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**POSITIONING STRATEGIES  
OF POLISH POLITICAL PARTIES  
IN THE 2014 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION**

The article concerns an analysis of the types of positioning an electoral agenda adopted by the Polish political parties during the political campaign before the elections to the European Parliament in 2014. Positioning the electoral offer has been treated as one of the main elements of the electoral strategies of political parties, as the way of defining their electoral goals and identifying their strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats. The scope of analysis assumes main Polish political parties represented in the Polish parliament in the years 2011 - 2014 and additionally the party that managed to cross the entry barrier into the parliamentary market in the EP election in 2014.

***Key words:***

positioning, political parties, elections, European Parliament

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) election in Poland marks the beginning of an ‘electoral marathon’ that will stretch over 18 months and encompass local election (Autumn 2014), presidential election (Summer 2015) and the national parliamentary election (Autumn 2015). Due to the predominantly parliamentary character of Polish political system, the last of these events will be of most significance to participating parties. At the same time, the above-mentioned schedule clearly determines the importance of strategies adopted by parties in the EP election. The result of this election will constitute the first test of their efficiency.

This article is focused on analysing one very important element of electoral strategies adopted by Polish political parties - the positioning of their electoral agenda. Positioning is crucial to the strategy for several reasons. Firstly, by positioning its agenda, a party conveys information about its key assets and resources, or, at the very least, about how it identifies those assets and resources

at a certain stage in the development of the political market. Secondly, positioning strategy contains clues as to current relations between political entities and the structure of inter-partisan rivalry. This is so because when positioning themselves, parties take into consideration the place and assets of other players on the market. Finally, the way the agenda is positioned reveals target groups to which it is addressed. At the same time, it is the one element of partisan strategy that is openly announced. Its content can be examined based on messages the party conveys to the electorate in fliers, banners, TV ads, official documents, etc. All these sources are readily accessible, which makes scholars' work that much easier. Of course, one needs to remember that any analysis based on such sources allows us to determine a given party's strategic goals, but it says nothing about how effectively these goals are being achieved.

This paper presents an analysis of positioning strategies adopted by political parties represented in the Polish parliament (Civic Platform - PO; Law and Justice - PiS; Democratic Left Alliance - SLD; Polish People's Party - PSL; Europe+ Your Movement - E+TR), as well as new entities created as a result of divisions within the already existing formations, for which the EP election constituted the first big test.

The key questions I intend to answer in this article refer to positioning strategies implemented by political parties in the period from 2011 to 2014 and later, during the campaign before the 2014 European Parliament election. By comparing strategies adopted throughout these two stages, I can determine whether the 2014-2015 "electoral marathon" is perceived by parties as a chance for a new opening (reformulating their goals and gaining new slices of the market) or, rather, as a time to maintain the status quo and confirm their position. Examination of types of positioning adopted for the 2014 election will also allow me to compare the current strategies with those utilised before the 2004 and 2009 elections.

The discussion of research results is preceded by an introduction to the issue of positioning partisan agendas on the political market, as well as a brief description of the pre-election state of things in Poland.

### ***Positioning partisan agendas on the political market***

In one of the most succinct definitions of the term, Philip Kotler and Kevin Keller described positioning as 'the act of designing a company's offering (...)' [Kotler, Keller 2011: 276]. The authors of the concept of positioning, Al Ries and Jack Trout, referred to it as the battle for the mind of consumers [Ries, Trout 2001] and emphasised that the product is positioned most of all in customers' awareness. Positioning means also differentiating one's offer from

that of the competitors. So-called points-of-difference that are promoted most are those that have the biggest impact on, or the biggest relevance to, the target group - in this case, segments of the electorate at which the agenda is addressed [see also: Kotler, Keller 2011: 276-279].

Selection of positioning strategies depends on a number of factors. First of all, on elements that shape the current environment of the political market - social, economic and demographic factors which affect behaviours of the electorate and, hence, the actions of political actors. Secondly, on the structure of the market - barriers to entry and elements that limit one's choice of direction, including formal and legal aspects (for example, electoral system), as well as resources possessed and positions occupied by each actor - particularly, their "market share". Thirdly, on the character and stakes of current political rivalry, be it at the polls, in the parliament, or within the government.

Elections are, of course, particularly important to political parties, as they determine their influence on the market. Each election reveals the position held by every formation compared to its competitors, as well as the electorate's attitude toward its agenda. Depending on the current market situation and the existence of potential barriers to mobility, parties may use elections as an opportunity to pursue the following strategic goals:

- **maintaining the status quo (in other words, current market share)** - in this case, parties continue their positioning strategies without any major alterations; they might add new details to their agendas, for example to solidify their image among current supporters (so-called deep branding)
- **broadening the market** - this implies partial / complete change of positioning strategy or, possibly, inclusion of new elements in the agenda (for instance, an attempt at addressing other segments of the electorate);
- **reducing support for competitors** - a party chooses to use the campaign as a chance to implement a specific stage of its long-term strategy - that is, to weaken the most significant rival(s) with which it competes for the support of the same target group;
- **entering / returning to the market** - if barriers to entry do not exist or are significantly reduced, newly formed parties may implement innovative positioning strategies in order to draw attention to their agendas and reach potential supporters; if barriers to entry remain too high to be overcome, small entities may want to remind the electorate of their existence [Cichosz 2011a: 86].

A different view on strategic goals attained through positioning is presented by Bruce Newman and Jagdish Sheth [1987: 135], as well as Paul Baines [1999: 407-408]. These authors underscore characteristics of the electorate to which the offer of a given party is addressed. By employing two criteria

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- the candidate (right / wrong) and values (right / wrong) - they distinguish four types of strategy:

- **reinforcement strategy** - used toward voters who have supported the “right” candidate for the “right” reasons; its purpose is to reassure those voters that they had made the right choice;
- **rationalisation strategy** - used when the “right” candidate has been chosen for the “wrong reasons”; it involves inducing a slight shift in the behaviour of a given party’s electorate;
- **inducement strategy** - applied to voters who pick the “wrong” candidate for the “right” reasons; it aims at attracting “misguided” voters to the “right” candidate;
- **confrontation strategy** - used when the “wrong” candidate is selected for the “wrong” reasons; here, strategic goals are achieved through negative or comparative campaign.<sup>1</sup>

When analysing the content of messages related to the positioning of agendas on the political market, one can notice three paths most frequently taken by parties:

- ideological positioning (through agendas), which places each party on the right wing - left wing continuum that has traditionally defined inter-party rivalry;
- situational positioning (through attitude toward specific issues), whereby a party builds its niche around its attitude toward the current situation and chosen contemporary problems - most typically, those which at a given moment are discussed widely by mass media and engage the attention of the public opinion;
- innovative positioning (adopted by outsiders), which allows a party to turn away from standard methods of positioning and instead, politicise new subjects [for more, see: Cichosz 2005: 152-155].

The choice of one of these options is related to, among other things, the life-cycle of a given party. As indicated by previous research on Polish political parties [Cichosz 2010: 103-105], ideological positioning is employed primarily by formations that are either newly established or marginal to the political scene. Young parties - particularly those formed on the foundation of social organisations - are also most likely to use innovative positioning and politicise problems that were previously absent from the public debate. Situational positioning, in turn, is the domain of mainstream parties which have already firmly

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<sup>1</sup> See also a typology offered by J. Pietraś [2000: 412-413], who describes four types of strategy: reinforcement (addressed at one’s own electorate and aimed at strengthening its support), broadening (aimed at gaining new segments of the electorate), reversal (addressed at the competitor’s voters with the purpose of changing their preferences) and neutralisation (based on discouraging a part of the competitor’s electorate from voting).

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established themselves in the electorates' awareness and specified their position on the right wing - left wing spectrum. They tend to distinguish their agendas by referring to selected specific problems, and presenting a hierarchy of social and economic goals.

In practice, one needs to make one more distinction between ways of positioning. In one variant, a party focuses on emphasising virtues it represents as a whole. In the other, it bases its strategy on promoting particular candidate(s). The choice of one of these options depends on how a given party perceives its own assets and resources, and how it identifies its strengths. The key question here is: which asset has the biggest potential to mobilise the electorate? Is it the party leader (or leaders) with his/her personality and leadership traits, or is it the image of the entire party, its character, place on the political scene and agenda.

The categories shown above should help in determining positioning strategies employed by Polish political parties before the 2014 European Parliament election. Since the choice of strategy always depends on the current situation on the political market, balance of power among partisan actors and patterns of rivalry, we have to first take a look at the shape of the market in the period before the election.

### *Situation before the 2014 European Parliament election*

Since 2005, Polish political scene has been increasingly polarised in favour of two key players: Civic Platform (Polish abbreviation: PO) and Law and Justice (Polish abbreviation: PiS). This division has been stable enough to prompt some authors to claim the scene is now almost entirely ossified [Wojtasik 2010: 76-77; Kolczyński 2010: 121-123]. The rivalry between PO and PiS has engaged approximately 70 per cent of all active voters (see: table 2).

Table 1. Support for PO and PiS in the period from 2005 to 2011.

Election	Percentage of valid votes		
	PO	PiS	Combined
2005 presidential election (first round)	36,33	33,10	69,43
2005 parliamentary election (lower chamber)	24,14	26,99	51,13
2007 parliamentary election (lower chamber)	41,51	32,11	73,62
2009 European Parliament election	44,43	27,4	71,73
2010 presidential election (first round)	41,54	36,46	88,00
2011 parliamentary election (lower chamber)	39,18	29,89	69,07

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, [www.pkw.gov.pl](http://www.pkw.gov.pl).

The division both parties have used to differentiate their political agendas was drawn in 2005, when PiS symbolically presented its rivalry with PO as „Poland of solidarity vs. liberal Poland”. This conflict referred to pre-existing political divisions - most of all, to ideological dispute on economics between proponents of statism and liberalism. In the 1990s, the same debate was also interpreted as a social conflict between those who as a result of democratic and economic transformation were put at a disadvantage, and those who used the very same process to gain privileged positions [Pełczyńska-Nałęcz 1998: 222; Grabowska 2004]. Another strategic move employed by the two competing formations was to broaden the polarisation so as to encompass political and axiological issues. In the political dimension, the statism vs. liberalism debate was presented as a choice between a strong, centralised state, and a weak, decentralised one. Meanwhile, in the cultural realm, the conflict between PO and PiS was built around two opposing visions of development: the modern Poland advocated by PO and traditional Poland championed by PiS [Cichosz 2011b: 157-158]. Finally, the two political rivals divided the voters with respect to their views on European Union<sup>2</sup>. Supporters of PO claimed Donald Tusk’s party represented Eurorealism, while PiS was the voice of Eurosceptics. Supporters of PiS also presented their party as Eurorealists, but attributed PO and its leaders with unjustified Eurooptimism [for more, see: Sula 2005]. Leaving such labels aside, the fact is that MEPs elected to the European Parliament from PO lists join the Group of the European People’s Party (EPP), while those put forward by PiS associate with European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR).

The two major parties differed also on their visions of foreign policy, particularly with regard to Polish-Russian bilateral relations. PO proposed an attempt at cooperating with the Russian Federation and following U.S. and EU’s policy on this matter. Conversely, PiS was deeply sceptical toward Russia and harboured a fear of Vladimir Putin’s imperial ambitions. This was reflected in a rather gloomy prediction the then-president Lech Kaczyński made in his speech in Tbilisi on 12th of August 2008, just days after Russian assault on Georgia: *‘Today, it’s Georgia. Tomorrow, it will be Ukraine. The day after tomorrow, the Baltic states. Then, it may be my own country - it may be Poland’* [Wzryta prezydenta RP w Gruzji].

Other noticeable political formations - including those that in the 2011 election managed to obtain parliamentary seats for its representatives (the Democratic Left Alliance, Polish People’s Party and Palikot’s Movement) - have usually been left with the role of mere observers, as PO and PiS kept

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<sup>2</sup> Parties’ attitude toward the EU (the desirable scope of integration of goals to be pursued by the Union) corresponds directly to their position on the modernism (left-wing formations) - traditionalism (right-wing formations) spectrum. Hence, it is treated here as an element of ideological positioning.

battling for primacy. Polish People's Party (PSL) partnered PO in a governing coalition after the 2007 election and, similarly to PO, put its MEPs in EPP. Its main target group and stakeholders are farmers, but it has been under constant threat from PiS, which has continuously tried to garner more support from the rural electorate. Nonetheless, PSL has persisted in presenting itself as a centric, pragmatic party, well-rooted in local self-government and focused on citizens' everyday problems. It has also emphasised its detachment from the PO vs. PiS conflict [Musiał-Karg 2012: 331-332]. Another party that has championed the image of rational and cooperative politics (also within the government) is the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Positioned on the left wing of the scene, SLD has put its MEPs in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). Ever since 2005, when it suffered a major loss in the parliamentary election (only 11,31 per cent of votes, compared to 41,04 per cent four years earlier<sup>3</sup>), SLD has been unable to come up with an attractive agenda and prevent much of its electorate from moving toward other major players. The most centre-minded of its voters have chosen PO, the ones in favour of welfare state have shifted their support to PiS, and the axiological liberals have found an alternative in Palikot's Movement. The latter party, formed before the 2011 election, positioned itself as deeply liberal, emphasising its anti-PiS standpoint, anticlericalism and liberal attitude toward issues such as soft drugs and homosexual civil unions [Modrzejewski 2012: 301-310].

During the 2011-2015 parliamentary term of office, dominant parties experience several rifts. In September 2013, a group of deputies focused around former minister of justice (in the PO-PSL government), Jarosław Gowin, left the ranks of PO. As explained by Gowin, the reason for such move was their disappointment with the government's economic policy (specifically, decisions to increase tax rates and effectively withdraw from the previously introduced reform of the retirement funding system) [Jagor 2013]. In December 2013, together with another group of deputies, who decided to leave a small centre-right formation Poland Comes First (Polish: Polska Jest Najważniejsza, PJN), they formed a new party called Jarosław Gowin's United Poland (Polish: Polska Razem, PR).

Another formation created during the 2011-2015 term of office is Poland of Solidarity. It was established by a group of deputies who in 2011 were expelled from PiS. Its leader, Zbigniew Ziobro, during his career at PiS reached

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<sup>3</sup> In 2001, SLD launched the campaign in a coalition with the Union of Labour (Polish: Unia Pracy, UP), while in the 2005 election it ran alone. Still, in the SLD-UP coalition, the Alliance was by far the stronger partner, with UP contributing no more than a couple per cent of support (in 2005, UP's candidates ran from the lists of another party - Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland; they garnered 3,89 per cent of votes). This means that results from both elections can be compared and credibly considered as reflecting support for SLD.

the position of the party's vice-chairman. From 2005 to 2007, he served as the minister of justice in PiS-led government. After falling out of favour with Jarosław Kaczyński, he spent the 2009-2014 term of office in the European Parliament. Ziobro and his colleagues were expelled for disloyalty to PiS leadership - effectively, as a result of their public calls for increased internal democratisation of the party [po. PAP 2011].

Polls released before the 2014 election indicated a growing support for one other formation - Congress of the New Right, established in 2011 by activists from several small political entities of conservative and liberal character. The popularity of the Congress was to be built around the image of its leader, Janusz Korwin Mikke - a widely recognised politician with experience dating back to 1989 (who after 1993, however, has been somewhat marginalised). Korwin-Mikke gained popularity by using Internet as a tool for political communication - he has been one of the first Polish politicians to launch his own blog. Polls conducted among Internet users gave him as much as over 20 per cent of support, although realistically, it has been far lower, oscillating from 1 to 2,5 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

For the four parties described above, the 2014 EP election held particular importance, as it determined their chance for finding a slightly more permanent niche on the political market.

### ***Positioning of partisan agendas during the election campaign***

Polish government's attitude toward Russia changed in the months preceding the 2014 European Parliament election due to the events in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> Russian policy toward Ukraine, the invasion of Crimea (February / March 2014) and subsequent outbreaks of armed struggles in the Eastern regions of Ukraine (April 2014) pushed the major governing party - Civic Platform - to make national security one of key issues of the campaign. The threat of aggression from Russia, not only against Ukraine, but also against its other neighbouring countries (including Poland) came to the forefront of public debate. Undeniably, the government made substantial effort to convince both NATO and the EU to devote more attention to matters of European security (including energy security). The same issue was used as a centrepiece around which Civic Platform's

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, in one of the Internet polls conducted before the 2010 presidential election, Korwin-Mikke received 18 per cent of support, which was the second highest result after Bronisław Komorowski (41 per cent), who ultimately was elected the president [Grzesiczak 2010]. However, Korwin-Mikke's actual result in the election was only 2,5 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> I'm referring to the protest which started in Kiev in November 2013, provoked by Viktor Yanukovich's policy and his decision to postpone signing Ukraine's association agreement with the EU. After the president used force against the protesters, the social movement turned strictly against him and his circles.

agenda for the European Parliament could be positioned. The party presented itself as the only political force able to provide Poland with sufficient security. The strategy was encapsulated in the following slogan: *„Strong Poland in a secure Europe”*. This amounted to a major change in the party’s approach - effectively, Civic Platform moved to the position previously occupied by PiS.

Faced with such move from its most important rival, Jarosław Kaczyński’s formation was forced to look for other subjects that would distinguish its offer from that of PO. The *‘Serve Poland, listen to the Poles’* slogan was meant to emphasise the difference between the Civic Platform - a party interested only in power and preoccupied with its own internal conflicts - and Law and Justice, which wants to engage with the citizens. As usual, PiS referred to the symbolic meaning of the “Solidarity”, pointing out that “Solidarity” is a *‘movement joined by millions of people who would like to have their say’*. The post-1989 transformation arose high hopes among the Poles, but subsequent two decades proved, to many citizens, to be a disappointment. (*‘This is not the Poland we agreed upon’*). PiS positioned itself as a representative of all those disappointed by the new reality [see: db/mtom 2014]. The party targeted most of all inhabitants of medium and small-sized cities, as well as rural areas.

PO’s coalition partner, Polish People’s Party (PSL), positioned its offer by distancing itself from both dominant players and presenting itself as *‘the only Polish party focused on dialogue and cooperation’*, an entity that is *‘close to people and their needs’* [Dlaczego warto głosować na PSL? 2014], *‘the voice of rural areas - Poland beyond the big cities’*. As one quickly notices, the latter claim put PSL in direct rivalry with PiS over the voters from rural parts of the country.

The coalition formed by two left-wing parties, Democratic Left Alliance and Union of Labour, chose to follow its course from the 2009 campaign and emphasise its affiliation with the family of European socialists - the second most numerous group in the European Parliament. It also pledged to pursue changes in European policy and focus on creating new jobs across Europe, improving social security system and ensuring equal treatment to all citizens. As in case of some other parties, it also claimed to *‘improve Poland’s position’* in the EU.

The left-wing and centre-left electorate was targeted by one more actor - Europe+ Your Movement, a would-be coalition partner of SLD and UP. In itself, Europe+ Your Movement was a coalition formed shortly before the election by several former SLD members and the Palikot’s Movement. Upon joining forces, these two groups created an entity which combined support for welfare state and modernisation with pro-European views. On the left-wing - right-wing continuum, it was situated slightly closer to the left than Palikot’s Movement alone. The new actor decided to put itself in opposition to PO’s vision of foreign policy by proposing a different take on national security.

Janusz Palikot stressed that Poles were not doomed to ‘*die for Poland*’ (in a war against Russia, to which prime minister Donald Tusk alluded in his speech - M.C.). Instead, he claimed, they could ‘*live for Poland*’, provided the country developed its economy, continued integration with Europe and introduced reforms aimed at building social capital [*Przemówienie Janusza Palikota 2014*]. Crucially for the image of coalition, it was backed by Janusz Palikot and former Polish president, Aleksander Kwaśniewski. The support from the latter figure meant Your Movement attempted to shed its reputation for political adventurism in favour of a calmer, more sanitised style. At the same time, it was also meant to give Your Movement more credibility in the eyes of left-wing voters.

Jarosław Gowin’s United Poland presented itself as Eurorealist, focusing on proposals for limiting EU’s bureaucracy, giving national interests primacy over the Union’s interests (hence the slogan saying ‘*A great Poland in a low-key Union*’), further enlargement of the EU and signing association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Referring to the key subject debated during the campaign, Jarosław Gowin called on leaders of PO and PiS to overcome particular partisan interests and initiate close cooperation between all right-wing and centre-right formations. As Poland’s national security was threatened, he argued, one sign of such cooperation would be if all Polish MEPs joined the same political group in the EP so as to better represent Polish interests on the international scene [*List Jarosława Gowina 2014*].

Another new entity formed as a result of numerous rifts and movements in the Polish parliaments was Zbigniew Ziobro’s Poland of Solidarity. (Polish: Solidarna Polska). Going into the EP election, it faced an increasingly difficult task of distinguishing itself from all the various formations springing up on the right wing of the political scene. It positioned itself as a centre-right party, espousing socialist views on economics and conservative axiology. As for Poland’s membership of the EU and the shape of the Union as a whole, it chose a utilitarian, somewhat egoistic approach expressed in the slogan: ‘*As much Union as benefits dictate*’ [*Program europejski Solidarnej Polski 2014*]. The main asset of the party was to be its leader, Zbigniew Ziobro, pictured as a competent and effective politician.<sup>6</sup>

The last formation to be described in this part of the paper is the Congress of the New Right - the only party of all discussed here without national parliamentary representation. In terms of axiology, Congress presented conservative standpoint, while its economic agenda was liberal. It was the only Polish party approaching the election with strictly Eurosceptic views (by which I mean “hard Euroscepticism”, see: Taggart, Szczerbiak 2004: 3). Congress’ leader, Janusz

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<sup>6</sup> Effective also in the EP, as reflected by Ziobro’s presence in the campaign of Nigel Farage - a well-known leader of UK Independence Party (UKIP) and an MEP.

Korwin-Mikke, claimed his formation would act toward ‘*abolishing the EU (...) by reducing it to a free trade agreement*’, ‘*stopping federalists’ rush toward centralisation*’, ‘*fighting Eurosocijalism (...), fighting EU’s tyranny*’ [Program Kongresu Nowej Prawicy 2014]. Apart from a visibly anti-EU rhetoric, the party made use of its position as an outsider on the political scene by attempting to garner the support of those voters who openly contested mainstream politics and large formations shaping it. Therefore, Congress put itself in opposition to all other parties, describing them collectively as ineffective ‘*crypto-socialists*’ or even thieves. New Right’s position on Russian-Ukrainian relations was also unique - Korwin-Mikke praised Vladimir Putin’s effectiveness in this matter and demanded that Polish government retained neutral position toward the conflict between Poland’s eastern neighbours [Oświadczenie w/s sytuacji na Ukrainie 2014].

Table 2. Positioning of agendas for the 2014 European Parliament election.

Political party	Slogan	Positioning type
Civic Platform	<i>„Strong Poland in a secure Europe”</i>	- situational - inducement strategy
Law and Justice	<i>„Serve Poland, listen to the Poles”</i>	- situational - reinforcement strategy
Democratic Left Alliance - Union of Labour	<i>„Europe: #Toward changes”</i>	- ideological (social –democratic)
Europe+ Your Movement	<i>„Freedom, equality, work”</i>	- ideological (social-liberal)
Polish People’s Party	<i>„Close to the people”</i>	- situational - reinforcement strategy
Congress of the New Right	<i>„New Right - New Europe”</i>	- ideological (liberal-conservative and anti-EU)
Jarosław Gowin’s United Poland	<i>„A great Poland in a low-key Union”</i>	- ideological (Eurorealism)
Zbigniew Ziobro’s Poland of Solidarity	<i>„Secure and just Poland”</i>	- ideological (statism, conservatism)

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