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Problems in Enyed

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By Christopher P. Ball

"In Enyed, things are just different," a girl in Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania) once told me. "The first time I visited Enyed," she continued, "I knew immediately that something was seriously wrong and I have lived in Romania all my life." She was not the first to tell me this and probably will not be the last.

Recently I returned to Enyed (Nagyenyed in Hungarian; Auid in Romanian).¹ The first 200 days of the new Romanian government were coming to an end.² Two votes of confidence were being raised in Parliament, one forwarded by the opposition parties, the other by the new government in an attempt to hold itself and its reform program accountable to the forces of democracy. It appeared an apt time for me to return to Enyed, where I first wrote about the elections in November 1996.

WHAT CITY COUNCIL?

"It's a big problem what the mayor has done Chris... a big problem," Sándor began. Seeing the puzzled look on my face he asked, "You didn't see them?"

Before I could respond, I was dragged outside by Sándor who began pointing at the side of his house and up and down the street. I noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

"The pipes!"

Indeed some not-too-attractive pipes outlined the houses along Sándor's street. To be honest, I never thought Enyed was a beautiful city to begin with. In typical Communist fashion, most remnants of the city's long-lost attractiveness had either been destroyed or had simply faded away from lack of maintenance. Perhaps Enyed had once, hundreds of years ago, been the center of world fashion, although I doubted it. Regardless of its possible previous state, it was not that spectacular now, with or without pipes, which I *thought* had always been there anyway.

"What pipes? Haven't those always been there?" I asked.

"No! Those pipes have not always been there. Those pipes are new."

I did begin to feel as though perhaps some of the pipes were possibly newer than the others, although I saw little difference between them. I surrendered and

¹ To review the main personalities in Nagyenyed, please see CPB 4 and 5. Briefly, and relevant here, are: Sándor Mezei, city councilor and vice-president of the local RMDSZ (Hungarian party in Romania); Horatiu Mihai Josan, mayor.

² Incidentally it was this report that inspired me to stop and review the changes during the government's first 200 days in office (see: CPB 8 and 9).



Pipes

feigned disgust, adding a comment or two about their unattractiveness. Sándor surely knew that I hadn't been able to distinguish between the old pipes and the new, but satisfied with my attempt at empathy we went back in the house.

"Several weeks ago," he began, "I woke up and went to the RMDSZ office for a meeting. I got about half way there when I noticed that the whole town was covered with pipes. I couldn't believe it. They ran everywhere!"

Apparently the mayor, without getting the required prior approval from the city council, contracted with a company to install small (about three inches in diameter) and medium (about six inches in diameter) gas pipes in Enyed. Much to Sándor's dismay the city councilors had neither been informed nor seemed to care about the pipe installation.

In Sándor's opinion the council should, among other things, be trying to restore some of the town's lost beauty. That meant slowly fixing the streets and sidewalks, painting some of the dilapidated buildings, finishing (or cleaning up) the many half-built buildings, and so on. Instead, not only did the mayor fail to consult the city council in making his decision, but in order to save money, also had the pipes installed in the most ugly way possible. That is, they were left above ground instead of being properly buried out of sight. Those who wished to have the pipes in front of their houses buried could have it done if they paid for it themselves. Sándor, not surprisingly, took that option.

While the ugliness of the pipes deeply bothered Sándor, it irritated him more that the authority of the city

council had been completely ignored. The mayor should approve all major spending decisions through the city council. He did not. Sándor suspected this was because the council might not have approved the move had they been fully aware of it in advance. At least he hoped so, although other experiences with the councilmen in similar circumstances suggested otherwise (see 'park light' story below). He certainly would have done all he could to block the move or have the pipes buried despite the extra cost.

In a country where the system of central control should be changing and, ideally, decentralizing, the mayor's move was rightly disturbing to Sándor. Of greater interest and surprise to me, however, was that the other council members and many townspeople didn't seem to care. Without their involvement (individually and collectively through the city council), the mayor will never be penalized for overstepping his power and thus the local balance of powers will never be properly developed. It seems to be one of the greatest psychological legacies of communism that people feel largely disconnected from their immediate environment, as though they were tiny parts in a giant machine. They seem to feel as though they have neither any say over the functioning of the machine nor the right to suggest changes in its design. They seem to bother only with their immediate surroundings, such as their clothes, the insides of their homes or perhaps the cleanliness of their cars. Any other change is apparently not worth the bother as it can easily be changed back (or to something new) without notice by the powers that be. During Communism this was often the fate of those who built houses only to have the authorities tear them down the next day (naturally, without due compensation) to make

room for a new factory or block of apartments.

Based on personal experience I am tempted to say that this mentality of disconnectedness is more prevalent in Auid and Cluj-Napoca than in the Szeklar [ethnic Hungarian] regions of Romania. Most studies suggest however that it is a general problem of post-socialism rather a geographically-specific one. For example, Hungarian-born economist János Kornai comments on a similar phenomenon (related to taxes and the state) in Hungary:

"The vast majority of the public fails even to realize the connection [between taxes paid and tasks performed by the state]. They feel that the *state* pays, full stop. The rest is no business of theirs. The Hungarian public shows an almost total lack of *tax awareness*. This belief by taxpayers that the tax levied on them is less than its actual extent, known in economic writing as the 'fiscal illusion,' has reached extreme proportions in Hungary and the whole post-socialist region."³

In addition to this 'general illusion' (as I would call it to broaden the term), it seems to me that somewhere the relation between cause and effect has been lost as well. Sándor mentioned another local example that exemplifies this. Enyed's city council decided to install sorely needed lamps in the town's small park. They agreed to buy the cheapest possible lamps and, rather than set the posts solidly in cement *in the ground*, they chose to cut costs by leaving them sitting on posts on top of the ground. The result will be large, waist-high, blocks of cement sitting around with lamp brackets jutting out of them. The project was approved by the council with few protests and will be carried out once the pipe project has been completed. The final product will be ugly and cheap, but most likely no one will complain. Again, something seems to be missing.

The morning Sándor woke up and found pipes in much of his town was the first of a quick, three-day installation process. It was done mostly overnight the first day, and then proceeded nonstop until completion, allowing little time for protest. At the time of my visit nothing yet filled them, but they were in place for some future date, whenever gas began to flow. When finally pressed for a reason as to why he began the project so abruptly and without getting city council's approval, the mayor replied that he had to go before the public for evaluation of his second 200-day term and couldn't go empty handed. Now, with the pipes in place, he could tell the voters that he had "done" something.

THIS GUY IN AN ECONOMIST?

Since our last meeting, the mayor had been traveling

extensively in Western Europe. Most Central-East European (CEE) cities have "sister cities" in western countries (that is, in Western Europe and the United States of America). Sister cities exchange delegations of local businesspersons and city council members to further relations at various levels. This usually means that the westerners advise the CEE cities on structure, development and policy. Sometimes it also results in trade between the CEE city and the western country. Enyed currently has sister cities in most major European countries (although none in the United States to date).

The mayor was not available for comment on the pipe problem since he was visiting Enyed's sister city in Denmark. Enyed's chief economist was, however, more than happy to meet with me and answer some of my questions.

Enyed's chief economist, Adrian,⁴ was an emaciated, sunken-faced fellow in his late 30s. He had pallid skin and chain-smoked non-filtered Romanian cigarettes. His extremely large, knit tie kept the wide collars of his polyester shirt in perspective, but nevertheless seemed to draw my attention from time to time during our conversation.

After briefly introducing each other, we sat down in the mayor's office to discuss Enyed's economic problems, plans and hopes for the future.

He began with a somewhat rehearsed spiel on the main industries of Enyed. The town has a large steel plant (15 percent of Enyed's gross production) that is partly private and exports about 35 percent of its products, a textile plant exporting 100 percent of its products (largely shoes, pants and shirts), one firm producing prefabricated cement, three fabricated wood producing firms, one private steel firm, two "very good" wine producing firms, and the rest (20 percent of local economy) consists of agricultural production.

Eventually I grew tired of hearing the list of firms in Enyed, all of which were "very good business" according to the town economist. I reemphasized that I was a researcher interested mostly in the problems facing the town as a whole and him in particular, as town economist. I think this disappointed him.

Yielding the floor to me, he lit a cigarette and I began with a simply question: "What are the biggest problems facing Auid?"

"Economic problems."

"Yes, but what in particular?" Noticing the blank look on his face, I tried again, hoping there was simply a lan-

³ Kornai, János. "The Citizen and the State: Reform of the Welfare System." *Discussion Papers No. 32*, Collegium Budapest / Institute for Advanced Study, August 1996, p.2. Note: emphasis is author's.

⁴ Initially I didn't catch his full name and later had no desire too.

guage problem between us. "What do you mean by economic problems?"

"...Well, the big problems are not political, but economic."

"For example?"

"...Uh, there are not enough foreign investors because the Americans don't like the Romanians. American policy is very bad and they give all their money to Hungary and not Romania..." He carried on in a similar vein for several minutes.

"Well, what can Auid do to attract foreign investors?" He gave another blank look and shrugged his shoulders. He lit another cigarette. I tried again: "Why should investors come here?"

"Americans don't want to come here. American policy is bad. They are only interested in profit and not in helping us with investment. Their foreign policy toward Romania is bad. (He broke and took a drag from his cigarette before continuing.) I don't like Madeline Albright.

She is another "Iron Lady." She is Czech. She is a Czech national and hates Romania. That's why we won't be in NATO..."

After listening quietly for ten minutes or so, I tried again to direct our conversation back to Enyed and economics. "Well, since the change in government [1996] some foreign investment has been coming to Romania, hasn't it?" He agreed. "It must go somewhere, right?" He agreed again. "Most likely to cities and their businesses, right?" Again, he agreed. "Then an investor must decide which city to go to. If the investor must choose between two cities, do you think he should choose Auid over some other cities?" He agreed with an "of course." "Why then do you think the investor should come here and not go somewhere else?"

"Because Auid needs foreign investment."

"But other cities in Romania need it too. What can Auid, and you as chief economist, do to encourage investors to come here instead of some other city?" Again, he shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment. I tried a new line of questioning,



"What is the average wage in Auid?"

"There is not one."

"Pardon me?"

He explained: "Everyone gets paid differently. The factory workers get one wage, shop owners another. I, for example, get a different one as well. There is not just one wage."

"I understand. How much, for example, do most factory workers get paid?"

"I don't know." This response followed as well when I tried to ask for the average wage of shop keepers, teachers, policemen, workers in the mayors office, etc.

"Are wages lower here than in Cluj [the nearest large city]?"

"Yes, Cluj is a big city. We are a little one."

"Okay, are they a lot lower?"

"Yes"

"Is the education level a lot lower here too?" I was trying to get to some idea of Enyed's relative average wage even if stated in the vaguest of terms.

"NO! We have a great lyceum [referring to the Bethlen Gábor Collegium, equivalent in level to an American high school]. Education in Auid is very good."

"Then you have well-educated and skilled labor at low wages. That might be one reason for foreign investors to come here, huh?" I encouraged.

"Yes, but Madeline Albright hates Romania..." He launched into another tirade.

Our conversation carried on like this for two and a half hours. About half of that time was spent with him bashing US foreign policy and especially American Secretary of State Madeline Albright for being a Czech nationalist, hater of Romania and part of the international conspiracy against the Romanian nation. Aside from this, it was clear that he had no training in economics at all. This was later confirmed when I learned he had only been a line worker in the steel factory before being appointed town economist. After meeting with him I felt sorry for Enyed and the economic future of its citizens.

During our conversation a young man named Cristea Florin-Eugen interrupted, however. He was head protocol officer for Enyed's largest steel plant, Metalurgica S.A. Auid. We agreed to meet the following day and discuss the steel factory. I never met with the "economist" again.

METALURGICA S.A. AUID

The following morning I met Cristea Florin-Eugen at the steel factory. He was on time and smiling. The factory was well guarded by three or more armed guards at the entrance gate. Unlike many of the other factories I have seen in Romania this one seemed to be reasonably clean and still had most of its windows intact.

He led me into the main building and upstairs to a small conference room. Coffee was served promptly while we chatted about the weather, my meeting with the economist, and so on. After a few minutes, a plump, dark-haired woman joined us. Her name was Carmen Savu. She was marketing director for the factory and had a sales brochure for me. Again, she was smiling and pleasant, like Cristea. Both spoke excellent English as well as French and Italian (or so they told me). After meeting the town economist, I was relieved to see that at least the factory had decent protocol personnel.

Our meeting began awkwardly as they launched into sales pitches.

"Metalurgica was founded in 1938 and nationalized in 1948. From there it continued to grow in size, although more quickly under Ceausescu as he increased large industry production, until 1978. It remained essentially unchanged until 1990 at which time it was partially privatized and began to be restructured... It constitutes 15 percent of Enyed's gross production and currently exports 35 percent of its products (totaling \$5 million from January to May 1997).... It has great experience in manufacturing spare parts for metallurgy, machine building and chemical industries. [It] is the unique producer, in Romania, of radiant-heat tubes and heat-resisting steel rollers for heat treatment furnaces as well as for heat-resisting steel tubes for pyrolysis in chemical industry. [Its] technical facilities enable [it] to offer a comprehensive service to [its] clients... It currently exports to Italy, Germany, Hungary, the Philippines, Russia, Belgium, and Holland."

Nodding approval, I asked, "And what is the average wage in the factory?" They looked at each other, then replied almost in unison that they weren't privy to such information. Despite my coaxing, they would neither guess at the figure, nor mention the average wage in, say, their own offices.

Having startled them sufficiently, I told them I was not a potential investor, but a researcher looking at local economic problems in Romania. Once this sank in, they offered me a cigarette, each lit up themselves, and we continued our discussion. Initially hesitant, they quickly realized I posed no threat to them, but was simply curious. They then relaxed and were willing to answer any question they were able (approved) to answer. Our conversation was enjoyable, lively and lasted nearly three hours.

From 1978 until 1990 the factory employed around



Metalurgica, S.A.

8,000 workers (Enyed has around 30,000 inhabitants, so 8,000 people is about 26.7 percent of the population). In 1990, however, the factory had to lay off half its work force. Hit hardest were those in "non-productive sectors" like research. By 1997 approximately 80 percent of the employees worked directly in production.

According to their story, the money dried up quickly and the factory was left with little support from the government to restructure. Furthermore, demand for their products vanished almost overnight since much of their production was carried out only to keep the Romanian economy independent of steel imports. This was due to Ceausescu's maniacal drive to boost large industry and simultaneously maintain a self-sufficient economy. Many of their products were also intermediate products for other factories suffering a similar fate. Thus, they were hit two-fold (i.e. by a decline in both direct and derived demand for their goods).⁵

The plant was unable, however, to simply close down loss-making sections because of its uniquely interwoven structure and production process. Cristea explained: "Because of our structure, we require a minimum of workers in each part of production and the processes are arranged so that we must use every sector to produce any one product." In other words, production of any one thing requires the entire factory to function. To add insult to injury, "the most advanced technology [they] use dates back to the mid- to late-seventies," and is product-specific (i.e. not able to be used in production of goods other than the ones it was originally designed to produce).

Despite these problems, both Cristea and Carmen insisted that Metalurgica was capable of competing in the world market and, with a little foreign investment, would be able to adapt to a competitive environment. Carmen supported this claim by saying: "We meet the German TUFF quality standards and received a diploma showing we meet ISO Standard 9000. These are the two highest quality standards in Europe and it helps sales to show that we meet them." (I neither know of these standards nor asked more about them.)

In such a depressed economic environment the point of production is not to maximize profit as it would be in a competitive, developed market, but rather to survive until they can coax a foreigner or two to invest in Metalurgica. Two examples help bring the necessity of such a survival strategy to light. First, the "privatization" Metalurgica underwent didn't help much.

Technically, the factory was partially privatized in 1992 by employee buyout through the Romanian Private Ownership Fund (POF), which is a state-run investment fund established under the Iliescu government. The remaining shares went to the State Ownership Fund (SOF), which is also state-run and owned. The SOF acquired 70 percent ownership and the POF 30 percent. Of the 30 percent, only seven percent actually went to the employees who "bought out" the company. That means the POF was left with 23 percent ownership. Thus, not being very "private," it has retained all the problems typically associated with social ownership (inefficiency, shortages, uncertainty in the face of political change, lack of control

⁵ In 1990, Romanian GDP fell by around 6% and industrial production by 24%. Industrial producers were Metalurgica's main customers. See: *Romania: An Economic Assessment*. OECD 1993.

over own production, and so on), but received less government support than before.

According to Cristea and Carmen there was no barter-based trade with other firms until after the system change in 1989. I found, and still find, that hard to believe. Bartering was a common element in all planned economies. Without it, the system would have collapsed far sooner than it did. In my eyes, it would be like saying that during Ceausescu's Communism there was no black market (another element essential to the system's survival). I suggested that perhaps "officially" there was no bartering, but "unofficially" there was. They denied this possibility as well.

Whatever the truth, it is fact that today there is a great deal of barter going on. This is the second factor that suggests they are pursuing a survival strategy rather than a profit-maximizing one. After 1989, Metalurgica even established an Office of Bartering. By 1997, the office employed three persons full-time and continued to grow. They couldn't offer any specific details, but suggested the percentage of total production that goes into barter has grown dramatically since 1989 and constitutes more of production than the part that is sold for money. I got the feeling, but was unable to confirm, that the 35 percent that is exported is virtually the only portion of production not going into barter. A reasonable *guesstimate* on my part would put the figures at about 60 percent barter, 40 percent money sales.

The system in which Metalurgica barterers is an extensive one. Since 1989 many companies have (increasingly) begun to barter. The barter system quickly became complex and widespread, covering a wide number of goods (necessary for reasonably efficient barter to occur). In Romania, this flourished in the 1990s the way it did in most other Central-East European economies as they liberalized and reformed prior to 1989.

In general, I believe Carmen and Cristea were reasonably honest with me. The only exception (aside from my suspicions about bartering before 1989) was the story of Metalurgica's employment policy. Carmen claimed that "wage conditions are very good in Metalurgica. The workers put in a 40-hour work week and are compensated according to work conditions and overtime." Also, according to her and Cristea, the goal of production was survival with a purpose. That purpose was to maintain the current employment level and regularly pay workers. They claimed to have done this faithfully since 1990 (with

exceptions during one or two problem periods).

Sadly, while Metalurgica may actually attempt to support its employees, it has have not paid more than 80 percent of their salary since 1992, or so claimed Gyöngyi Domokos, who worked at the factory until 1990 and whose parents both worked there at the time of my visit. Her story was confirmed by nearly every other worker or worker's family member with whom I spoke.

The average line-worker's⁶ wage in the factory, based on estimates given to me by workers interviewed,⁷ is between 160,000 Lei/month (for a beginner) and 400,000 Lei/month (for more experienced workers). At the time, June 1997, the exchange rate was 8,200 Lei for U.S.\$1. That put wages between U.S.\$22 (160,000 Lei) and U.S.\$55 (400,000 Lei) per month. By way of comparison (again based on the personal estimates of workers, teachers, etc.) the average grade-school or high-school teacher's salary in Enyed at the time of my visit was \$37/month (270,000 Lei), a senior-ranked teacher \$55/month (400,000 Lei) and a university professor in Cluj-Napoca (nearest large city with university) earned between \$69/month and \$138/month (500,000 -1,000,000 Lei), depending on seniority.

I left the meeting on good terms with Cristea and Carmen. They were nervous about the upcoming plant closings already announced by Prime Minister Ciorbea. They hoped that their exports abroad would count for something when the final decision was made.⁸ Also, they were both hopeful that Romania would be included in NATO at NATO's Madrid meeting on expansion. Cristea's office even had a sign-up sheet where employees could mark whether they were for or against Romania joining NATO. Most employees participated in the survey and almost all were in favor of joining. [As we all know, however, Romania didn't make the cut.] We agreed to meet during my next visit to Enyed in August.

A BRIEF RETURN

In August I returned to Enyed for a night or two. Whenever I go into or out of Romania I try to stop in Enyed for at least one night to catch up on the latest developments. Metalurgica had been placed on the government's list for closure and neither Carmen nor Cristea were available for comment. The town "economist" was still in office. The mayor was gone again to visit another sister city, this time in Germany. The finishing touches had also been put on the pipes. They are all bright yellow now. □

6 Recall that, according to Cristea and Carmen, line workers and other directly involved in production constitute 80% of Metalurgica's work force.

7 Accurate statistics are hard to come by in Romania, especially statistics broken down geographically. Therefore, I often rely on people's personal estimates which I confirm through at least two other independent sources. Given that most average people have and had little knowledge about things outside their immediate sphere of influence in Romania, all quoted figures and guesstimates should be subject to suspicion until checked against more reliable data not currently attainable in Romania.

8 See CPB 8 and 9 for further information on the new government's plant closure policy.

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Institute Fellows and their Activities

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Christopher P. Ball. An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Chenoa Egawa. An enrolled member of the Lummi Indian Nation, Chenoa is spending two years living among mesoAmerican Indians, studying successful and not-so-successful cooperative organizations designed to help the Indians market their manufactures, agricultural products and crafts without relying on middlemen. A former trade specialist for the American Indian Trade and Development Council of the Pacific Northwest, Chenoa's B.A. is in International Business and Spanish from the University of Washington in Seattle. [THE AMERICAS]

Marc Michaelson. A program manager for Save the

Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research." [sub-SAHARA]

Randi Movich. The current John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, Randi is spending two years in Guinea, West Africa, studying and writing about the ways in which indigenous women use forest resources for reproductive health. With a B.A. in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Master of Science degree in Forest Resources from the University of Idaho, Randi is building on two years' experience as a Peace Corps agroforestry extension agent in the same region of Guinea where she will be living as a Fellow with her husband, Jeff Fields — also the holder of an Idaho Master's in Forest Resources. [sub-SAHARA]

John B. Robinson. A 1991 Harvard graduate with a certificate of proficiency from the Institute of Kiswahili in Zanzibar, John spent two years as an English teacher in Tanzania. He received a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1995. He and his wife Delphine, a French oceanographer, are spending two years in Madagascar with their two

young sons, Nicolas and Rowland, where he will be writing about varied aspects of the island-nation's struggle to survive industrial and natural-resource exploitation and the effects of a rapidly swelling population. [sub-SAHARA]

Daniel B. Wright. A sinologist with a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, Dan's fellowship immerses him in southwest China's Guizhou Province, where he, his journalist-wife Shou Guowei, and their two children (Margaret and Jon) will base themselves for two years in the city of Duyun. Previously a specialist on Asian and Chinese affairs for the Washington consulting firm of Andreae, Vick & Associates, Dan also studied Chinese literature at Beijing University and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California. [EAST ASIA]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a juris doctor from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARA]

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