



Middle East Mediterranean

An ELIAMEP Report

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Community of
Tunisia**
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Passalis

**Bilateral
Economic
Relations**
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New Tunisia

*Democratizing a society and
boosting relations with Greece*

Elections in Tunisia: Optimism
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Women's Rights in Tunisia and
Egypt

Cleopatra Youssef

*Monitoring
the Middle East*

Middle East Mediterranean

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Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

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Editor's Note

Like an avalanche the Arab Spring exerted major political influence on the political future of the Arab world. Tunisia's share in this process is considerable given that it was the starting point of the Arab Spring. Given the strategic geographical location and political significance of Tunisia, it has a key regional role in promoting the message of democracy and social pluralism.

The new constitution has laid the foundations for the formation of a modern, secular and democratic society. This society has many challenges to face, challenges which are mainly traced in the field of tradition and stereotyped concepts of the major part of the population.

In light of the above the bilateral relations between Tunisia and Greece acquire a special role in every field: political, economic and cultural.

The current issue of the Middle East Mediterranean focuses on those aspects related to Tunisia and Greece that are expected to have a strong impact on future bilateral and regional developments.

MEM

Analyses

Elections in Tunisia: Optimism and Reserved Stance

Dr. George Tzogopoulos,
Post-doctoral fellow, ELIAMEP

In the next months, the international media will be possibly able to conclude whether Tunisia can be regarded as the single success story in North Africa.

The organization of elections in countries where the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ started, is an issue of interest for international media. That is because democracy can theoretically emerge and be established in a geographical area which had experienced authoritarianism for decades. In that regard, Tunisia could not be an exception. Significant progress has already been made in preparing for the next elections indeed. Ennahda, which had led a coalition government since the 2011 elections, handed over power to caretaker Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa at the start of the year. This followed the approval of a new constitution, under an agreement to end a political crisis triggered by the assassination of two opposition leaders.

Reuters puts emphasis on the fact that Tunisia’s presidential and parliamentary elections will go ahead as planned later this year despite delays in approving a new election

law. The 2014 election to be organized in Tunisia has been also of interest for Chinese media. *Xinhua* news agency has reported on the matter closely monitoring developments. Participants in the Tunisian national dialogue recently agreed on holding presidential and parliamentary elections on separate dates. *Al Jazeera* argues subsequently that ‘oil-poor Tunisia is emerging as the region’s first genuine democracy’. It also adds that ‘this will be an enriching process in civic, social, cultural, political and economic terms.’

Nevertheless, the attention of the media is also turned towards problems that might occur as well as towards obstacles of the democratization process. The *New York Times*, for instance, explains that ‘the true test for Tunisia is still to come’. Within this context, American newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* have focused on encouragement by US politicians to

Tunisian authorities to stay on the democratic path. In particular, Washington has urged the government in Tunis to arrest and prosecute those responsible for terrorist attacks which targeted the US embassy and the American school.

Associated Press interviewed Mehdi Jomaa who considered the security situation in his country as being under control. In his view, the country is only looking forward to new elections by the end of the year, after a transition that has been marked by terrorist attacks, political assassinations and widespread social unrest. But the choice of

international media to keep a reserved stance is understandable. They are highly influenced not only by the political experience in Tunisia from 2011 until 2013 but also by developments in other countries of North Africa such as Egypt and Libya. The good news for Tunisia – as the *BBC* explains – is that although Tunisian democracy faces challenges, the robustness of the country's civil institutions means that it is better placed than in other countries to resist them. In the next months, the international media will be possibly able to conclude whether Tunisia can be regarded as the single success story in North Africa.

major institutions (i.e. National Council of Women), grassroots female activism was flourishing; for decades women had been active members of civil society organizations, trade unions and more informal networks equipped to go out and protest against the corruption of the old regimes. From 2004 onwards the *Kefaya* movement staged protests against corruption and authoritarian rule. The 2007 and 2008 strikes of 20.000 textile workers in Mahalla-al Kubra of the Nile Delta illustrated a limited large-scale collective action prior to the Egyptian Revolts of 2011.

As a result of the contemporaneous revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt (2011), local women became considerably empowered, making a strong presence on both virtual (members of online communities, bloggers, Facebook users) as well as physical level. Women of all ages, highly educated, illiterate, feminists, activists, unemployed, supporters of Muslim Brothers or Leftist parties turned up on the streets en masse chanting, listening, making speeches, distributing food, making banners, tending the wounded, and maintaining this popular stand of defiance. Unlike their male counterparts, female protesters had to put up with the brutalization and harassment techniques used by the states' security forces in order to

deter women from protesting. The Tunisian police and the Egyptian army accused female protesters of prostitution and in some cases forced them to undergo virginity tests during imprisonment.

“Women who protested were sexualized and had their respectability wiped out by arresting them as prostitutes, registering them in court records and press accounts as sex criminals” (Amar, Egypt).

After the revolutions

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions brought together women from all walks of life to join their male compatriots in pursuit of democracy and social justice. Three years later, regardless of the movement's call for reform, the participation of women in the official committees and the political leadership is undoubtedly disproportionate to their active presence in the uprisings. In Tunisia, the country with the most advanced women's rights prior to the Arab Spring, political transition has not provided for better female representation: in 2011 elections, women had secured 61 of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly's 217 seats (27%), however there are only three women ministers (of total 41) and the majority of political parties, including the Islamist party Al-

Nahda that won the elections, had placed men at the top of their party lists. As in Tunisia, Egyptian women figured low down on party lists and managed to occupy only 12 seats of the total 498 in the (disband as of 2013) People's Assembly.

There have been others problems also concerning women's rights in the two countries in the post revolution era. Apart from the minimal political representation, women still face sexual harassment and verbal abuse in demonstrations, celebrations of International Women's day and anniversaries of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Sexual harassment together with a strong Islamic spirit is on the rise in both countries, regardless of whether the women being victimized are dressed in a

Western style or are covered with a headscarf or fully covered (niqab).

There exists a whole array of questions regarding a major inconsistency: so many women taking part in the Arab Spring, yet so few in the new Parliament and so on and so forth. A historical re-ordering of Tunisia and Egypt is on the making on a multiple level involving economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. Yet, despite the sporadic reforms, it is quite uncertain whether the gains of the recent past will be maintained in the future.

"Before Jan. 14, we were asking for normal rights. Now we are trying to preserve the rights we already have."(Mona, Tunisia).

Comments

Economic Relations between Tunisia and Greece

Dr. Evangelos Venetis,
Head of the Middle East Research Project, ELIAMEP

Sharing common interests in the Mediterranean Sea Tunisia and Greece can become active partners in every economic field of trade, investments, scientific and technological cooperation and others.

The democratization and economic modernization of Tunisia mark a new era for the country and the region. The development of economic relations between Athens and Tunis is a *desideratum*. Despite the positive bilateral political and cultural relations, economic relations remain underdeveloped at large. Sharing common interests in the Mediterranean Sea, Tunisia and Greece can become active partners in every economic field of trade (including taxation and customs), investments, scientific and technological cooperation and others.

With regard to the bilateral trade volume, it increased considerably in 2011 and was positive for Greece (11,41%). Greek imports increased by 23,86% and exports were boosted by 75,51%. As far as Tunisian exports to Greece is concerned, these products involve mineral fertilizers (29%), shellfish

alive or preserved (13%), fresh fish (11%), floor wooden leaves (11%) as well as iron and iron steel products (8%). Regarding Tunisia imports from Greece, these involve wheat (48%), cotton textiles (9%), raw tobacco and tobacco wastes (5%), and cotton (4%).

As far taxation and customs are concerned, much time has been wasted regarding the double taxation abolishment. Tunisia is one of the few MENA countries that Greece has signed agreements with (the others are Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar and S. Arabia).

In terms of agreements in the field of scientific and technological cooperation the prospects are promising, because of the bilateral agreement signed. However it is necessary to have this agreement implemented by both sides. Likewise in the field of tourism, although Greece is a major touristic destination globally and there is a

bilateral agreement, there have been no active and in depth touristic relations between Athens and Tunis. It is necessary to have this agreement activated the sooner so that it becomes fruitful for both sides.

In the case of Tunisia-Greek direct investments are entirely absent due to bureaucratic, administrative, customs and tariff restrictions, insufficient information on the Tunisian market in Greece as well as the dominance in Tunisia of strong competitors (France, Italy, Belgium) for products which Greece produces traditionally (cotton, building materials, fertilizers, textiles agricultural machinery). The Greek business presence in Tunisia is active through the operation of a small number of firms (five to six), especially in the craft sector (clothing, treatment fur, skin, etc.),

food (cheese) and imports of minerals (pumice, perlite).

From the preceding brief description of Tunisian-Greek economic relations, it becomes apparent that these can be boosted further, provided that the two countries display the necessary vivid interest, especially now with the prospect of further democratizing Tunisia and creating new opportunities for development. Hence in the context of developing Tunisian-Greek relations further, the forthcoming investment forum “New Tunisia: New Democracy, New Opportunities” in Tunis (June, 12-13, 2014) is expected to offer an opportunity for boosting these ties further. 🇹🇵

The Greek Community of Tunisia

Konstantinos Passalis
H.E. Minister Counsellor-Cultural Expert

The Greek Community of modern Tunisia is a facilitator of bilateral cultural relations. The importance of the Greek community of Tunisia lies in the fact that it can contribute to democracy and pluralism of the Tunisian society.

Greek Tunisian cultural relations form a special field of bilateral relations today since it embodies in the most social way the contact between the two peoples and cultures. These relations are traced back to ancient times and they were further enforced during the Roman-Byzantine period and Ottoman times. The coexistence and interaction between the two peoples and cultures for so much time have created a network of cultural bilateral understanding. In modern times this familiarity is expressed both by the presence of Greeks in Tunisia and vice versa. This analysis deals with the Greek Community of modern Tunisia and its role as a factor of bilateral cultural relations.

Today the Greek community of Tunisia mainly is settled in the capital Tunis. The community's activities are centred on its imposing Greek Orthodox Church of St. George and its adjacent buildings in Rue de Rome. The church liturgy is conducted by His Eminence, the Archbishop of Carthage and North

Africa. The church of St George is one of the ten Orthodox churches across Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania that make up this archbishopric, which has considerable travel demands. The church was built in 1847 with funds provided by the Ottoman of Greek origin Pasha Ahmed Khaznadar, also known by the name of Yiannis Khalkias Stravelakis.¹ Stravelakis boosted the Greek presence in the region in the cosmopolitan 19th century. Stravelakis was instrumental in enabling economic activity for his fellow Greeks in an Ottoman context. The Greek Community has always been supported and safeguarded by the Greek diplomatic mission in Tunisia

¹ Ahmed and his brother Mustapha (Georgios) were both sold into slavery as young Christian boys when the Ottoman Turks massacred Chios's population in 1822 after the Greeks of Chios declared independence from the Ottoman Sultanate. After being taken to Smyrna then Constantinople, they were sold as slaves to an envoy of the Husainid Dynasty who were Beys of Tunis.

in regard to every issue that has come up occasionally.

Next to the church are the community's offices and school. The board members of the Community are determined to keep it alive. They care and are in need of both motherland Greece as well as a democratic Tunisia. Some of Greek women have Tunisian husbands. There is also a Greek language class attended by Tunisian mature-age students. Their motives for studying Greek vary; for instance some of them are interested in Ancient and Modern Greek language and Cultures.

Nowadays the community's population is limited and is descendants of Greeks who had arrived generations ago, while others settled here as a result of their commercial activities, e.g. Greeks coming from the Dodecanese Islands to Tunisia to work in the sponge commerce. It consists of people who mostly have dual citizenship and reside in the area of Tunis. Some others reside in cities such as Bizerte, Djerba, Sphanx, the Kerkenah Islands (Circe's Islands) and Hammamet, known as the Isle of Lotus Eaters of Odysseus. The Greeks of Tunisia cover a wide range of professions and participate in the ongoing process of boosting the society and economy of the country.

The importance of the Greek community of Tunisia lies in the fact that it contributes to democracy and pluralism of the Tunisian society. The latter is in the process of becoming more open and global through the ongoing democratization of the country. A democratic society based on drawing every aspect of spiritual inventory of its citizens, regardless of religion and ideology. Tunisia becomes a steady and strong politically and economically dynamic society with a bright future. The society which offers expression, creativity and work for its citizens highlights those very characteristics which guarantee safe and guide further development. Otherwise the dynamics of society has an expiration date, leading it inevitably to decline and decay.

Pluralism within a democratic framework is strengthened and enriched not only by difference of opinion within a particular political and cultural group but also by the coexistence of views and beyond cultural groups. In this way it is possible to structure cultural interaction and mutual emulation among communities as a whole through the model of civil society. 

Monitoring the Middle East

Afghanistan

Afghan war claimed no US soldiers in March (31 March., 2014)

For the first time in more than seven years, there were zero combat casualties among U.S. military forces in Afghanistan during a full calendar month, according to NATO press releases. March marked just the third time since the conflict in Afghanistan began more than 12 years ago that no U.S. service members died in combat.

Comment: This is the result of diplomacy and not military dexterity.

Bahrain

Bahrain jails 16 Shias for life (31 Mar., 2014)

A Bahraini court jailed 16 Shias for life and two others 10 years for an attack that wounded two policemen in a village near Manama. Bahrain remains deeply divided three years after a quashed uprising, with persistent protests sparking clashes with police, scores of Shias jailed on “terror” charges and reconciliation talks deadlocked

Comment: There must be soon a consensus by the international community on the crisis in Bahrain.

Cyprus

The Legendary rock group Deep Purple to perform in the occupied lands of Cyprus (21 Mar., 2014)

Legendary British rock band Deep Purple has announced on the group's official website that it will give a concert in the occupied lands of Cyprus on May 24.

Egypt

Egypt outlaws Hamas (5 Mar., 2014)

Egyptian court today banned all activities of the Islamist Palestinian group Hamas in Egypt, announced a judicial source, a further indication that security forces willing to fight the organization have control of the neighboring Gaza Strip.

Greece

Avramopoulos and Liebermann meet (21 Mar., 2014)

Greek National Defense Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos and the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman discussed issues related to security and stability in the wider region in a private meeting; they also reiterated the willingness of both countries to further strengthen bilateral relations.

Greek FM in Tehran (16 Mar., 2014)

Greek FM Evangelos Venizelos was received in two separate meetings by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani, and former president of Iran Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. He had the opportunity to convey the warm greetings of the President of the Hellenic Republic and discuss with him issues of bilateral political, economic and trade relations in the framework of international law and the relevant resolutions of the UN and the EU, and for bilateral relations between the European Union and Iran, as Greece holds the periodic Presidency of the European Union.

Iran

New Iran-Russia nuclear agreement (12 Mar., 2014)

Iran and Russia concluded a preliminary agreement to build at least two new nuclear plants at Bushehr.

Tehran deterred sabotage in Arak nuclear facility (18 Mar., 2014)

An attempt to intervene in the operation of the pumps of the reactor in Arak nuclear plant aimed to halt the Iranian nuclear program, according to Asghar Zarian, Vice president of National Nuclear Agency of Iran. Zarian did not name the targets of other attacks and commented what could be behind them.

Iraq

Iraqi army bombs Fallujah (20 Mar., 2014)

At least 15 people were killed in bombings in the Iraqi army and clashes that occurred today in many neighborhoods in Fallujah, a city near the capital Baghdad. The incidents and bombings began after midnight and continued all morning in the northern, eastern and southern districts of the city resulting in the death of 15 people and injuring 40 others, said the chief medical officer of the hospital in Fallujah, Ahmed Sami. Jihadists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (IKIL) and anti-government fighters, members of local tribes, have been put under the control of Fallujah early January, as well as some neighborhoods in the nearby town of Ramadi. The riots erupted after the dissolution of the government forces, a camp in Ramadi Sunni demonstrators who protested arguing that discrimination against them by the Iraqi authorities. Security forces regained partial control of this city, which have so far failed to do in the case of Fallujah.

US Energy experts in Iraq (6 Feb., 2014)

U.S. will send experts to Iraq to help the country to protect oil facilities, whose output is 95% of the revenue of the Iraqi government, as officials announced today. This announcement occurs at a time Baghdad is trying to increase its sales of crude oil in order to boost the country's reconstruction, which sinks back into violence. But oil pipelines and oil infrastructure are regularly targeted in attacks, mainly in northern Iraq. Today a pipeline that transports refined products from Baitzi in Baghdad was bombed, causing the suspension of its operation. The vice president of Iraq Hussein Shahrstani said that cooperation will not include the presence of foreign troops on Iraqi soil, but will research and new equipment.

US to sell helicopters to Iraq (28 Jan., 2014)

The Obama administration has expressed in the US Congress its intention to sell Apache attack helicopters to the armed forces of Iraq. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency, DSCA, at the Ministry of Defense in a post on its website said it was stated to the Congress that the possible sale of 24 Apache helicopters to the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki will address the threat to national security raised by the action of extremists.

Kuwait

Kuwait to host first Arab League Summit (27 Mar., 2014)

Thirteen heads of state attended the Arab Summit, which took place on March 25 and 26, with Arab foreign ministers. This was the first Arab summit hosted by Kuwait since it joined the Arab League on June 20, 1961, and comes during a critical time in the region's history.

Lebanon

Suicide bombing against Hezbollah (17 Mar., 2014)

At least three people were killed Sunday after a suicide bombing against a bulwark of the Lebanese Shiite organization Hezbollah in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. A security source said two of those killed in the explosion Nabi Osman were members of the Shiite Muslim organization Hezbollah fighters which supported the earlier hours of the forces of the Syrian army in the capture of Giamprout.

Libya

US Special Forces take control of Libyan oil ship (18 Mar., 2014)

The special forces of the U.S. Navy took control of the tanker Morning Glory, the flag of North Korea, which had slow load from a port in the eastern Libyan rebels who control, announced yesterday the U.S. Department of Defense. The group of special forces of the U.S. Navy boarded the ship in the early hours of Monday, while it was sailing in international waters southeast of Cyprus.

Libyan Deputy Minister assassinated (12 Jan., 2014)

Deputy Industry Libyan Hassan al-Droui murdered by strangers in the early hours today in the city of Sirte, 500 km east of Tripoli. Hasan al-Droui murdered by strangers while was visiting in his hometown of Sirte. He accepted barrage of gunfire while he was in the city center. Droui was a former member of the National Transitional Council, the political wing of the uprising that toppled the regime in Tripoli. This is the first assassination of a member of the interim government after the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011.

Comment: Libya has been plagued to chaos and there is no western restoring security plan in sight.

Palestine - Israel

New Israeli settlements approved (21 Mar., 2014)

The Israeli military administration of the West Bank has approved the plans to build more than 2,000 homes in Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories thereof. A committee of the Israeli Ministry of Defense approved plans involving a total of 2,269 homes in six different villages.

Qatar

Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain against Qatar (6 Mar., 2014)

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have decided to withdraw their ambassadors in Qatar, Doha denouncing the interference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi King appoints successor (28 Mar., 2014)

The King of Saudi Arabia Abdullah bin Abdulaziz today appointed his half brother Mokren bin Abdulaziz Crown Prince and future King, who will take the throne if he is unable to perform his duties, essentially excluding the current Crown Prince Salman of succession.

Somalia

Turkey supports economically the Somali government (17 Feb., 2014)

Turkey has vowed to continue this year's direct financial support of Somalia. Ankara plans to continue payments, which are a major source of funding for the Somali government, which is trying to rebuild the country after more than two decades of chaos.

Syria

Obama: US cannot meddle in Syria (29 Mar., 2014)

U.S. President Barack Obama on Friday defended its decision to refrain from using violence against the Syrian regime last fall, stressing that the U.S. also have their limitations. "I think it is wrong to believe that we were able, with a few targeted disruptions, to prevent those who follow in Syria," Obama said in an interview on American network CBS. This interview was filmed in Rome, shortly before leaving the U.S. president for Saudi Arabia.

Opposition Islamists in Syria enforce dress code (20 Feb., 2014)

Islamist rebels in eastern Syria instructed the local women to wear the Islamic headscarf, warning that anyone who does not comply with the order will be punished in another coordinated effort by hardliners to impose Islamic law on citizens.

Syrian Kurds declare self-rule (23 Jan., 2014)

Syrian Kurds, who have already declared "transitional democratic autonomy" in one of the three Kurdish-majority areas of northern Syrian (Rojava), are now set to declare self-rule in the other two Kurdish regions within a week, local politicians have said. "The preparations in the other two regions are still continuing; we will declare democratic autonomy in Afrin and Kobani," Zohat Kobani, one of the prominent leaders of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) has stated.

Tunisia

Tunisia assembly vote on new constitution (1 Jan., 2014)

In spite of a number of serious challenges, the Tunisian Constituent Assembly successfully negotiated a new and modern constitution. The new constitution is expected to play central role in democratizing the country in the future.

Kerry in Tunisia in a sudden visit (18 Feb., 2014)

The U.S. secretary of John Kerry on a sudden visit, aiming to demonstrate U.S. support for the country from which started the movement of the "Arab Spring". John Kerry visited the country briefly and discussed with senior officials on the country's progress toward democracy and its efforts to address the armed Islamists..

Turkey

Municipal elections victory of Erdogan's AKP and his first speech (30 Mar., 2014)

Prime Minister Erdogan appeared at 23:40 on March 29 on the balcony of the main building of the AKP in Ankara, along with all his family, to appeal to the assembled crowds cheering for the election results. The speech ended 31 March at 00:20. With him was his wife, his son, his daughter, all his family members, the deputy prime ministers and many ministers. The former Minister EU Egemen Bagis was also present.

On reopening the Theological School of Halki (24 Mar., 2014)

In an interview with the Daily Sabah, the Deputy Prime Minister Bashir Atalay made statements about the Greek Orthodox Theological School of Halki: “The reopening of the Halki seminary remains for some time on the international agenda. There have been major developments in the resolution of this issue, and hope that a lasting solution will be found within days.”

Yemen

30 fighters dead in N. Yemen (9 Mar., 2014)

At least 30 people were killed during the two days of clashes between Shia rebels and Sunni members of a tribe in the northwestern province of al-Jawf Yemen, said the governor. The Shiite Huti rebels try to consolidate their position in northern Yemen, one of the challenges facing the transitional government, which is also battling against rebels who want secession of the south, and rebels linked to al Qaeda.

Shiite rebels advance in N. Yemen (2 Jan., 2014)

The Shiite rebels took control of the key positions of the powerful tribe of Chasint after violent clashes that occurred in northern Yemen, as stated by witnesses and tribal sources. According to these sources, hundreds of fighters Ansarullah, the Shi'ite rebels captured the city Hout, 180 kilometers north of Sanaa. The rebels continued their offensive and took control of the stronghold of the tribe Hashid city Hamra, which has symbolic importance as there is the family house of al-Ahmar, the tribal Hashid chiefs. The Ahmar left the house and ordered to be burned, according to tribal sources. s are aiming to expand their influence in certain areas of the region. The Yemeni army is currently not intervene in the conflict. 



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