do with the relation between Israel and Cyprus. The statement of the president of the State of Israel in May 2013 reveals what Israel needs from Cyprus. More specifically, Shimon Peres said that '*without Cyprus, Israel lies far away from Europe*', indicating the dependency of Israel on Cyprus regarding the transfer of natural gas from Israel to Europe (Official website of President of Cyprus, 2013). What Cyprus needs from this coalition is the safeguarding of the security in the area in order Cyprus to be able to explore and exploit hydrocarbons in its maritime area. As soon as Israel achieves to transfer natural gas to Europe, gains of Israel will be made and possibilities for opportunistic behavior from Israel, leaving the coalition will increase. It is important for Cyprus to continue to develop relations with Israel in several levels following a strategy called by de Bruijn and ten Heuvelhof as *giving-prospect-of-gain*. These multi-level relations will reduce the possibility of opportunistic behavior due to the prospect of future gains in several other levels. However, trying to develop and preserve relations with Israel,

the ability of Cyprus to build relations with other neighboring countries (e.g. Egypt, Lebanon) that do not have good relations with Israel will decrease. The aforementioned trade-off should be taken into account regarding this recommendation.

The volatility of the relations between Israel and Turkey, regardless of the cooperation between Israel and Cyprus, reveals the limited ability of Cyprus to influence bilateral relations of other actors. The understanding of this limited ability is important. Reliance of Cyprus on bad relations between Israel and Turkey could be proven a risky strategy since Cyprus cannot influence these relations. An unexpected turn of this relation, that Cyprus cannot control, may dramatically weaken its strategic position. Thus, a positive strategy, in which Cyprus actively builds relations with other actors of common interests instead of relying on bad relations of other actors, could be a wiser strategy.

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Το ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ (ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ) ιδρύθηκε το 1988 και λειτουργεί ως ένα ανεξάρτητο, μη κερδοσκοπικού χαρακτήρα ερευνητικό και επιμορφωτικό ίδρυμα. Μέσω του πολυετούς έργου του έχει αναδειχθεί σε σημαντικό φορέα πληροφόρησης, μελέτης και σχεδιασμού θεμάτων εξωτερικής πολιτικής, και θεωρείται ένα από τα πιο έγκριτα σε διεθνές επίπεδο κέντρα μελετών της Ελλάδας στον τομέα των Ευρωπαϊκών υποθέσεων και των διεθνών σχέσεων.

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