

Public diplomacy as political communication in Albania

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Abstract

Public diplomacy represents an important activity that serves national interests and comes as a function of the development of the country and its people. The importance of public diplomacy is increasing, especially when considering the current global context – technological, digital, economic developments, interconnections, and interactions at multilateral levels. In Albania, little is known about public diplomacy, its role, and functions, how it is constructed and how it is represented through various initiatives. The study on Public Diplomacy as a Political Communication Tool in Albania aims to provide a general overview of public diplomacy in Albania, initiatives and activities taken in support of public diplomacy, and the role of public diplomacy in the development of the country and the benefits associated with it. For the realization of this study, a mixture of research methods was used, including desk review of exiting literature and key strategic documents, and interviews conducted with the public to assess public perception and knowledge on public diplomacy. The results show efforts made in years to engage in public diplomacy with countries all over the world, as a strategic intervention to promote the country's development. It furthers shows the low levels of recognition and knowledge of the wider public about public diplomacy in country. The study highlights that public diplomacy in Albania is in the steps of its development and yet to consolidate.

Key words: *Public diplomacy, political communication, political influence.*

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Introduction

One of the most important and vital models of interaction is communication – communication between individuals, groups, societies, and communities between states and countries. Key features that lead the communication and tools used to define the purpose of the communication, are defined depending on the contexts where this communication takes place.

Thus, in terms of the practice of public diplomacy, as a concept focused on relations between political structures, a special emphasis is placed on political communication, which refers to a range of professional practices, and an academic discipline as well. As a professional practice, the term political communication suggests about communication processes targeted as propaganda, electoral marketing, political marketing, political campaigns, and political public relations. While as an academic discipline, political communication is based in theories that derive from political science, sociology, psychology, marketing, and other fields. According to Gonçalves (2018), it is accepted that political communication is focused on the interaction between political actors, media, and citizens, characterized by its persuading and strategic character.

Pippa Norris (2015) defines political communication as: an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media, and the public. The process goes on downward from governing institutions towards citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and upward from public opinion towards authorities. The literature on political communications can be divided into three main categories [...] to distinguish between production, content, and effects. While Chaffee (1975) suggests that political communication is the role of “communication in political processes”.

Consequently, to achieve its purposes, political communication uses a series of practices and strategies, which have as their final goal the appeal to mobilize public opinion and increase the influence of actors who use political communication to influence. The structure and content of political communication play a critical role in promoting collaborations and providing the necessary support to implement political communication in practice.

This study aims to explore and offer an analysis of key aspects related to design and implementation of public diplomacy in Albania, as a tool to impact a country's development. The study will answer the following research questions “In which development sectors public diplomacy is present in Albania?”, and will seek to address three main objectives:

- (1) Provide an overview of public diplomacy in Albania.
- (2) Identify key initiatives implemented in Albania in frame of public diplomacy.
- (3) Explore the role of public diplomacy in the country's development.

Literature review

Public diplomacy and its characteristics

In the two most commonly used definitions Signitzer and Coombs (1992: 138) understand the public diplomacy as: »... a way, with which the government and the private individuals and groups can directly or indirectly influence those public opinions and positions, which directly influence the foreign politics decisions of another government.« In their understanding the public diplomacy is widening its field of traditional diplomatic activities: from the sphere of »high politics« on the diverse issues and aspects of daily life and from the »closed« sphere of governments and diplomats on new actors and target groups, i.e. different individuals, groups and institutions, which are joining international and intercultural communication activities and have influence on the political relations between countries (Signitzer and Coombs 1992: 139, as cited in Krajnc, 2019).

Public diplomacy is represented by a few characteristic features. Public diplomacy deals with influencing public attitudes towards the design and implementation of foreign policies. It includes dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another country; foreign affairs reporting and its impact on politics; communication between those who have the duty of communication, such as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and intercultural communication processes (Cull, 2008).

Public diplomacy is about 'having other people on your side - influencing other people's opinion and attitudes.' To convince the leaders of other nations and their governments to support certain policies, the citizens of those countries must also be convinced. So, for example, the goal of US State Department diplomacy is to inform, engage and influence global audiences. This goal is intended to reach beyond foreign governments to promote better appreciation of the United States abroad, greater acceptability of U.S. policies among foreign publics, and sustained access to and influence in important sectors of society. the foreigner.

Another critical characteristic of public diplomacy is related to its goal to "advance policies". According to the United States Advisory Committee, public

diplomacy involves understanding, informing, engaging, and influencing the attitudes and behaviors of foreign audiences in ways that support the nation's strategic interests.

The Lord Carter Review (2006) defines public diplomacy as “work which aims to inform and engage foreign individuals and organizations to improve understanding and influence of the United Kingdom (UK) in a manner consistent with medium- and long-term goals of the government.

In an International Policy Statement, Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) defines and recognizes the growing importance of public diplomacy as:

“Projecting a coherent and influential voice to all those who have influence within a society – not just within its government. Canada's credibility and influence abroad will be built not just by government actions, but by Canadians themselves – artists, teachers, students, travelers, researchers, experts, and youth – interacting with people abroad. Public diplomacy includes cultural events, conferences, trade fairs, youth trips, foreign students in Canada, Canadian study abroad and visiting thinkers. All this cultivates long-term relationships, dialogue and understanding abroad, supports our advocacy and increases our impact. Public diplomacy is also important to realizing our foreign policy goals. Convincing others of the value of our strategies and propositions.”

Australia also uses the concept of public diplomacy as “influencing other states to protect and promote national interests. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia refers to public diplomacy as “a means of communicating with the populations of other countries, influencing international opinion, and projecting the national image abroad”.

For the above, it can be summarized that public diplomacy has as its main purpose influencing the perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes of individuals in foreign countries in ways that serve the interests of a country's foreign policy.

Strategic areas of public diplomacy

Public diplomacy offers space for cooperation for the advancement of several or more strategic areas of a country's development. Public diplomacy comes as a way to respond to contemporary challenges, through the creation of common discussion spaces that address common problems, improve common understanding, and create bases for global cooperation. For these reasons, states consider it necessary to invest, in a sustainable manner, in the practice of public diplomacy to improve and develop different fields and sectors of a country. These may include:

- (1) Economy as a strategic sector (Economic Diplomacy).
- (2) Culture as a strategic sector (Cultural Diplomacy).
- (3) National security as a strategic sector.
- (4) Education as a strategic sector.
- (5) Sports as a strategic sector.
- (6) Science and technology as a strategic sector.

Approaches and tools of public diplomacy

The goals and objectives of public diplomacy must be pursued and realized through approaches, tools and techniques that engage a country's audiences, and facilitate networking, cooperation, and communication between people and institutions to build understanding, trust, and influence the advancement of a country's national interests. Approached and tools that are used to practice public diplomacy can include:

- (1) Branding the nation.
- (2) Propaganda.
- (3) Cultural relations.
- (4) Public relations.
- (5) Lobbying.
- (6) Media involvement and engagement.
- (7) Engagement of Alumni groups.
- (8) Building networks of influence.
- (9) Diaspora communities.

Methodology

Research methodology

The research is carried out using the mixed research method, collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, combining the strengths of primary and secondary research. For the collection of primary data, the study used the qualitative research method. The study also used a systematic literature review to collect secondary data. This involves finding, evaluating, and synthesizing the content of many empirical articles. This research method enables reference to useful primary sources (Cronin et al., 2008).

The study uses the positivist research paradigm. The phenomenon must be observable or discoverable in order to be considered scientific knowledge, and the

researcher must be completely objective when interpreting the findings (Bryman, 1984; Struwig & Stead, 2001). The collection and analysis of secondary data used for the purpose of the study is related to the use of the positivist paradigm. But the study also uses the social construction paradigm. According to this paradigm, 'truth' varies. Truth is different based on who is asked, and people change their definitions of truth based on interactions with other people. Researchers using this paradigm are particularly interested in how people agree, or disagree, with what is true or real (Pressbooks). The approach used to conduct the study is the deductive approach, as the study is built based on what is known about public diplomacy. The deductive approach begins with the general and ends with the specific. Arguments from widely accepted principles are best expressed through the deductive approach. This approach comes from 'top-down', from theory to hypothesis, to data to complement or contradict the theory (Morales, 2017).

Study sample

Primary data collection

For the collection of the primary data of the study, the sample of the study included ordinary citizens, residents of the municipality of Tirana, a sample population of 10 people. The sample was realized/selected in two stages: The first phase has included the selection of primary sampling units - citizens, residents of Tirana municipality. The second phase included the selection of interviewees. The selection is based on what is known as 'simple random sampling', where random citizens who have shown willingness to conduct the interview have been selected. A total of 10 interviews were conducted.

Instrument and data collection

Primary data collection. For the realization of this study, a structured interview was used. The interview contains 11 questions, divided into 3 sections: 1) The purpose of public diplomacy (3 questions); 2) Public diplomacy initiatives and activities (4 questions); 3) The role of public diplomacy in the development of the country (4 questions). The interview lasted about 20 minutes.

Secondary data collection

For the collection of secondary data of the study, a systematic review of the literature was used, which according to the researchers is one of the most

rigorous methods to collect articles, because it is certain that all relevant data is covered. The purpose of this review is to identify the existing evidence that answers the research question and objectives of the study. Research strategy used to collect secondary data included review of governmental institutional sites and databases (Ministry of Finance and Economy, Minister of State for Diaspora, National Agency of Diaspora, Ministry for Europe, and Foreign Affairs), with reference period public diplomacy in Albania in the last 3 years (2020 - 2022). The review focused on articles covering the following information: (1) The state with which there was a cooperation relationship; (2) The type of cooperation carried out; (3) The type of activity performed.

Results

Albania has built and established diplomatic relations with the countries of the region, countries around the globe, with international organizations, and other regional and international initiatives, as strategic development partners that support and help advance the country's strategic development priorities.

Albania is involved and participates in a series of regional and wider initiatives which represent important agreements within the exercise of public diplomacy functions, which facilitate the country's efforts to promote economic growth and social progress, as well as factors of others that promote or may hinder its overall development:

Open Balkan Initiative: The initiative for the creation of the Open Balkans (Open Balkan) or otherwise known as Mini-Schengen aims to improve the political-economic relations between the countries of the region. The Open Balkans is an economic and political zone of 3 Balkan countries, Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, which aim to increase trade relations and cooperation as well as improve relations between the parties. Until now, only these three countries have become part of this initiative, while Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina have hesitated to join it.

Albania-EU relations: The process of Albania's integration into the European Union (EU) is considered the most strategic national priority, which leads the country's governing agenda. Albania established diplomatic relations with the European Community in 1991. Albania was officially recognized by the European Union as a potential candidate country in 2000. In June 2006, the process of negotiations on the Stabilization-Association Agreement with Albania was concluded, which was signed in the Council of General Affairs (GAC), in Luxembourg. In April 2009, the SAA entered into force. In the same month, Albania officially applied to join the EU. Albania enjoyed the status of a candidate country for the EU since June 2014 (PuneteJashtme.gov.al) On July 19, 2022, the European

Union officially opened negotiations with Albania (and North Macedonia). The official opening of negotiations means the approval of the established EU law (*acquis*), preparations for its implementation and the implementation of legal, political, administrative, economic, and other reforms necessary for the country to fulfill the conditions for membership.

Albania in the Security Council: For the first time after joining the UN since December 1955, Albania has been voted to be a temporary member of the UN Security Council for a 2-year term for the period 2022-2023. This mandate began on January 1, 2022. Albania's election as a temporary member of the UN Security Council has been assessed as a historic opportunity and achievement of Albanian diplomacy. The activity of the UNSC has international peace and security as a priority. In view of this priority, the SC enjoys the right to send peacekeepers to troubled regions and approve sanctions. In June 2022, for the first time, Albania held the presidency of the SC during its two-year mandate in the Council. In 2023, Albania will have the presidency a few months before the end of the mandate (October 2023).

Albania in NATO: Albania becomes a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO at the Summit of the Alliance that was held in Strasbourg & Kehl in April 2009. Membership in NATO has created the opportunity to, through active participation in the decision-making of the Alliance, contribute to the processing of issues related to Euro-Atlantic security and, therefore, also to national security. As a member of NATO, Albania is in a better position to confirm its national interests and increase national prestige and reputation. After joining NATO, Albania's efforts focused on transforming the armed forces into a smaller, fully professional, deployable, and interoperable force with NATO.

Albania and OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Albania's accession to the OSCE was accompanied by deep legal reforms regarding human rights. The circumstances that enabled Albania to join the OSCE included the democratic movement of December 1990, the first pluralist elections and the adoption of the Interim Constitutional Package on April 29, 1991. This Package included provisions that recognized political pluralism and respect for human rights. Albania is in a new phase of cooperation with the OSCE - in partnership for the achievement of the country's national priorities, in accordance with the aspirations for Albania's integration into the European Union. The presence of the OSCE in Albania supports legal, judicial, administrative and property reforms and helps the Albanian authorities in building parliamentary capacities, the fight against corruption and the promotion of good governance, strengthening civil society, strengthening media freedom, etc.

Albania within UNESCO (Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the United Nations). The spirit of cooperation is concentrated in the four areas of the Organization's activity, namely education, science, culture, and communication.

Cooperation with the organization has encouraged quality education, preservation of cultural heritage, citizenship education, freedom of expression, the creation and functioning of civil society and the protection of human rights. During the last three decades, cultural, environmental, and spiritual assets with indisputable universal values have been included in various UNESCO programs. Cooperation and interaction between Albania and UNESCO are multi-sectoral and in coherence with national development priorities, in fulfillment of joint efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Albania and the Council of Europe. Within the framework of cooperation, the legal framework for the development of democracy has been built through laws of a constitutional character, which also contain a list of human rights and fundamental freedoms, after consultations with international experts. Continuous programs have been implemented in the field of human rights and the rule of law, where, among other things, the training of judges, lawyers and the police, reform in the prosecutor's office, in the judicial system, in the Ministry of Justice and in prisons have been addressed, the drafting of the civil and criminal code and the relevant procedure codes. In the period May 23 - November 9, 2012, Albania chaired the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the first time since its membership. The Albanian presidency focused on these priorities: 1. Promotion of stable democratic societies; 2. Strengthening democracy at the local and regional level; 3. Strengthening the rule of law in Europe; 4. Continuation of the political reform of the organization; 5. Guaranteeing the long-term functioning of the European Court of Human Rights; 6. Stimulation of dialogue at the inter-institutional level and at the level of international organizations (punetejashtme.gov.al).

Albania and OHCHR. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) strives to provide expertise and support to the various human rights monitoring mechanisms in the United Nations system. OHCHR assists with technical expertise in capacity building to implement international human rights standards on the ground. The Office helps governments, which bear the primary responsibility for protecting human rights, to fulfil their obligations and supports individuals seeking their rights. Moreover, it objectively denounces human rights violations. Albania has effective relations with the Office of the High Commissioner (punetejashtme.gov.al).

Albania has diplomatic relations and cooperation bridges at the state level/ bilateral relations with countries in the region and beyond:

Diplomatic relations between Albania and the USA: There is cooperation with a concrete and comprehensive calendar, which focuses on three plans: partnership on global issues; partnership for regional issues and partnership for the bilateral agenda - political dialogue, security, strengthening the rule of law in Albania, economic development, energy security and educational-cultural exchanges. Cooperation with the United States in the UNSC has been key in addressing the unjustified

and unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine, where Albania is co-custody with the US for Ukraine. Albania has made its contribution, alongside the USA, in peacekeeping missions, including in Afghanistan, while it is sheltering Afghan refugees for a transitional period. Albania was among the first countries to join the international coalition against terrorism and ISIL, under the leadership of the US,

Albania-Turkey relations: Turkey is an important strategic partner of Albania in the region and beyond, where the strengthening, expansion and deepening of relations with Turkey, in the new conditions of joint security, peace and economic development commitments, remains one of the important priorities of the foreign policy of Albanian institutions. Turkey has represented one of the main supporters for Albania's entry into NATO, as well as being an important contributor to the modernization of the Albanian army and police. The cooperation between the two countries consists especially in the field of energy, minerals, construction of infrastructures, telecommunications, etc., and the will is expressed to encourage, expand, and further deepen this cooperation and increase Turkish investments in Albania as a common good for the two countries. Turkey is also one of the most important economic and commercial partners for Albania.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and the countries of Western Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland). All these countries have supported the policy of enlargement within the framework of the EU, the implementation of justice reform in Albania, and the implementation of national anti-corruption policies. These countries have contributed through various programs in the fields of democracy, rule of law and law enforcement, economy, development, environment as well as in culture - activities in music, theater, literature, or films, education, science, and civil society, focused on governance and civil society; water-sewerage; humanitarian aid; social infrastructure and services.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and the states of Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden). These countries have supported the democratic reforms undertaken in Albania and have financed several development aids programs and projects. Political dialogue is considered one of the main pillars of bilateral relations. Through numerous cooperation programs, a special contribution is seen in terms of strengthening security and the rule of law in the country. Cooperation has expanded in terms of border control, the fight against organized crime, including human trafficking and illegal immigration. All these countries have supported the integration-membership process of Albania in the European Union, for obtaining the status of a candidate country and subsequently for the opening of EU accession negotiations.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and other European countries (Belgium, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain). The countries have continuously supported the democratic and reforming processes in Albania, its integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, the independence of Kosovo and in

other aspects. There have been efforts to promote cooperation in areas of mutual interest such as economy and education.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and the states of the Visegrad group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). The countries of the Visegrad group have made an important contribution to the integration processes of Albania in the European Union and have provided support with expertise in the framework of twinning programs and the Western Balkans Fund. The countries have expressed the political will to further expand relations in the economic and trade relations, especially in the sphere of energy, rail transport, tourism, infrastructure, art and culture, education, and science. Cooperation has also been noted at the parliamentary level - there have been exchanges both at the level of presidents of parliaments and parliamentary committees.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. There is a common will to promote and strengthen relations and intensify cooperation in more concrete terms in all areas of mutual interest. These countries have always supported Albania on its way to NATO membership and European integration in the EU, and for the opening of negotiations. Latvia was the first country to ratify the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and Albania. There is a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of European Integration between the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Albania shares common positions with these countries on important regional and global issues. Political dialogue is considered one of the main pillars of bilateral relations. Albania remains in solidarity with the Baltic states, as a member of NATO.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and Russia. Bilateral cooperation appears very weak. The main lines where cooperation with the Russian Federation has been developed remain areas of mutual interest, economic spheres where the parties have mutual interest, education, culture, sports, tourism. Tourism is an area of interest for cooperation with Russia, where Albania has a lot to offer. The Albanian government has removed visas for Russian tourists for several years, an action that expresses the will to facilitate cooperation between the two countries.

Diplomatic relations between Albania and other countries (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the State of Qatar and the State of Kuwait, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, China and South Korea, Argentina and Brazil, Ireland and Iceland, Israel, Japan, and Canada). Relations with these countries are valued in terms of regional security and stability, investment, and economic potential (economic and trade exchanges), initiatives with impact on the tourism sector. There is a rich legal framework, with agreements in the field of economic cooperation, trade, protection of investments, in the field of health, culture, air transport, environmental protection, visa waiver for passport holders diplomatic and service, etc.

Discussions

Study findings note that public diplomacy in Albania has been implemented through years, to support the country's development in several areas of development. The study shows about the various relationships established with countries and partnerships all over the world, that have contributed to build Albania's public diplomacy, and consequently impact development. This, like other country's public diplomacy strategy, that uses partnerships as a means to broaden the scope of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy does not happen in isolation. It is part of a series of processes and efforts carried out over the years, in different fields and sectors, by multiple stakeholders, that nurture and share the goal of improvement and development. Interests, be they strategic, commercial, humanitarian, are pursued and achieved through the development of multilateral relations, based on mutual benefits.

Public diplomacy in Albania serves to many purposes. Key highlights from the study show that advancement and achievement of national interests, supporting the creation of favorable conditions for national development, improving the image of the country, promoting tourism, are few of the purposes public diplomacy in Albania intends to achieve. While this is like purposes of public diplomacy for many other countries as well, it is noted that the scope of public diplomacy in Albania needs to strengthen further.

This study also explored the areas of public diplomacy in Albania, and found that in the context of Albania, public diplomacy activities have centered around regional political initiatives, cultural activities, media engagement, sport activities, diaspora. It is observed that such activities are at the center of public diplomacy in general, confirming that Albania is making efforts to align its public diplomacy agenda with its partners and allies. The new global environment requires concrete, continuous, and sustainable and strategic investments to develop effective public diplomacy, and Albania should continue to further invest in this strategic direction.

Study findings suggest that public diplomacy brings a number of benefits in terms of: facilitating free movements / free movement of peoples; knowledge of cultures, promotion of history, cultures and values; social, economic and cultural benefits; promotion and widespread recognition of human rights, impact on the reduction of prejudices and stereotypes; national security; promotion of values, national identity, and improvement of the country's image; promotion of tourism and economic growth; increasing progressive development and collective well-being; development in personal and interpersonal terms of individuals; ensures world peace, political stability; better employment opportunities and financial

support; exposure to good practices and exchange of experiences; highlighting opportunities and development opportunities that come as a result of implementing such strategic instrument.

Next steps include focusing on the policies that promote good governance and democracy, drafting a diplomatic agenda that reflects the unique diversity of the nation, mapping actors who are interested in building bilateral relations in all spheres of development and strategic sectors of development, investing to transform current practices into advanced practices to effectively promote the country and its social, economic, environmental, cultural, and other interests.

Limitation

This study does not exclude the possibility that not all areas of public diplomacy in Albania have been fully covered. While these limitations have not impacted the findings and results of the study, future work could be taken to deepen knowledge and information about public diplomacy in Albania.

This study uses as a reference period only last three-years of public diplomacy initiatives in Albania. While findings are accurate to present the actuality of public diplomacy in Albania, a detailed analysis over a longer time might enable identification of valuable information on how public diplomacy in Albania has evolved, and changed, through years.

The study sample used is limited, which can impact generalizing findings on the level of knowledge and perceptions of the public about public diplomacy. It is recommended that future studies are conducted using a larger sample.

Conclusions

International relations have power and can exert tremendous influence. A country's foreign policies are guided by national interests, but the nature of the relationships built plays a key role in each country's capacity to pursue enduring interests. The nature of international relations helps to create a favorable climate, or not, to achieve the country's political goals and objectives. In a time of rapid, radical, transformative changes, both at the national level and in the arena of international relations, the development of relations between nations, which are based on the mutual understanding of the societies of these countries, their culture, takes on significant importance. The role of public diplomacy to mediate differences, and project the development of critical issues for the country is of major importance.

Albania actively encourages and promotes the building of diplomatic relations with strategic partners, to support security issues and stability in the region, which promote the economic development of the country, which address important national issues. Investment in activities to strengthen public diplomacy have included organizing advocacy and lobbying meetings to secure support and promote the country's interests, taking leadership in the direction of important regional and European structures, with wide influence on important regional and global issues, hosting of activities of a global nature in Albania that shows the readiness of the country to support regional and world policies, celebrating and promoting strategic relationships through cultural events.

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