



ORIGINAL PAPER

Human Rights and Freedoms in Croatia in 1989/1990 Using the Example of Local Newspapers

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Abstract:

The paper explores the issue of human rights and freedoms and journalism in 1989 and 1990 using the example of local newspapers published in the city of Zadar in the Republic of Croatia. The research is based on newspaper articles on human rights and freedoms published in Zadar local newspapers *Narodni list* and *Fokus*, in the Republic of Croatia. The defined research period for the paper is from 9 February 1989 to 22 September 1990, when the youth monthly newspaper *Fokus* was being published. The socio-political changes in the research period were extremely difficult and demanding for Croatia, and they were marked by the dissolution of the SFRY, the transition process, the liberalization, the commencement of the process of democratization and the creation of an independent Croatia. One of the main issues in the then multinational republic of Yugoslavia were, among other things, human rights and freedoms, especially those connected to religious freedoms which during the initial stages of democratization in Croatia received their space in the researched newspapers. The research includes the newspaper articles which are placed in the Human Rights and Freedoms category, published on the pages of the weekly newspaper *Narodni list* and the youth monthly newspaper *Fokus*. The paper applies a descriptive, explanatory and qualitative content analysis. 104 newspapers and 1175 newspaper articles were analyzed, among which 41 were published under the Human Rights and Freedoms category. The research findings have showed that the examined local newspapers *Narodni list* and *Fokus*, actively informed the readers about the issue of human rights and freedoms.

Keywords: *human rights and freedoms; local newspapers; democratization; Croatia; content analysis*

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Introduction

The Republic of Croatia began its journey to independence and sovereignty in the late 1980s. In that period, Croatia was one of the republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), along with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Within that state, which had the characteristics of a totalitarian regime, Croatia could not develop its democracy. Slowly, in the late eighties of the last century, the mentioned totalitarian regime weakened, with many socio-political changes, and Croatia then begins its transition process, i.e. the transition from totalitarian to democratic order; then the process of liberalization, political pluralism and finally the beginning of the process of democratization. All these processes, similarly, took place in other countries of Central and Southeast Europe, with a significant difference that Croatia, among other things, had to find its way to statehood by, unfortunately, war, which resulted in the Homeland War that took place in Croatia from the beginning of 1990 until 1995. It was precisely the war that put the mentioned processes in the background, because defence of the territory against the Serbian aggressor was in the foreground, and thus the process of democratization of Croatia slowed down significantly. The basis for the democratic development of Croatia, as well as other countries of Central and Southeast Europe, was certainly the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 - the symbol of the Cold War and block division of the world. The year 1989 is in world literature often referred to as the year of miracles because it was marked by important socio-political changes in many states which changed their political histories.

According to Anđelko Milardović, democratization is defined as a process of liberalization, transition and consolidation of democracy (Milardović, 2006:109). As causes of democratization he mentions: pressure of the opposition on the regime elite, weakening of the old regime, expansion of the rights and freedoms of citizens, pluralization of political space (multipartism) (Milardović, 2006:108). The liberalization process, according to the mentioned author, implies: individual freedoms, expansion of rights and freedoms for groups, release of political prisoners, free discussion and elimination of censorship, creation of civil society, democratization of the media, opening up of a larger political space for greater action of opposition and civil society (Milardović, 2006:108).

An important prerequisite for the development of the process of democratization in every state, including Croatia, is certainly statehood. According to many politologists, statehood can only be achieved if there is democracy as a new form of government within a particular state.

The process of democratization in Croatia started with the introduction of pluralism in Croatia's political life. The Croatian political scene in 1989 was strengthened by the legalization of a large number of political parties when the Republic Administration and Judicial Secretariat issued the first party registrations. Most of them were newly founded parties, although among them there were those who based their programs on party tradition. The first established political party in Croatia was the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSL), founded in 1989, after that, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) was founded in 1990, and it won the first democratic elections in Croatia held in April 1990. These elections were a reflection of the disagreement between political actors at the then political scene of Croatia and then Yugoslavia.

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Apart from the political changes affecting Croatia in the research period, the democratization of the Croatian society has also influenced by the changes in legislation, the media sector and the area of human rights and freedoms. As for changes in the media, they concerned changes in the way of information, expression and journalist action in general (Ražnjević Zdrilić, 2014:296). The former Yugoslav media system, which was marked by censorship, especially when it came to print media, was slowly replaced by a new democratic pluralistic media system that had its backbone in many new laws and acts.

Human rights and freedoms should be a foundation of every political system, as part of a modern and democratic society. The democracy of a society does not exist unless fundamental human rights and freedoms of every individual are achieved (Hadžić, 2015:9). Human rights and freedoms include, inter alia, "political participation of individuals in the political communication process" (Lohmann, 2004:1). According to Vujčić, human rights are defined as "the content of a democratic political culture as well as the universality, egalitarianism and obligation of human rights that "give" and "protect" important freedoms, identities, chances, powers, benefits, services, etc., makes them as a constituent of the political culture of the democracy of people" (Vujčić, 2000:56). At the beginning of the transition period, the breakup of SFR Yugoslavia and creation of the new Croatian state, according to Bing, "the human rights and freedoms were one of the central political issues of social development of Croatia, manifested in a series of complex problems in the center of which was the problem of harmonization of state building and development of democratization, i.e. civil society" (Bing, 2007:196). In the observed period, at the beginning of the 1990s, human rights and freedoms changed the concept of value: "fundamental" human rights (right to work, education) oppress the rights to political freedom (the right to political organization, self-determination of people, freedom of the media) (Bing, 2007:197). Within the framework of human rights and freedoms, this research will also analyse those articles that relate to religious freedoms.

As a research corpus for this paper, local newspapers which were published in the town of Zadar in Croatia were selected. On the world map the city of Zadar is recognized as a cultural, historical and tourist destination, but it is also famous for its long-standing media tradition. The first Croatian-language newspaper, *Kraljski Dalmatin*, was published in Zadar from 1806 to 1810, during the rule of French administration in Zadar, and *Narodni list*, which is also a part of this paper, was launched in 1862 and is published even today. Due to its extremely long tradition of publishing, *Narodni list* is amongst the oldest newspapers in Southeast Europe. The fact that from the beginning of the 19th until mid-20th century there were over 120 different periodicals published in Zadar speaks volumes about Zadar as a center of journalism in Croatia, and wider (Ražnjević Zdrilić, 2014: 296).

Methodology

This paper deals with the research of the communication aspect between human rights and freedoms and journalism in the period between 1989 and 1990 on the example of local newspapers that were published in the city of Zadar in the Republic of Croatia. The research corpus are newspaper articles published in Zadar local newspapers *Narodni list* and *Fokus* in the Republic of Croatia. During the research period, two newspapers were published in Zadar: the weekly *Narodni list* and the youth half-monthly *Fokus*. *Narodni list* published its first issue in 1862 during the Italian government in Zadar under the title *Il Nazionale* in the Italian language, and a supplement in that newspaper was published in the Croatian language and was called *Narodni list*. Since 1876 it has been published only in Croatian. The research period of this paper is the time of publication of

the monthly *Fokus*. *Fokus* is a youth monthly that was published in Zadar from 9 February 1989 until 22 September 1990. *Fokus* was unique in many aspects, and most of all because it was the first independent newspaper in Croatia. The weakening of the communist regime in Croatia made it possible to launch independent media. The editorial policy of this youth monthly was liberal. That is why this newspaper and its articles often broke the barriers of the one-party system of the time and slowly opened the door to the process of democratization in all aspects, not only in Zadar but throughout Croatia.

The research was based on newspaper articles published in the weekly *Narodni list* and the monthly *Fokus* which are classified into the category *Human Rights and Freedoms*. The analysis covered 104 issues and 1175 articles, of which 41 articles were published within the category *Human Rights and Freedoms*. Descriptive and exploratory methods as well as methods of qualitative content analysis were used in this paper. The criteria for qualitative content analysis were the relevance and importance of the topic with regard to the socio-political context of the research period. Given this criterion, four newspaper articles from the weekly *Narodni list* and four newspaper articles from the monthly *Fokus* from each research year, 1989 and 1990, were analysed with qualitative content analysis. The paper is based on the assumption that the political and legislative changes affecting Croatia in the observed period enabled the development of human rights and freedoms in Croatia, which also reflected on newspaper communication on the example of local newspapers in Zadar.

Result of research

Table 1. Issues of *Narodni list* and *Fokus* in 1989 and 1990

	<i>NARODNI LIST</i>	%	<i>FOKUS</i>	%	<i>TOTAL</i>	%
1989	48	55,81	11	55	59	55,66
1990	38	44,18	9	45	47	44,34
TOTAL	86	100,00	20	100,00	106	100,00

Adjusted according to: Ražnjević Zdrilić (2013: 85)

Table 1 shows the issues of newspapers published in the observed period. 55,66% issues were published in 1989 and 44,34% in 1990. Observing each newspaper individually, it is apparent that *Narodni list* published more issues in both researched years, which is to be expected as the newspapers in question had different issuance periods. Namely, *Narodni list* was a weekly, and *Fokus* was a monthly, so in this aspect it was not possible to compare these two newspapers.

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Table 2. Comparison of the share of newspaper articles in *Narodni list* and *Fokus* in 1989 and 1990 according to the research category *Human Rights and Freedoms*

	<i>NARODNI LIST</i>	%	<i>FOKUS</i>	%	<i>TOTAL</i>	%
1989	9	69,24	12	42,86	21	51,21
1990	4	30,76	16	57,14	20	48,79
TOTAL	13	100	28	100	41	100

Adjusted according to: Ražnjević Zdrilić (2013: 86)

Table 2 shows the comparison of the share of newspaper articles in the researched newspapers with respect to the category *Human Rights and Freedoms* in 1989 and 1990. Looking at the total, almost the same number of newspaper articles on the investigated category was published in 1989 and in 1990. However, it is important to emphasize that the youth monthly *Fokus* published more articles in the category *Human Rights and Freedoms* compared to *Narodni list*. As an independent and liberal newspaper, in the observed period, *Fokus* gave more media attention to the subject of human rights and freedoms which was of great importance for the development of democratization in Croatia in the mentioned transition period from communism to democracy.

Fokus in 1989

In newspaper articles, *Fokus* frequently discussed the issue of the Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, the article titled *Conscientious Objection*, published in the second issue of *Fokus* on 23 February 1989, talks about the Christian religious community Jehovah's Witnesses (B. Š., 1989:9). Members of this religious community refuse military service because they consider that man cannot be used as a means against another man: "Who has a Bible-educated conscience refuses to serve military service. For whoso keeps the sword, from the sword shall perish" (B. Š., 1989:9). Because of their refusal of military service, members of this religious community were often condemned, and the interlocutor in this article states that it is contrary to the *Declaration of Human Rights* in the United Nations, and the signatory of that *Declaration* is also Yugoslavia. In other countries in Europe this problem was solved in a way that the convicts would do community service and after that they would no longer receive invitations to the army (B. Š., 1989:9). The next article also discusses the Declaration of Human Rights. The theoretical background to the concept of human rights and related areas was given in the article *Self-Governing Democracy*, by Željko Luburović. The author defines human rights as a set of fundamental rights of individuals in a society which an individual does not acquire but enjoys them by his/her very birth (Luburović, 1989:9). As historical documents which were the basis for the development of the then Declaration, the author cited the *Declaration of North American Fighters Against English Colonization* and the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* from 1789. According to the author, man is *zoon politikon* (political animal), i.e. he has the right to freedom of thought, expression, affiliation, association, and so on, and all that is taken away from man in socialist societies: "This is most drastically manifested in the encroachment into freedom of thought, press and speech, lack of freedom in this area puts the modern man in chains, those same chains in which slaves and serfs were put" (Luburović, 1989:9). In its sixth

issue, *Fokus* published the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Given the political situation at the time, the newspaper decided to remind the public of the fundamental human rights of every man regardless of the country or territory in which he/she lived and the political status those countries had (OG, 1989: 7). About the issue of people gathering on squares, readers were able to learn in the article titled "*In The Rush Hour, The People Happen*" in which the author mentions the Republic Square in Zagreb as one of the places where people can have fun during their free time, which can also be a gathering place for expressing one's own rights and dissatisfaction with the current political and social situation (Jovanović, 1989: 9).

Fokus in 1990

The newspaper articles analysed in category *Human Rights and Freedoms* in the monthly *Fokus* in 1990 mostly referred to the tragic deaths of Kosovar soldiers during military service in the Yugoslav People's Army. A series of newspaper articles was published, and as contribution to these shocking stories, there were photographs of these terrible crimes. In the article titled *Wastelands Of Kosovar Reality*, the author focuses on the then Yugoslav autonomous province of Kosovo and the violation of human rights of Kosovo's population (Torić, 1990:13). Author M. Torić states that the events that took place in Kosovo in late January and early February 1990 represent another slap on the face of Yugoslavia's democracy. He also states that the endangered inter-ethnic relations in Yugoslavia paint a bad picture in the world. In almost all domestic official news agencies, especially Tanjug, Albanians are given epithets such as nationalists, separatists, terrorists, gangs and fascists, while foreign unbiased reporters report on the unequal conflict in Kosovo between armed special police and youngsters throwing stones (Torić, 1990:13). The author noted in the article that Yugoslavia, by signing the Helsinki Accords and the Vienna Convention, strongly undertook to protect the rights of all peoples and ethnic groups, which it did not do, and had not yet adopted the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Torić, 1990:13). In the 15th issue of *Fokus*, a text on isolation of certain persons in Kosovo and their suffering was published for the first time, which had never been published in any other print medium in Yugoslavia. The article titled *Even The Militoners Cried!!!* brings the testimonies of Kosovo's isolates. Professor Ibrahim Rugova also found himself in a group of isolates; just before the defense of his doctoral dissertation, the security personnel imprisoned him for a month (Ivković, 1990:6). The testimony of one of the isolates, Bahrim Osmani, stands out: "*It was terrible. Even the militoners who escorted us cried. Even those who heartlessly tied and guarded us cried over our pain and troubles*", says Osmani and continues: "*One of them grabbed my hair and hit my head against a wall so long until it started to bleed. Even that wasn't enough for them, so three of them beat me with a bat later on, but I did not fall*" (Ivković, 1990:6). The testimonies of the families of tragically deceased Albanian young men during military service in the JNA was published in the 17th issue of *Fokus* in an article titled *Sadness In Locked Caskets*. The intention of this article was to inform the public about the violent deaths of Albanian soldiers. The testimonies were given by members of the families of three Albanian soldiers, stating that the bodies of their loved ones were brought in locked caskets with visible traces of violent death on their bodies (N. N., 1990:7). The sequel to the previous article is the title *Vuk Obradović, Respond!*. The editorial board of *Fokus*, led by its then editor-in-chief Branko Mrčela, sends a public appeal to Vuk Obradović, the then JNA's spokesperson, why the relatives of the killed

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soldiers are not allowed to see the bodies of the deceased soldiers before the burial, and why they never learned the motives of suicide of these unfortunate soldiers (Mrčela, 1990:3). *Fokus* still intended to publish a series of articles on the tragic deaths of Albanian soldiers in the JNA, but Naser Jaharija Breći, the correspondent of *Fokus* in Kosovo, was not allowed to work in the Albanian media of public information. The then last published issue of *Fokus* in Kosovo was seized (Mrčela, 1990:3).

Narodni list in 1989

Religious freedoms are included in the category of human freedoms in this paper. With the development of democratization in Croatia, they got their space in *Narodni list*. The article titled *Sveti Roko More Important Than The Flood*, published in the 1962nd issue, mostly talks about how religious celebrations and holidays are no longer a taboo, and all that was enabled by a wave of democracy in Croatia (T.S., 1990:24). *Narodni list* covered a large church celebration in Nin on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of the Croats transition to the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. It also covered religious ceremonies, among others the one called *Nin '89 - Branimir's Year - The roots of Christianity in Croats*. The report from this ceremony was published in the 1965th issue of *Narodni list* in an article titled *A Dignified Religious Gathering* (M.K., 1989:7). This great homeland celebration gathered over 60,000 people. The solemn concelebration was conducted by cardinal Franjo Kuharić who in his sermon put special emphasis on youth, family and parenthood by describing marriage as sacred and abortion as murder of the child, emphasizing to believers the increasing fall in birth rates in Croatia (M.K., 1989:7). The gathering was dignified because there were no excesses or political speeches, and apart from the church flags, there were only two Croatian flags (M.K., 1989:7). The theme of free expression, with special emphasis on political expression, was analysed in article titled *Petition For Free Political Expression*, by Meri Kučina. The citizens' petition was initiated to collect signatures for the abolition of articles 114, 133 and 157 of the SFRY's Penal Code, referring to trials for "counterrevolutionary action", "malicious and unrealistic representation of the state of the country", "enemy propaganda" and "violations of the reputation of the SFRY" (Kučina, 1989: 11). The petition was addressed to the Presidency of the SFRY, the basic motto of the petition was *Freedom of Another Man is My Freedom Too*; and its goal was to release all political prisoners who were convicted under the aforementioned articles. 14,000 signatures were collected in Zagreb, several thousand in Split, and the main initiator of petition in Zadar was the Zadar Municipal Conference of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia. However, many complaints came from other parts of the country about these petitions, saying that they are the result of the current political situation, i.e. the trial of Adem Vllasi (Kučina, 1989: 11). The author conducted a brief survey amongst Zadar's youth about this topic. Their views were divided. The majority of surveyed respondents supported the abolition of verbal delict, as well as the text of this petition. Their conclusion was that everyone has the right to their opinion, especially if it is opposed to the ruling politics, all of which leads to the suffocation of democracy (Kučina, 1989: 11). The next issue of *Narodni list* brought an article titled *Four Thousand Signatures*, which provided information on the collected four thousand and 200 signatures in the organized three-day petition at the Zadar National Square, organized by the Zadar Municipal Conference of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia (M. K., 1989:2). A hundred citizens were against the abolition of the abovementioned articles of the Penal Code. The Zadar Municipal Conference of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia was very satisfied with the success of the petition.

The citizens of Biograd supported the initiative of the Zagreb City Committee of the League of Socialist Youth of Croatia. They scheduled organized signing for 27 and 28 November 1989 (M. K., 1989:2).

Narodni list in 1990

The 1982nd issue of *Narodni list* also talked about human rights and freedoms. The article titled *Full Freedom Of Every Individual* has human rights and freedoms as the main topic. The author addressed the changes in Croatia's political system that enabled the development of a democratic society based on human rights and freedoms (Pavlović 1990: 3). He also mentioned international acts to ensure the protection of human rights: the *Declaration of Human Rights from 1949* and the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child from 1959*. He stated that human rights and democracy are inextricably linked: *The human dignity is ensured and the possibility of degrading and transforming a man into object, reducing him to a number and a means of manipulation is eliminated. Human dignity becomes an integral part of human personality* (Pavlović 1990: 3). Apart from fundamental human rights, the author also mentions the rights of man and citizen to an independent and impartial tribunal contained in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the human right to a healthy environment (Pavlović 1990: 3). At the end of the article, the author addressed human rights and freedoms in Zadar Municipality in 1989, citing political pluralism as one of the forms of human rights and freedoms, expressed through the founding assemblies of alternative movements, alliances and communities (Pavlović 1990: 3). The topic of human rights and freedoms was also covered in an article titled *Unconstitutionality And Human Rights*, published in the 2002nd issue of *Narodni list*. With the article, the author added to the speech of the then new President of the Presidency of SFRY Borislav Jović, who, among other things, stated that free elections were unconstitutional. The author stressed that human rights were above each constitution and that President Jović obviously forgot about many international human rights conventions that Yugoslavia committed to abide by (Matek, 1990:7). Religious freedoms and celebrations were the subject of article *Fiestas In Zadar And Škabrnja*, published in the 2015th issue of *Narodni list*. Emphasis was put on the religious celebration of Assumption of Mary, celebrated in parishes Puntamika and Škabrnja in the Zadar area (D.J., 1990:9). Along with Christmas and Easter, this holiday was of particular importance to believers. Under the former communist government, every celebration of religious holidays was overseen by enhanced police controls. With the development of democracy and pluralism in Croatia the control of religious celebrations disappears: *Free multiparty elections have broken off the chains of the "controlled dosage of freedom of religious expression" and in the past months the believers have diminished a 40-year "isolation"* (D.J., 1990:9). Article titled *The Pre-Christian Roots Of Christmas* was published in the 1986th issue of *Narodni list*. In that article, the author presented a report from a forum titled "Christmas as a Civilization Heritage", organized by the Section for Culture of the Zadar Municipal Conference of the Socialist League of Working People of Croatia and the Sociological Forum of the Faculty of Philosophy (Kučina, 1990:3). The basic question that was addressed at this forum was whether to celebrate Christmas as a holiday or a non-working day. The scientific, theological and social significance of Christmas was also discussed. Some of the present experts at this forum spoke about the pre-Christian roots of Christmas in Slavic peoples: *Christmas is deeply rooted in the culture of Slavic peoples, including the South Slavs, and from the beginning it had a holiday character. It demanded rest, holidaying in the circle of family and night of vigil,*

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in which the spirits of ancestors were contacted (Kučina, 1990:3). The problem that occurs during Christmas celebrations, according to the author, is which date to determine for this celebration, since in Croatia, apart from Catholics, there are also citizens of other religions. Precisely on the basis of democracy, which knocked on the door of the Croatian society, it was necessary to find the right way and legal provisions for marking Christmas in Croatia, it is the author's opinion (Kučina, 1990:3).

Conclusion

The transition process in Croatia started in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was a reflection of similar socio-political and economic events occurring in the countries of Central and Southeast Europe. In those countries, as well as in Croatia, which was then part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), there was a breakdown of communist regimes that open the door to the processes of liberalization and democratization. Croatia had a different path towards democratization than the mentioned countries. Due to the inter-ethnic disagreements within the then Yugoslavia, the Croatian War of Independence took place in Croatia between 1990 and 1995, in which Croatia was obliged to defend its territory and thereby secure its statehood. One of the fundamental problems that emerged in the process of democratization of Croatian society was the one related to human rights and freedoms. Since Croatia was part of multinational state, this problem was particularly pronounced. This research investigated the relationship between journalism and human rights issues on the example of two local newspapers in Croatia, *Narodni list* and *Fokus*, published in the city of Zadar. The research showed that these newspapers actively informed readers of the socio-political situation that was reflected in the area of human rights and freedoms. Analysis of newspaper articles on this topic indicated that both newspapers analysed and commented on all socio-political events in Zadar, Croatia, as well as throughout Yugoslavia, and their reflection on the area of human rights and freedoms. The researched media actively reported to readers about the documents that guarantee the freedom of every individual, with particular reference to the Declaration of Human Rights, criticizing the political government of that time for not complying with the documents and acts it was obliged to implement. They also discussed the right to political expression, establishment of new political parties or alternatives and free elections as one of the fundamental human rights. Within this category *Narodni list* devoted more space to religious freedoms, analysing the issues of marking religious holidays and religious ceremonies. The research showed that the youth monthly *Fokus* placed particular emphasis within this category on violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms of Kosovo's population. It brought a series of shocking articles and photographs that corroborate the violent deaths of young Kosovar men during military service in the JNA. Comparing the way of commenting and analysing between these two newspapers, it was established that the monthly *Fokus* had an approach to the issues of human rights and freedoms in a more critical, liberal and open way. Given the editorial policy of the newspaper, *Fokus*, as an independent monthly, contributed to the development of democratization of media and social space in Zadar, Croatia, as well as throughout the Yugoslavia of that time.

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