

Talaat Pasha

Posthumous Memoirs

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Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha

The following article is a translation of portions of a manuscript penned by Talaat Pasha, the Young Turk leader and former Grand Vizier of the Turkish Empire, after his flight from Constantinople and during his sojourn in Berlin, where he was carrying on a campaign of Turkish Nationalist intrigue when he was shot and killed by an Armenian student on March 15, 1921. After Talaat's death the manuscript passed into the possession of his wife, who remained in Germany; she has not yet published the whole of it, but after the acquittal of her husband's assassin she permitted the Paris correspondent of the *Vakit*, a liberal Turkish newspaper published in Constantinople, to reproduce the most interesting portions of it. These have been translated from the Turkish by Armenian M. Zekeria, a native of Constantinople. They represent about fifty pages of the original manuscript, the opening sentence of which, " I do not tell all the truth, but all I tell is truth," aroused a great sensation in Turkey.

- Beginning
- Why Turkey favored Germany
- Trying to avoid war
- The allies evasive
- Bulgaria and Romania
- Germany forces the Issue
- Turkey pushed into war
- Deportation of the Armenians
- Atrocities condoned



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Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Beginning

FROM the beginning of the revolution of 1907 down to the Balkan war, Turkey had no definite foreign policy. One day a pro-English feeling would prevail at the Porte, the next we would turn toward Germany. We were in a hesitating state, not knowing where to go, whose hand to shake. We followed the exigencies of the hour, trying to be equally good to all the European powers. After the Balkan War we thought that the loss of Turkey's European provinces was largely due to our undecided and vacillating policy. Consequently, we thought it necessary to settle all our difficulties and disputed problems with the European powers, and, discarding all pretexts of European intervention, to devote our efforts to the social and economic reconstruction of our country. With this aim in view, the Cabinet of Mahmoud Shevket Pasha organized a commission under the Presidency of Hakky Pasha—the former Turkish Prime Minister, who was Turkish Ambassador to Germany during the war, and who died in 1917 at Berlin—and invested it with the extraordinary mission of visiting all the European capitals, with full authority to solve unsettled problems and to reach an agreement with the nations of Europe about their supposed interests in Turkey. Hakky Pasha began his work, going first to England. After concluding an arrangement with the English Government he was to go to Paris, then to Germany, &c. But just at that time Russia sent a vigorous note to the Porte. After the Balkan War there was a worldwide belief that Turkey had become very weak and was lying on her death-bed. Russia, taking advantage of this opportunity, demanded the application of the Treaty of Berlin to the eastern provinces of the empire. This treaty had been violated many times after its signature, and its stipulations had become obsolete. Russia, however, wished to use it as a means of aggression at a time when she knew that Turkey was not able to resist. This unexpected hostility of Russia created great anxiety at the Porte. Trying, on the one hand, to get the help of the other Ambassadors at Constantinople to frustrate the consequences of the Russian note, we gave, on the other hand, a telegraphic order to Hakky Pasha at London to sign an agreement with England and secure her help for the realization of a constructive program by the Turkish Government in the eastern provinces. According to the Treaty of Berlin, the integrity of these Turkish provinces, where our interests were clashing with those of Russia, was assured by England. Hakky Pasha, starting from this point, asked the English Government to appoint English subjects as supervisors of the constructive work to be carried on in this disputed area. The English Government accepted this proposal, and some of the English inspectors who were to go to Turkey for this purpose were even selected and their names announced. The application of this agreement would have eliminated the dangerous effects of the Russian note and would have saved Turkey from great embarrassment. St. Petersburg, realizing this, immediately applied to London and began to use its influence against the agreement. Unfortunately, she succeeded. As a consequence, the English Government subsequently withdrew its consent, and the project to get English help for the constructive work failed.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Why Turkey favored Germany

When England turned her back to the Porte, Germany was courting Turkey to secure her sympathy. During the Balkan War Germany had not failed to flatter the national feeling of the Turks, while the other nations had only insulted it. When we addressed the Ambassadors to ask their help against the Russian demand, they all advised us to submit to the Russian desires, except the German Ambassador, who encouraged us in our project and promised us his help. Although the negotiation at London failed, we continued our political activities, and, with the moral aid of Germany, we were able to divert the move of the Russian note and to put it among the problems of the general reform program. But this incident, which was followed by others, gave a new impetus to the pro-German feeling among the members of the Cabinet. After the Balkan War, the political balance of the Balkans being broken in a way unfavorable to Turkey, we advocated an alliance with one of the European groups to offset this disadvantage. The amiable attitude of Germany encouraged us, and during the diplomatic conversations in regard to the eastern provinces we suggested to the German Ambassador at Constantinople that we were ready to make an alliance with Germany. The German Ambassador received this suggestion favorably, and asked instructions from Berlin. The German Government, however, did not appear enthusiastic about it, and in its answer expressed the belief that Turkey was too weak to make an alliance with Germany; that an alliance might be useful only if contracted at a propitious time, and that for the moment the time was not ripe for such a union. All our endeavors to find an ally failed because of this fact. The European powers wished a strong and powerful ally to help them. In the Summer of 1914, however, Germany, to our surprise, revived our old suggestion and proposed to consider it anew. As no change had occurred in our foreign policy in the interval, there was no reason for refusing this proposal, which we had initiated some time before. Consequently we accepted the discussion of the problem, and in some consecutive meetings with the German Ambassador we prepared a project of alliance. Both parties easily fell into accord regarding the guiding principles and signed an agreement which would form the main lines of a political and military alliance between Germany and Turkey. Immediately after the signature of this document the incidents followed which ended in the World War. When we signed the agreement there was no prospect of war. Immediately after the signature of this document the incidents followed which ended in the World War. When we signed the agreement there was no prospect of war. But after it was signed the assassination of the Austrian Prince and the hostilities between Austria and Serbia suddenly proved ominous. We realized that the change in the attitude of Germany in seeking our co-operation was due to a forecast of future events; but we thought that, even so, this alliance would be still to the benefit of Turkey, because none of the European powers would admit us into their circle without hope of gaining material benefit.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Trying to avoid war

Some months later we were facing the World War. Our position was exceedingly delicate. By the alliance recently concluded, we were engaged on the side of one of the combatants. The German and Austrian Ambassadors visited us every day, insisting upon our immediate entry into the war on their side. Every day we were pressed to answer such questions as these: " When will you join us? When will you show your good will by fulfilling the terms of your agreement ? " &c. The answer to these questions was simple. We could have said: " Italy, although one of the allied members, has not yet joined the Central Powers ; though the neutrality of Belgium has been assured by international treaties, Germany herself has not respected her own signature." But such an answer would have been equivalent to the denial of the alliance, which we had sought so anxiously and esteemed so highly. Moreover, such an attitude would have shown the world our faithlessness to our agreement, and would have ended the confidence of the civilized world in our word. Consequently we preferred to make a more diplomatic reply to the Germans' insistence. We told them that Turkey was faithful to her word; that she would gladly act as soon as necessity showed the need of her help; that as Russia was the most inveterate and menacing enemy of Turkey, it was not only a moral obligation for Turkey to ally herself with Germany in the war, but a necessity proved by historical facts; that it was useless and even dangerous, both for Turkey and for her allies, for us to join the Central Powers without knowing what would be the attitude of Bulgaria, who by various pacts was closely tied to Russia. " After the Balkan War," we further explained, " our European frontier was modified in such a way that Constantinople was rendered defenseless before a serious attack of the Bulgarian Army. If Bulgaria joins the Allies against Turkey, our capital will be exposed to a danger which neither Germany nor the Turkish Army can prevent. Therefore, it will be an unsafe adventure for Turkey to enter the war, unless Bulgaria decisively defines her position. It is possible to win the help of Bulgaria, as there is a hostile feeling among the Bulgarians against Serbia. If Germany can induce Bulgaria to go against the Serbs, Turkey will be glad to fulfill her engagement." This ambiguous and yet apparently logical and skillfully prepared answer saved our position for a long time. Delaying our entry into the war, we could follow the military operations at the fronts and the political changes which occurred in Europe and in the Balkans.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/The allies evasive

There was a belief that during this period, in which we tried to remain neutral, the Allies had offered us very alluring proposals, and that we refused them without serious consideration. This is an exaggeration of facts. The truth is, that from the beginning of the World War until the incident of the Black Sea, which caused us to enter the conflict, not a real or formal proposition had been handed us by the Allies. It is true also that the French and English Ambassadors advised us many times to keep our neutrality. Even when they observed our inclination toward Germany, the only promise they could give us was that, in the case of our preserving strict neutrality, they would guarantee the integrity of the empire and would persuade Russia to do the same. They never went further in their proposal than that, and never proposed anything else. The pledge to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire had been repeated many times after the Paris conference, but never kept. It was not possible and wise, therefore, to give serious consideration to the evasive proposal of the Allies. Who could assure us that this promise would oil could be kept after the war? We had a good example of what might happen in England's attitude regarding the eastern provinces. key to enter the war, unless Bulgaria decisively defines her position. It is possible to win the help of Bulgaria, as there is a hostile feeling among the Bulgarians against Serbia. If Germany can induce Bulgaria to go against the Serbs, Turkey will be glad to fulfill her engagement." This ambiguous and yet apparently logical and skillfully prepared answer saved our position for a long time. Delaying our entry into the war, we could follow the military operations at the fronts and the political changes which occurred in Europe and in the Balkans. There was a belief that during this period, in which we tried to remain neutral, the Allies had offered us very alluring proposals, and that we refused them without serious consideration. This is an exaggeration of facts. The truth is, that from the beginning of the World War until the incident of the Black Sea, which caused us to enter the conflict, not a real or formal proposition had been handed us by the Allies. It is true also that the French and English Ambassadors advised us many times to keep our neutrality. Even when they observed our inclination toward Germany, the only promise they could give us was that, in the case of our preserving strict neutrality, they would guarantee the integrity of the empire and would persuade Russia to do the same. They never went further in their proposal than that, and never proposed anything else. The pledge to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire had been repeated many times after the Paris conference, but never kept. It was not possible and wise, therefore, to give serious consideration to the evasive proposal of the Allies. Who could assure us that this promise would oil could be kept after the war? We had a good example of what might happen in England's attitude regarding the eastern provinces. On the contrary, we had many reasons for not believing in their promises. In the very beginning of the war England, without any reason, without even a previous announcement, had requisitioned our two great dreadnoughts, Osman I. and Reshadie, in construction at English arsenals. These two warships were ordered from England at the cost of a tremendous sacrifice on the part of the Turkish people. Poor and rich alike had shared in the expense. The Turkish women had sacrificed their valuable jewels for these ships. In spite of all our efforts and protests, we lost them, because England refused to give ear to our representations. This fact created a very bad impression both on the Porte and on the public. The requisition was interpreted by the Turks as a scheme to secure in the Mediterranean the supremacy of the Greek Navy, which had been recently strengthened by an American dreadnought, renamed the Averoff. After these facts we could hardly believe that England would fulfill her assurance of integrity. It was true, however, that the Allies earnestly desired our neutrality. In many cases, for instance in the purchase of the German ships the Goeben and the Breslau, and in the abolition of the capitulations, they never went further than a formal protest, and never tried to break political relations with Turkey. The Allies, who were fighting against a formidable enemy, and who knew not what the result of the war would be, appreciated the importance of even a small and weak nation going against them. Their policy, therefore, was not to gain our assistance, because they soon understood that was impossible, but to keep us out of the war as long as they could. On the other hand, our aim was to delay joining the Central Powers as long as possible, and while watching the political changes which might occur in the Balkans, to secure our interest as best we might.

The first military operations were favorable to Germany, and very hopeful for the Central Powers. Even after the battle of the Marne, in which the Germans were defeated, the military experts strongly believed that ultimate victory would belong to Germany. The Allies, meanwhile, were suspicious of the policy of the Porte. The German military mission was a source of real anxiety for them. We had changed the names of the German warships and put them under Turkish rule and the Turkish flag; the Allies, however, naturally protested against the keeping of the German officers and the German crews on board. On this score we were in a very difficult position, and yet the Allies limited their efforts to keeping us neutral.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Bulgaria and Rumania

In answer to Germany's pressure for our immediate aid, we insisted so much upon a definite decision by Bulgaria that at last Germany asked us if it would not be advisable to enter into diplomatic negotiations with Bulgaria to that effect. It would have been unwise if not impossible to refuse such a suggestion. At that time Mr. Radoslavov was at the head of the Bulgarian Government, and Mr. Gnadiev, with whom we were personally acquainted, was his Foreign Minister. After a long discussion of the matter in a meeting of the Cabinet, we decided to send a delegate to Sofia to get into personal touch with leading persons and to investigate the situation. In company with Halil Bey, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies at that time, I went to Sofia. We interviewed Messrs. Radoslavov and Gnadiev: we discussed at length with them the position of Bulgaria, and after many

close conferences we understood that the key of the situation was not in Sofia, but at Bucharest. Bulgaria, deprived of her previous gains by the second Balkan War, was ready to go against Serbia. Even the threatening attitude of Greece was not considered dangerous at Sofia. The only source of fear was Rumania. The Bulgarian leaders were afraid of a Rumanian blow, which, with the help of the Russian Army, might be a great menace in the Balkans. It was impossible to secure the help of Bulgaria without assuring her protection from the danger that threatened in the rear. We left Sofia, therefore, for Bucharest.

Bratiano was the Prime Minister of Rumania at that time. The German Embassy was occupied by von Kuhlmann, later Foreign Minister of Germany, and the Austrian Embassy by Count Tchernin, later Foreign Minister of Austria. We visited both of them and also saw Mr. Radev, Bulgarian Ambassador to Rumania. According to the program planned in our conferences with them, each of us began to pay separate visits to the King, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and different political leaders of Rumania. In the evening we met in one of the embassies, where we reported our activities and prepared the program for the next day.

After a long discussion of the matter with the Rumanian leaders, we got the impression that Rumania was in favor of strict neutrality. The Rumanian Government promised us to keep its neutrality, despite all changes that might occur in the Balkans. Radoslavov, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, informed of the pacific intention of Rumania, asked a written agreement to that effect. When we applied to Bratiano for a written assurance he said: *Rumania promised the world to remain neutral during the present war. Serbia belongs to one of the hostile parties. To give a written promise to Bulgaria, encouraging her to war with Serbia, would mean to use our*

neutrality in favor of one of the combating nations. This act, therefore, would be the negation of our promise. Consequently, to sign a written agreement in favor of one of the combating parties is against our interest and our national honor. But verbally I promise you that Rumania will not change her neutral attitude, even if Bulgaria should declare war against Serbia."

This assurance, though valuable, was not strong enough to induce Bulgaria to make a decision. She wished, and insisted upon getting, a written promise. Realizing that our mission had failed, we returned to Constantinople.

I do not know how far the aim and the result of our trip to Sofia and Bucharest were known by the allied representatives, but after our return the situation went on in the same indeterminate way. The German and Austrian Ambassadors continued playing their tricks to lead us into the war, and the allied representatives endeavored to avoid breaking political relations with the Porte. The Porte, between these two opposing forces, tried to delay war as long as possible.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Germany forces the Issue

Day by day our position became more and more difficult. The addition of the German naval mission to the German military organization, the increasing number of German officers and crews, and their ever-growing influence in Constantinople rendered the situation very critical. Just at this moment the incident of the Black Sea occurred. The German Admiral Sushon, taking some of the strongest ships of the Turkish fleet, went out on the Black Sea, attacked the Russian fleet and bombarded some of the Russian ports. Contrary to the general belief, this incident had not taken place with the knowledge of the Porte. During the war I did not deny the rumor that it had; but now that the war is over, and I am not in power, I most emphatically declare that I learned, as everybody did, of this regretful incident just after it happened, and that no one of the Cabinet members gave his consent to this sudden attack on the Russian fleet. This incident caused the Porte real anxiety. All the members of the Cabinet were angry. Some of them, such as Mahmoud Pasha Churuk-soulou, Minister of Public Works; Mr. Suleiman Elbustany, Minister of Agriculture; Mr. Oskan, Minister of Posts and the only Armenian member of the Cabinet, resigned as a protest, and Djavid Bey, Minister of Finance, threatened to resign if the incident was not closed amicably in a short time. Even Said Halim Pasha, the Prime Minister, consented to keep his place for only one session of the Cabinet, in which we were to discuss the matter at length, and to reach a final decision. This incident had created great surprise and excitement, not only in political circles, but among the people as well, who followed with enthusiasm the German victories at the front. The situation had become exceedingly critical. We had to decide whether to admit this incident as an accomplished fact and to side with Germany, or to apologize for the sudden attack of the German Admiral and try to close the incident peacefully. We immediately convoked an extra session of the Cabinet at the home of Said Halim Pasha. At the end of a long and animated discussion, we authorized Said Halim Pasha, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, to see the allied representatives, particularly the Russian Ambassador, and to try to settle the matter peacefully. At the same time Djavid Bey, who was known as pro-ally, was to see Mr. Bompar, the French Ambassador at Constantinople, and to ask his help.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Turkey pushed into war

Immediately after the Black Sea incident had occurred, the Russian Ambassador sent a vigorous protest, which was followed by similar protests from the allied representatives. The French and British, however, showed a certain inclination for a peaceful settlement, and, in order to close the matter amicably, they proposed that we disarm the two German ships, the Goeben and the Breslau, which had been annexed to the Ottoman fleet; that we send back all the German officers and crew, end our secret relations with Germany, and fulfill all the requirements of neutrality. Acceptance of these conditions would have amounted to breaking our alliance with Germany. The situation, already critical, had become acute. It was impossible to prolong this rather ridiculous position. We had to choose one of two alternatives; either to satisfy the demands of the allied Ambassadors, which meant to lose Germany forever, or to join the Central Powers. At a meeting of the Cabinet we discussed the matter very minutely. Personally I regretted the incident, which aggravated the already existing difficulties, but in fact I was in favor of war. I firmly believed that, if we avoided the fulfillment of our agreement then, we should lose the confidence of all the civilized world. The Allies had already observed that we inclined toward Germany. We could hardly hope for effective help or material advantages from the Allies. They had never done more than give meaningless and ludicrous assurances of integrity. If we insisted upon keeping our neutrality until the end of the war, refusing aid to our allies in the time of their necessity, Germany and Austria also would reasonably refuse to help us in case they were victorious. Consequently, no matter whether the Allies were victorious or not, if we did not take part on one side or the other, Turkey was doomed. In both cases the victorious party would punish Turkey for her inaction, and would try to satisfy its political ambitions against the empire. At the end of the war we should be in a most disadvantageous position. As a statesman, I could not consent to yield my country to such a disastrous fate. I was, therefore, in favor of entering the war on the side of Germany. I wished only to delay this decisive act as long as possible and to join Germany at the most propitious time. The Black Sea incident accelerated Turkey's entrance into the war, which I believed to be inevitable. Djavid and Kahmy Beys, in whom I had unlimited confidence, opposed our entry, not because they were against it, but because they believed that the propitious moment had not yet arrived. But once the necessity of war was admitted, the question of time was of very little importance. In the meantime, while we were discussing what decisive attitude to take, the news reaching the Porte from the Caucasian frontier indicated an increasing concentration of Russian forces on the front. This concentration, which necessitated equal precautionary measures by us, had created a very tense feeling between the two armies. Since we had advanced so far, and had reached this climax, it was hardly possible to retreat. I therefore advised the members of the Cabinet to consider the Black Sea incident as an accomplished fact, and openly to declare war against the Allies. As this suggestion was backed by a majority in the meeting, we refused the conditions proposed by the allied Ambassadors, and openly joined Germany.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/ Deportation of the Armenians

The deportation of the Armenians, in some localities of the Greeks, and in Syria of some of the Arabs, was used inside and outside the empire as a source of attack on the Turkish Government. First of all, I wish to inform the public that the rumors of deportation and assassination were exceedingly exaggerated. The Greeks and the Armenians, taking advantage of the ignorance of the American and European public of the Near Eastern situation and of the character of the Turks, used the deportation as a means for propaganda, and painted it as best suited their aim. In saying this, I do not mean to deny the facts. I desire only to eliminate the exaggerations and to relate the facts as they occurred.

I admit that we deported many Armenians from our eastern provinces, but we never acted in this matter upon a previously prepared scheme. The responsibility for these acts falls first of all upon the deported people themselves. Russia, in order to lay hand on our eastern provinces, had armed and equipped the Armenian inhabitants of this district, and had organized strong Armenian bandit forces in the said area. When we entered the great war, these bandits began their destructive activities in the rear of the Turkish Army on the Caucasus front, blowing up the bridges, setting fire to the Turkish towns and villages and killing the innocent Mohammedan inhabitants, regardless of age and sex. They spread death and terror all over the eastern provinces, and endangered the Turkish Army's line of retreat. All these Armenian bandits were helped by the native Armenians. When they were pursued by the Turkish gendarmes, the Armenian villages were a refuge for them. When they needed help, the Armenian peasants around them, taking their arms hidden in their churches, ran to their aid. Every Armenian church, it was later discovered, was a depot of ammunition. In this disloyal way they killed more than 300,000 Mohammedans, and destroyed the communication of the Turkish Army with its bases. The information that we were receiving from the administrators of these provinces and from the commander of the Caucasian Army gave us details of the most revolting and barbarous activities of the Armenian bandits. It was impossible to shut our eyes to the treacherous acts of the Armenians, at a time when we were engaged in a war which would determine the fate of our country. Even if these atrocities had occurred in a time of peace, our Government would have been obliged to quell such outbreaks. The Porte, acting under the same obligation, and wishing to secure the safety of its army and its citizens, took energetic measures to check these uprisings. The deportation of the Armenians was one of these preventive measures.

I admit also that the deportation was not carried out lawfully everywhere. In some places unlawful acts were committed. The already existing hatred among the Armenians and Mohammedans, intensified by the barbarous activities of the former, had created many tragic consequences. Some of the officials abused their authority, and in many places people took preventive measures into their own hands and innocent people were molested. I confess it. I confess, also, that the duty of the Government was to prevent these abuses and atrocities, or at least to hunt down and punish their perpetrators severely. In many places, where the property and goods of the deported people were looted, and the Armenians molested, we did arrest those who were responsible and punished them according to the law. I confess, however, that we ought to have acted more sternly, opened up a general investigation for the purpose of finding out all the promoters and looters and punished them severely.

Posthumous Memoirs of Talaat Pasha/Atrocities condoned

But we could not do that. Although we punished many of the guilty, most of them were untouched. These people, whom we might call outlaws, because of their unlawful attitude in disregarding the order of the Central Government, were divided into two classes. Some of them were acting under personal hatred, or for individual profit. Those who looted the goods of the deported Armenians were easily punishable, and we punished them. But there was another group, who sincerely believed that the general interest of the community necessitated the punishment alike of those Armenians who massacred the guiltless Mohammedans and those who helped the Armenian bandits to endanger our national life. The Turkish elements here referred to were short-sighted, fanatic, and yet sincere in their belief. The public encouraged them, and they had the general approval behind them. They were numerous and strong. Their open and immediate punishment would have aroused great discontent among the people, who favored their acts. An endeavor to arrest and to punish all these promoters would have created anarchy in Anatolia at a time when we greatly needed unity. It would have been dangerous to divide the nation into two camps, when we needed strength to fight outside enemies. We did all that we could, but we preferred to postpone the solution "of our internal difficulties until aft^r the defeat of our external enemies.

As to the deportation of the Greeks and the Arabs, this charge is based more on propaganda than on real fact. The truth is that the Greeks living on the coast of the Sea of Marmora supplied food and petrol to the enemy submarines, which, passing through the strait, entered the Marmora and threatened our communication by sea. In order to prevent the Greeks from aiding the enemy, we deported those who were guilty to Anatolia? But their deportation was carried out in a very regular way. They suffered neither loss of life nor of goods. As to the Arabs of Syria, we confined ourselves to the application of martial law, and punished only those who promoted a revolution to overthrow the Turkish authority in Syria.

These preventive measures were taken in every country during the war, but, while the regrettable results were passed over in silence in the other countries, the echo of our acts was heard the world over, because everybody's eyes were upon us.

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