

## Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Danube and the Black Sea region: views for building forward better - CONCLUSIONS

Hosted by **MEP Carmen AVRAM**, SEArICA Vice-Chair responsible for the Danube and the Black Sea, and co-organised by the **Balkan and Black Sea Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR BBSC)** and the **International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)**

**Thursday 22 April 2021 from 11:00 to 13:30 (Brussels time/CEST)**

The online conference, hosted and chaired by **MEP Carmen AVRAM**, was divided into two sessions. The first session addressed the challenges of the fisheries sector related to the COVID pandemic, such as disruptions in supply chains for fish and aquatic foods caused by disturbances of transportation, trade, and labour. The second session discussed opportunities and next steps for the post-COVID-19 era.

### **Session 1: The challenges of the pandemic – disruptions in supply chains for fish and aquatic foods and disturbances in transportation, trade, and labour**

**Ms Carmen AVRAM**, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the SEArICA Intergroup, responsible for the Danube and the Black Sea welcomed the speakers and participants. She stressed the fisheries sector has been hit hard by the COVID pandemic and mentioned the ways in which some marine ecosystems and marine species have reacted to the reduction in human activities are becoming apparent, for example in coastal areas there has been an increase in sighting of marine mammals such as dolphins and sharks. She listed the following measures taken by most countries to fight the effects of COVID and ensure health and safety:

- Closing ports;
- Quarantining foreign vessels;
- Closing open air fish markets;
- Providing masks for workers;
- Disinfecting ports and fishing boats;
- Raising awareness among fishers and aquaculture farmers about sanitary measures.

Market measure have been taken including ensuring the continuity of food supply, expanding home deliveries and direct sales, and supporting national and local production through consumer awareness campaigns. Various social measures have also been taken such as social assistance, social insurance and unemployment benefits.

She concluded by pointing out that these measures are being complemented with enhanced investments in fisheries and aquaculture sectors as well as changes in specific fisheries management and control measures. A mix of immediate action and long term strategic initiatives is needed.

**Ms Barbara FOCQUET**, Deputy-Head of Fisheries Management Mediterranean and Black Sea (MARE.D.1) Unit, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), European Commission presented the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, its three goals (healthy marine ecosystem, innovative blue economy, investments) and ten priorities:

1. Ensure the protection and sustainability of the marine ecosystem;
2. Address marine pollution and plastic litter;
3. Support sustainable fisheries and aquaculture;
4. Support innovative marine research infrastructures;
5. Encourage the production, management and sharing of marine and coastal environmental knowledge for effective environmental monitoring and observation;
6. Foster innovative business models, stimulate research, innovation and sustainable growth and up-to-date jobs;
7. Promote transport and digital connectivity;
8. Promote blue skills and blue careers as an engine for innovation and competitiveness;
9. Improve access to financial resources and promote sustainable investment in the blue economy;
10. Promote maritime entrepreneurship and clusters.

She presented the four main pillars of the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), to address the research challenges, to boost the black Sea blue economy, to develop innovative infrastructures and to enhance the blue workforce. She stressed the importance of developing scientific knowledge informed participants there will be a high level conference on the Black Sea in Georgia in 2022 to allow Black Sea countries to take stock of the progress made in the implementation of the 2018 Sofia Declaration.

She presented the specific deliverables of the new fisheries governance for the Black Sea:

- EU provides financial support to back up its initiatives at sea basin level;
- Improvement of scientific advice and data collection (example given of the BlackSea4Fish project);
- Aquaculture Demonstrative Centres (excellent regional hubs sharing knowledge, best practice, technical assistance and research on Black Sea aquaculture and its specificities);
- Regional multiannual management plan for turbot fisheries.

EU financial support to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak was addressed and specific examples of the EU's comprehensive support package were explored:

- A temporary State Aid Framework;
- The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative;
- SURE Scheme;

- Specific measures in the EMFF;
- Financial compensation to fishers for the temporary cessation of fishing activities;
- Financial compensation to aquaculture farmers and processing enterprises for:
  - A suspension or reduction of production;
  - A suspension or reduction of sales;
  - Additional storage costs;
- Financing of working capital for aquaculture farmers and processing enterprises;
- Support to fishery and aquaculture producer organisations for the temporary storage of fishery and aquaculture products.

The exceptional flexibility in EMFF implementation was also noted – retroactive eligibility of expenditure, simplified procedure for amending operational programmes, and flexible reallocation of financial resources. She concluded by presenting the opportunities for the Black Sea, notably to build on the progress achieved, to use the lessons learnt from common challenges, to strengthen compliance and fight against IUU, to strengthen scientific cooperation and advice and to develop new conservation measures.

**Mr Valentin MOLDOVEANU**, Acting President of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission (CPMR BBSC), Tulcea County Councillor (Romania), and Danube Delta FLAG Manager provided information on the Danube delta and gave an update on the current state of play in the area.

**Mr Catalin PLATON**, President of Romfish Association (representative association for Romanian aquaculture sector) and Member of Aquaculture Advisory Council gave a presentation of Romanian Aquaculture during 2020, including a brief overview of Romania’s fisheries sector and hydrographic network, and shared graphs to demonstrate how Romanian fisheries and aquaculture has been affected by last year’s events. He explained the structure of the aquaculture sector and highlighted the problems identified and measures adopted. The problems experienced in 2020 included:

- Live fish storage is not considered as in commercial fishing;
- The workforce is permanently challenged by other A or non-A businesses;
- Low capitalisation due to unfinished privatisation;
- Overwhelming bureaucracy;
- Aquaculture does not benefit from the same financial instruments as agriculture.

The measures adopted to address these problems include:

- EU / national initiatives for example:
  - Regulation 508/2013 :
    - Article 55 Public health measures (however the money has not yet been received by the farmers one year later);
    - Article 67 Storage aid (although some funds have been received, storage aid for aquaculture is not possible);

- 2 investment schemes: SME Invest and Agro-Invest for working capital and investments as guarantee funds;
- State Aid Temporary Framework – ceiling raised

He concluded by stressing the importance to give support to the farmers when they need it. 2 analyses were mentioned, the Aquaculture Advisory Council (impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the EU aquaculture sector) and FAO the impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture food systems, possible responses (Information Paper, November 2020).

**Dr Viktor KOMORIN**, Director of the Ukrainian Scientific Center of Ecology of the Sea (UkrSCES), Member of the Board of Directors of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) presented EU strategies and initiatives implemented in Black Sea countries and how these should be used in new pandemic conditions:

- Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea;
- Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA);
- Black Sea Assistance Mechanism (BSAM);
- EU Black Sea Synergy initiative;
- EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR);
- EU Green Deal;
- EU Farm to Fork Strategy;
- Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020.

He listed various legislation and different approaches to understand the environment and the connection between humans and the environment. One instrument is the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and he gave the example of the EMBLAS Project. He provided information on different scenarios for the lower Danube region ecosystems. He addressed the impact of COVID-19 on the environment and fisheries and aquaculture, and the next steps to take:

- Despite positive environmental effects such as slower CO<sub>2</sub> build up, there is uncertainty about the long-term benefits of the COVID-19 pandemic for the environment;
- There have been clear negative environmental impacts of the pandemic, such as increased plastic pollution due to a surge in consumption and disposal of single use plastics;
- Many environmental enforcement programmes, observer programmes and monitoring surveys have been postponed or suspended during lockdowns, which hampers the collection of continuous time observations that are fundamental for ecosystem assessment, management and conservation.

He addressed the impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture using an ecosystem-based approach made up of two components, an economic component and an environmental protection component. Regarding concrete steps forward:

- Danube and Black Sea countries should adopt an approach to fisheries and aquaculture management used by the best available scientific practices. Diverse management systems are employed and those that invest in limiting fishing pressure backed by comprehensive

enforcement programmes, as opposed to enhancing fishing capacity, are more likely to experience stock recovery;

- It would be prudent to conduct an independent scientific review to ensure the long-term plan and mechanisms used to manage fisheries and aquaculture in the Black Sea basin have the best possible chance of enhancing the future of communities through recovering resilient fish populations.
- The establishment of marine Protected Areas (MPAs) is one of the most cost-effective ways to restore over-exploited stocks and habitats o, which fish depend, to the mutual benefit of the fishing industry who experience increased catches in grounds immediately outside of MPAs.

## Session 2: Opportunities and next steps

**Mr Iain SHEPHERD**, Senior Expert - Maritime Policy - Blue Growth, Data and Innovation, Maritime innovation, Marine Knowledge and Investment (MARE.A.1) Unit, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), European Commission explained the current state of play regarding aquaculture. He addressed various aspects of the European Green Deal and what it could mean for aquaculture. Targets set include:

- Decarbonisation:
  - 55% reduction by 2030
  - Zero carbon by 2050
- Farm to Fork:
  - Food security
  - Neutral or positive environmental impact
- Biodiversity:
  - Widening protected areas
- Zero pollution:
  - Better monitor, report, prevent and remedy pollution from air, water, soil and consumer products
- Circular Economy:
  - Sustainable products empowering consumer circular production

The importance of saving the Danube was stressed and the problems and solutions relating to dams and weirs were presented. The main problems included:

- Blocking – migratory fish spawning and resident fish cycle;
- Ponding – colonisation by planktivorous fish;
- Irregular channel flow – disrupts seasonal spawners.

The proposed solutions include:

- Removal or partial breaching – this is the preferred solution;
- Fishways – allow upstream and downstream passage
- Flush flows – reduction in magnitude and frequency.

He welcomed the EU's commitment to healthy oceans through research, knowledge and investment.

**Professor Dr Baris SALIHOGLU**, Black Sea CONNECT Coordinator presented the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA). He highlighted the uniqueness of the Black Sea and the effects of multiple stressors, including climate change, deoxygenation, acidification, over-fishing, invasive species, eutrophication, pollution (including litter) and sea/land based sector activities, on the sea basin. The transition to a sustainable blue economy was then explained, and he noted that the initial focus areas are biotech, sustainable seafood, tourism, renewable energy and mineral resources. He introduced the SRIA, noting its key outputs and reiterating the four main pillars. Some priorities within these pillars that relate to fisheries were highlighted:

- Enhance food systems research including fisheries;
- Uncover biodiversity and ecosystem services and functions;
- Study Black Sea specific features;
- Develop sustainable fisheries;
- Develop innovative tourism services and promote synergies.

He provided information on SRIA consultations, and joint actions as part of the Connect project which include actions relating to the COVID-19 impact on the Black Sea marine ecosystems, marine plastics and activities of Black Sea young ambassadors. He concluded by introducing the SRIA implementation plan.

**Mr Konstantin PETROV**, Subregional Coordinator for the Black Sea, General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) introduced the role of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and informed participants what fisheries and aquaculture represents for the Black Sea. The achievements and progress made by the GFCM were noted, including the outcomes and progress made:

- Adoption of a Common Regulatory Framework;
- Multiannual Management Plan for Sustainable Turbot Fisheries;
- Management measures;
- Closure period for turbot fishing;
- Set of minimum standards for bottom-set gillnet fisheries;
- Common assessment of stock status of priority species;
- Roadmap to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Black Sea;
- Establishment of Aquaculture Demonstrative Centres;
- Implementation of a regional Plan of Action for sustainable SSE.

The BlackSea4Fish project, which provides crucial support was introduced as a success story, along with the turbot multiannual management plan (with the establishment of a whole-of-the-Black-Sea Total Allowable Catch and a mechanism to determine country quotas) and the Aquaculture Demonstrative Centres. He explained GFCM's analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on

fisheries and aquaculture. He presented the opportunities and next steps for post-COVID-19 era for fisheries and aquaculture in the Black Sea area, including a new 2021-2030 GFCM Strategy for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture:

- Expand and deepen cooperation with other relevant organisations;
- Strengthen the implementation of the sub-regional approach including capacity development;
- Enhance multi-disciplinary scientific and technical advice that also incorporates socio-economic aspects as a basis for robust decision-making;
- Adopt ecosystem-based measures taking into account factors such as climate change, pollution, non-indigenous species;
- Strengthen compliance and enforcement against IUU fishing;
- Enhance the value chain in fishery products and promote responsible aquaculture.

The main targets of the new 2021-2030 Strategy include:

- Fisheries and ecosystems: healthy seas and productive fisheries;
- Compliance and enforcement: a level playing field to eradicate IUU fishing;
- Aquaculture: A sustainable and resilient sector growing to its full potential;
- Livelihoods: Decent employment and engaged fishers towards profitable fisheries;
- Capacity development: technical cooperation, knowledge sharing and efficient partnerships in a subregional perspective.

Future considerations and opportunities were also explored:

- All-of-Black-Sea demersal survey;
- Black Sea fish stocks under changing environmental and climatic conditions:
  - Ensure continuation of time series data;
  - Support surveys at sea;
  - Consider multi-species modelling of fish resources;
  - Implement mass-balance ecosystem models;
- Stock identification of black Sea resources;
- On-going work to establish a Black Sea Scientific Database;
- Online expert meetings for Black Sea priority species;
- Strengthen the application of the subregional approach through the GFCM subregional technical unit.

He concluded by mentioning the implementation of GFCM's Regional Action Plan for small-scale fisheries, which includes concrete actions to be implemented over the next 10 years (scientific research, data collection, management measures, value chain enhancement, participatory approach, capacity building etc) and noted aquaculture activities in 2021.

**Mr Alexei NISTREAN**, Executive Manager, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Permanent International Secretariat (BSEC PERMIS) introduced the BSEC's main areas of cooperation and provided information on prospects of cooperation in the field of fisheries and

aquaculture. He noted that three priorities of the BSEC Working Groups relate to fisheries. He introduced proposals for enhanced cooperation including the establishment of an ad-hoc Working Group on fisheries and aquaculture with specific objectives (to collect and analyse scientific data in the field of fish resources, to carry out studies and apply good practices in the field of fisheries). He addressed topics and areas of perspective interaction including in relation to joint projects. 2 main proposals for interaction were highlighted:

- Opportunity for joint cooperation in the fields of fisheries, rehabilitation of aqua and marine culture in the Black Sea;
- Identifying the species and population of origin of fish in fishery products as a way of combatting IUU fishing.

Other proposals included harmonising labelling standards, enhancing bio-technology methods, elaborating joint regional programmes for effective management and control of plant quarantine disease and establishing the BSEC Regional Cooperation centre for sustainable food systems.

Information was provided on completed and on-going projects and cooperation with Black Sea municipalities was underlined. The means to implement these projects include:

- PDF – Project development Fund;
- PPF – Project Promotion Facility;
- PMU – Project management Unit.

He concluded by highlighting that fisheries is an important economic activity for local communities.

**Dr Cristina SANDU**, President, International Association for Danube Research (IAD) (Austria) provided participants with key figures on both global and Black Sea fisheries. She addressed perspectives regarding the over exploitation of fish stocks, which could increase the risk of the fisheries sector collapsing and proposed a new approach to establish no-take zones (NTZs) (fish stock recovery areas) within the Black Sea. These no-take zones would be marine sanctuaries with no human activities except scientific activities, and they would be beneficial as:

- They provide long-term benefits to biodiversity and local economy;
- Protected fish grow larger and support replenishment with more offspring;
- Fish species swim outside the protected area (spillover), contributing to local fisheries;
- Eggs/larvae are also supplied to adjacent areas;
- Offspring settle into surrounding fishing grounds;
- Protecting habitats from the damage caused by fishing gears enhances species recovery;
- More diverse habitats host higher biodiversity;
- They are more resilient to environmental challenges.

This list of benefits was backed up with supporting scientific evidence from various cases around the world. She stressed this has a key role in the recovery of endangered species and gave the example of Danube sturgeon. Conservation efforts in the Danube, strategic actions from 2005-2017 were introduced as well as the following recent projects:

- Distribution of restocked sturgeons in the Black Sea;
- Prevention and counteracting poaching and illegal trade;
- Creation of aquatic ecological corridors for migratory fish species;
- Investigating fish behaviour at the Iron Gates dams;
- Restoring fish migration at the Iron Gates.

She remarked on the conservation measures that are urgently needed in the Black Sea, noting the sturgeon life cycle calls for cooperation between the Danube and Black Sea stakeholders. Conservation efforts made in the Danube area need to be mirrored in the Black Sea otherwise efforts will fail. She highlighted the following urgent conservation measures needed in the Black Sea:

- Harmonised monitoring methods;
- Key habitats declared strictly protected areas (no-take zones);
- Ex-situ conservation facilities established along the Black Sea coast;
- Supportive stocking programmes;
- Evaluate the efficiency of stocking programmes;
- Enhance control of sturgeon fishery ban and protection measures in no-take zones;
- Support fishermen communities to develop alternative livelihoods to sturgeon fisheries (i.e., aquaculture, ecotourism, guiding);
- Elaborate a sturgeon conservation plan for the Black Sea.

The possibility to establish a network of fish stock recovery areas in the Black Sea will support not only biodiversity conservation but also contribute to the revival of depleted stocks through measures including:

- Habitat identification as fish stock recovery areas / NTZs;
- Mapping the spatial distribution of human activities in these areas;
- Establishing the frame for multi-stakeholder dialogue;
- Developing Management Plans for NTZs with the active involvement of key stakeholders;
- Consider compensatory measures/alternative livelihoods for lost fishery grounds.

She concluded by noting the lessons learnt from COVID-19 demonstrate that reduced human impact favours the recovery of marine ecosystems and fish stocks and provides benefits to coastal communities.

**Mr Ivo HRISTOV**, Member of the European Parliament, Member of SEARICA Intergroup, Member of the Committee on Fisheries (PECH) and European Parliament Rapporteur on the “Challenges and opportunities for the fishing sector in the Black Sea” report underlined that low consumption of fish products can be positive and efforts to reduce the imprint on the environment is important. He stressed that the aquaculture sector has to be promoted and enhanced. He gave the good example of mussel farms that have helped purify the water but it should be kept in mind that high density of some aquaculture facilities might influence the local environment. He noted that

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competent authorities should develop a plan on aquaculture development in the Black Sea, keeping in mind that a high density of aquaculture could enhance the environment.

**Mr Davit DADIANI**, Chief Specialist of International and Public Relations Division of National Environmental Agency of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia presented the opportunities and next steps for Georgia. He presented key facts and figures about the Georgian fisheries and aquaculture sectors, then addressed the challenges and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on aquaculture production and activities in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Prospects for the development of the sectors, including the implementation of the law of aquaculture (which creates legal instruments for investment and introduces a new system for both land-based and sea-based aquaculture facilities), the creation of allocated zones for aquaculture in the Black Sea, the promotion of mariculture development, and the development of a national plan for the sustainable development of aquaculture were highlighted. He noted the need to simplify administrative procedures and the opportunities for fisheries and aquaculture in Georgia including the conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources, the sustainable development of aquaculture, a sound regulatory and governance framework and support for market-oriented production. He concluded by discussing international and regional important projects and looking at the next steps in international and regional cooperation.

**Mr Konstantine TOPURIA**, First Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Poti City (Georgia) noted it was very important and interesting to hear about partner's work in the field of fisheries and aquaculture and noted the similarities in experiences. He provided background history and information regarding the fisheries sector in the Municipality of Poti City and stressed the great potential for the fishing industry. He pointed out that supply does not meet the high demand for fish, and there is a risk of extinction for certain species. He provided information on a positive example of a salmon provider and concluded by addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on both the municipality and the fisheries sector.

## Reactions and Open discussion

**Ms Cristina Ganapini**, CPMR, highlighted a relevant study on the economic benefits of MPAs for the fisheries and tourism sectors. Several case studies have shown that due to increased catch per unit effort for fishermen and increased incomes from tourism, coastal economies can be strengthened and diversified by MPAs.

**Mr Stavros Kalognomos** noted that all information would be shared with participants. He invited Mr Dadiani to elaborate any plans to introduce Fisheries Law in Georgia.

**Mr Dadiani** provided further information on legislation including issuing licences for fisheries and several by-laws for fishing.

**Mr Kalognomos** asked Mr Petrov if the fisheries and aquaculture strategy for the Black Sea includes a reference to sturgeon?

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**Mr Petrov** noted that in general the objective of the agreement is the sustainable exploitation and conservation of resources in the Black Sea, and there is still room for discussions. Healthy seas and productive fisheries is one of the main targets of the strategy.

**Mr Kalognomos** asked Mr Shepherd if the European Commission will contribute on its own to fulfil the SDGs, especially SGD14, or will it rely on actions by Member States.

**Mr Shepherd** stressed the SDGs are extremely important for the EU and gave the example of marine litter. A lot of action has already been undertaken which has had a big impact. This work is still on-going, particularly in the research field. He noted that as part of the reform on control regulation there could be better monitoring of small-scale fisheries with low cost equipment. He reiterated that Mission on Oceans is a big research effort with concrete targets.

**Mr Kalognomos** asked Ms Focquet for further information on the pilot project on Black Sea bycatch of cetacean. He provided information on the CeNoBS project.

**Ms Focquet** clarified that the pilot project is currently under development.

**Mr Kalognomos** asked Mr Petrov for comments on the strategy regarding the conservation of fish stocks, and if the public consultation process is still open.

**Mr Petrov** replied that the stage for comments is well advanced and it is creating a common vision for the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, while considering the social, economic and ecological aspects of fisheries. The strategy should be adopted in June 2021.

**Mr Kalognomos** noted that marine litter goes hand in hand with fisheries and aquaculture, and this paves the way to another SEARica event on marine litter. He invited Mr Bernard Merckx to share information on this issue.

**Mr Bernard Merckx**, Waste Free Oceans, explained the current situation and showed powerful images that illustrated why doing nothing is not an option. EU legislation is on-going (Plastics Strategy, Circular Economy Package, Waste Package Directive, Port Reception Facilities Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Single-Use Plastics Directive, Fishing Gear Directive), and plastics are currently in the spotlight. He highlighted the need for clarification as collection does not necessarily mean recycling. He mentioned four points for reflection regarding circularity:

- Design for disassembly;
- Design for recyclability;
- Design with green plastics;
- Design for capture at end of life.

Some of Waste free oceans activities were described, including fishing for litter (tackling existing marine debris), using tools for floating debris that have been developed with fishermen and

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dredging companies for example. He introduced the Waste Free Danube project and mentioned river and beach clean-up efforts that are on-going in the Danube basin, as well as elsewhere in Europe. He presented an example of Europe's first multi value chain partner project, which involves close collaboration of ports, fishermen and a seal rescue centre, to preventively collect obsolete gear, ropes and nets and fishermen release rescued seals back into the sea. Fishing gear recycling plants in Slovenia and Denmark were also presented as an example of how old and obsolete gear can be turned back into raw materials used to create new products such as aquaculture rings and crate boxes. Pragmatic solutions have been found for difficult to recycle waste streams, and they have been turned into social housing for refugees.

**Ms Carmen AVRAM**, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the SEARica Intergroup, responsible for the Danube and the Black Sea confirmed that SEARica will hold a special meeting focusing on this issue. She reiterated that the Black Sea is a unique sea requiring unique measure. She thanked the speakers and participants and closed the meeting.



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