



SLOVAKIA

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Slovakia – formerly part of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic – was a non-free country under Soviet influence until 1989 (with Soviet troops placed in the country for 23 years since the occupation in 1968), when the regime-change opened space for media freedom and the first independent publications.

After the split, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were established in 1993 and major foreign players helped shaping the market (e.g., German publishers behind *Hospodárske noviny* and *SME*), before a gradual shift toward domestic/regional owners happened around 2008. In recent years, the media environment has been marked by sharper polarization and several high-impact political moves that are interpreted as both state capture (control of newly restructured public broadcaster STVR) and direct assault on independent and critical media (pressure against the leading private broadcaster TV Markíza and regular hostile rhetoric against mainstream media, including personal attacks against journalists).

A law was passed in June 2024, resulting in a formal end of the public RTVS (Radio and Television of Slovakia) being replaced by STVR (Slovak Television and Radio). The government insisted that the changes were necessary to increase efficiency and impartiality. While essentially groundless and lacking any factual justification, as also documented by the MEMO 98 analysis, the law aimed to terminate the tenure of Ľuboš Machaj, the CEO who was elected in 2022 and who had a legal mandate until 2027. The law also aimed to reshape the company's governing structure. Unlike the previous board, which was elected by parliament, the current board consists of members who were elected by parliament and direct appointees of the minister of culture.

The European Commission, experts and numerous critics (a public petition was supported by more than 80,000 citizens) pointed out that the proposal contradicts the principles of the newly adopted European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). The law not only raised concerns about increased political influence over the public broadcaster, it also served as the legal confirmation of previous public declarations to redefine its mandate and to weaken its independence, primarily by the representatives of SNS (Slovak National Party). Andrej Danko, the chair of the party, has often stated his preference for state-controlled television over a public service broadcaster. Both, Minister Šimkovičová and Mr. Michalko, the Chair of the Parliamentary Media Committee, are SNS nominees.

Despite the urgency and extremely rushed legislative process concerning the public broadcaster (from April when the draft law was introduced until its parliamentary adoption in June 2024), the new broadcaster's Council was elected only in March 2025 and the CEO, Martina Flašíková, elected in May. She is a daughter of Fedor Flašík, co-founder of SMER and a key marketing adviser to former authoritarian prime minister Mečiar (in 1998 his government was replaced by the reformist prime minister Mikuláš Dzurinda). While previously running her father's pro-government website E-report, after taking the STVR position, she immediately cancelled several critical programs, including an educative radio section that has regularly debunked conspiracy theories.

Furthermore, restricted journalists' access, often combined with openly hostile attitude towards journalists from traditional media, limited citizens' access to full official information. Immediately after taking office, the minister of culture caused a stir when she refused to communicate with certain media outlets and restricted their participation in press conferences. The prime minister and his governmental office, particularly after the assassination attempt on him in May 2024, increased their aggressive rhetoric against independent media and critical journalists, combined with complete avoidance of public media discussion. This approach openly signalled that the government and its representatives would not be open to critical editorial offices.

The private channel TV Markíza has faced adversary behaviour already prior to the September 2023 parliamentary elections. In response to a critical, fact-checking-type political discussion on the channel Na telo (Directly), Prime Minister Robert Fico of the SMER-SSD (Direction-Slovak Social Democracy) announced its boycott in August 2023, which has continued far beyond the campaign.

The new governing coalition (SMER-SSD, HLAS-SD established by current president Peter Pellegrini and chaired by Matúš Šutaj Eštok, the incumbent Minister of Interior; and SNS) began criticizing Markíza for its news coverage, which it perceived as overly critical, with accusations and labels of "progressive bias". Markíza found itself in a difficult position. On one hand, it maintains high ratings thanks to heated political debates; on the other hand, it has faced threats of restricted access to government officials and potential economic repercussions. Reports emerged about internal disagreements within the channel regarding the degree of independence and how Markíza should cover political events. Dissatisfied with management's interference in news reporting, journalists founded trade unions. Michal Kovačič, the host of Na telo – the country's leading political discussion programme – left in June 2024 after being dismissed for comments he made about censorship during a show. In the context of growing government pressure on the media, his departure was seen as an attack on media freedom and sparked a wide-ranging debate on the state of journalism in Slovakia, highlighting the growing concern that even commercial television stations could be influenced by political or economic interests.

Also in Slovakia, the universal importance of social media is a key factor in information consumption habits. Meta platforms, Telegram, YouTube, and TikTok have become very popular, for segments of population the main source of both information and misinformation. Parties, politicians and an increasing number of influencers use these platforms for a direct, verification-free reach, bypassing traditional media. As a side effect, it discernibly weakens the controlling, gate-keeping function of journalism.

At the same time, disinformation ecosystems, including so-called alternative portals, have further expanded and strengthened their position among a section of the public that distrusts traditional media. Many dubious outlets and accounts have been legitimized by the ruling coalition representatives, including by participation in a discussion with criminally charged individual. These portals often spread pro-Russian narratives and conspiracy theories, contributing to further fragmentation of the information environment.

Nevertheless, mainstream daily newspapers such as Aktuality, SME and Denník N also act as media watchdogs, providing critical analysis of the government's performance in domestic and foreign policy matters, including Slovakia's stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Critical online mainstream media and new quality journalism projects such as 360-tka (established in fall 2024 by Michal Kovačič and some of his former television colleagues) play a key role in maintaining independent journalism, investigative reporting and plurality of opinion, especially at a time when traditional television stations are facing political and economic pressure.

Online platforms are not directly dependent on large investors or political structures, which allows them to cover topics that might be suppressed in the mainstream media. They often operate based on crowdfunding campaigns, donations, or subscriptions, which allows them to remain independent of state advertising or large commercial clients. The annual Journalist Award (Novinárska cena, with 21 editions by 2025), organized by the Open Society and supported by a plethora of partners from commercial and civil society sphere, recognizes exceptional journalistic materials, thus highlighting their essential role as guardians of democracy.

Outlets and Owners

For decades, television has held a dominant position in the Slovak media market, both in terms of its share of the advertising market and as a popular source of news and entertainment. However, in recent years, the environment has changed, with online media and social networks emerging as dominant forces. The evolving preferences of the Slovak audience, as reflected in the media landscape, force television, radio and print media to adapt to changing consumption patterns in the digital age.

The key media in Slovakia include the following entities:

Slovenská televízia a rozhlas (STVR) is Slovakia's public service broadcaster. Originally established as RTVS (Rozhlas a televízia Slovenska) in 2011 through the merger of Slovak Television (STV) and Slovak Radio (SRo), it operates three TV channels and nine radio stations. In 2024, parliament passed a law that transformed RTVS into STVR, effective from 1 July 2024. This reform was criticised by domestic and international organisations and restructured the governing structures, resulting in a politically affiliated and biased board. Four of the nine board members are directly appointed by the Minister of Culture and elect the broadcaster's CEO, replacing the previous system in which the CEO was elected by parliament. Although experts (including MEMO 98) have advocated genuine structural change, aiming for a diversified Council based on expertise, the final outcome openly prioritises direct political interference and control.

Founded in 1996, *TV Markíza* is Slovakia's leading TV network and is currently part of the wider Markíza Group, which includes Markíza, Doma, Dajto and the streaming platform VOYO. Since 2002, the channel has been part of Central European Media Enterprises (CME), which, as of 2020, has been owned by the Czech investment holding company PPF Group. While primarily an entertainment broadcaster, Markíza maintains a strong news and current-affairs presence and historically shaped the political environment – most notably offering a counterweight to state media ahead of the 1998 parliamentary elections. Since 2023, however, the channel has faced increased political pressure, including verbal attacks and boycotts of the leading political programme by representatives of ruling coalition led by prime minister Fico. These pressures and the lack of the channel's resistance resulted in the departure of several prominent journalists, raising concerns about the sustainability of independent commercial television and critical journalism.

TV JOJ, part of the JOJ Media House, is the second most watched television channel in Slovakia, after TV Markíza. It began broadcasting in 2002. The channel's programming is aimed at families, combining entertainment formats, series and shorter news segments. This is different from the main public broadcaster's programming. JOJ Media House and the broader JOJ Group (JOJ, JOJ Plus, Jójko, JOJ 24, JOJ Šport, JOJ Svet, JOJ Cinema, WAU) were historically linked to the J&T financial group, founded by Slovak businessmen Patrik Tkáč and Ivan Jakobovič, whose investment activities extended into media. The current ownership with TV JOJ L.P. is ultimately shared between two Cyprus-based companies – Hernado Limited controlled by Richard Flimel and Agunaki Enterprises Limited, controlled by the J&T Private Equity Group.

TA3 is a private 24/7 news channel launched in 2001, with its first extraordinary broadcast covering the September 11th attacks. TA3 was controlled by Slovak businessman Ivan Kmotrík via Grafobal from 2006, until it was sold to Czech entrepreneur Michal Voráček through Blueberg Media in 2022. Since the change in ownership, TA3 has broadened its programming mix by adding more service-oriented and magazine-style content, while maintaining core political debate formats

such as the weekly programme *V politike*, which continues to attract strong viewing figures. TA3's ownership chain is relatively transparent compared to that of several other Slovak broadcasters.

In radio broadcasting, the news segment is dominated by public radio stations, above all *Rádio Slovensko* (part of the public broadcaster STVR). However, the popular private *Rádio Expres* also plays a significant role, broadcasting regular news bulletins and the influential daily political discussion *Braňo Závodský Naživo*.

National daily newspapers in Slovakia have a diverse readership and ownership structure. The tabloid newspaper *Nový Čas*, formerly owned by Anton Siekel's FPD Media, was acquired in 2023 by News and Media Holding a.s., which is part of the Penta Investments structure. *Nový Čas* remains the newspaper with the highest readership. Among the most popular dailies is also the tabloid *Plus 1 Deň*, also published by NMH (its online version *pluska.sk* is the most read tabloid, fourth in total). Penta's media group also owns *Plus 7 Dní* and *Trend*, an economic weekly, as well as numerous print and online lifestyle outlets covering fashion, women's interests, hobbies, living, gardening, cars and travel.

Pravda, also one of the popular daily newspapers, formerly the official daily of the Communist Party, has transformed into a liberal left-leaning daily that focuses on current events and politics. It is published by OUR Media SR a.s., which is controlled by Czech businessman Michal Voráček through Blueberg Media.

Another popular daily, *SME*, was founded in 1993 by journalists who left *Smena* in response to political pressure under prime minister Mečiar. It is published by Petit Press, whose majority shareholder remains *Prvá slovenská investičná spoločnosť*. In 2014, Penta's vehicle *Namav* agreed to acquire the 50 per cent stake in Petit Press. The announcement triggered a major editorial crisis at *SME*: senior editors and reporters warned of a conflict of interest given Penta's wide non-media business holdings, and a large group resigned. Later in 2014, they launched *Denník N* with a journalist-ownership model: the publisher *N Press, s.r.o.* is 100 percent owned by *Denník N, a.s.*, whose 80+ shareholders are currently predominantly *Denník N* journalists and staff, alongside minority investors including ESET co-founders. In April 2021, Penta fully exited Petit Press: the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) bought 34 percent from *Namav*, while Petit Press managers and a former co-owner acquired the remaining ~5.5 per cent. Since then, *SME* has operated without Penta in its ownership, with *PSIS* continuing as the majority shareholder.

Hospodárske noviny, an economy-focused daily, is published by *MAFRA Slovakia*, which has been owned by *Kaprain Group* (Karel Pražák) since February 2024; until 2023 it formed part of *Agrofert's* media assets associated with *Andrej Babiš*.

In the online segment, *Aktuality.sk*, the most popular online outlet was founded in 2005 by entrepreneur Milan Dubec as a news portal, originally linked to the chat-type *Pokec.sk* service. The portal has become a symbol of independent journalism, especially after the murder of investigative journalist *Ján Kuciak* in 2018, who worked for *Aktuality.sk*. Since 2010, the outlet has been part of the *Ringier Axel Springer* media group, now directly under *Ringier Slovakia Media*, with the Swiss company *Ringier* as the ultimate owner. In the online segment, *SME.sk*, the website of the daily *SME* (*Petit Press*), also enjoys consistently high readership.

In addition to traditional print and broadcasting, Slovakia has seen a sharp rise in digital-native outlets and social channels. Brands such as *Refresher*, *Startitup*, and *Interez* operate as registered media businesses with publicly identifiable owners and editorial teams, and they reach younger audiences at scale.

By contrast, several YouTube political channels (e.g., *Informácie Pravdy*, *Politika Dnes*) provide significant reach but lack clear, consistently published ownership disclosures, which complicates transparency assessments. Investigative reporting has shown that some Slovak political YouTube channels buy ads through private companies rather than naming a publisher. For example, *Politika Dnes* ran paid promotion with the advertiser listed as T-Community, a firm owned by Tomáš Doboš, who told *Denník N* that he handles the business side, while content is created by Vladimír Bartaloš. The channel itself does not provide a clear imprint/ownership disclosure on YouTube.

Main ownership patterns

Since the fall of the socialist regime in 1989, ownership in Slovakia's media has shifted repeatedly. Foreign media groups dominated the 1990s and 2000s, but recent years brought a tilt toward domestic and regional investors whose core businesses lie outside media, alongside rising consolidation. In 2025, the Slovak media market is dominated by several major ownership constellations. PPF Group controls TV Markíza through CME, acquired in 2020, and remains the key player in the television advertising market. Penta Investments owns News and Media Holding, the largest print and online publishing group, through a layered structure anchored in Cyprus. JOJ Media House is historically linked to the J&T financial group, that, alongside Richard Flimel, exercises its ownership via a Cyprus-based company controlled by the J&T Private Equity Group.

New Czech investors have also expanded their presence: in 2022, Michal Voráček's Blueberg Media acquired the news channel TA3, and in June 2025 has acquired the publishing house Our Media SR, which publishes the daily newspaper *Pravda*.

This ownership landscape shows a clear dual structure. On one hand, a few diversified domestic groups – PPF/CME, Penta/NMH, and the JOJ cluster – combine strong media positions with extensive non-media interests, creating structural risks of instrumentalisation and conflicts of interest. On the other hand, foreign media houses and digital-native actors tend to have more transparent ownership structures but a smaller aggregate market footprint.

Who Owns What?

- PPF Group/CME (TV Markíza).

Since October 2020, PPF Group has been fully controlling CME, which operates TV Markíza in Slovakia. Markíza remains a ratings leader and a major player in the TV advertising market. Strategic oversight is managed by CME/PPF, while day-to-day operations and editorial management are based in Slovakia.

- Penta Investments/News and Media Holding (NMH).

NMH, the publisher of *Nový Čas*, *Plus 1 Deň*, *Plus 7 Dní*, *Trend*, *Život* and *Pluska.sk*, among others, is owned via Media SK Holdings Limited (Cyprus), with Penta Investments Cyprus Limited at the top of the ownership chain. In 2023, NMH acquired FPD Media a.s., thereby bringing *Nový Čas* under Penta's media umbrella. Slovak transparency records identify Penta partners Marek Dospiva and Jaroslav Haščák among the ultimate beneficiaries.

- JOJ Group/JOJ Media House.

JOJ Media House, a.s. (and its associated media assets linked to the TV JOJ ecosystem) reports that its majority owner is TV JOJ L.P., which is ultimately co-owned by two Cyprus-based entities: Hernado Limited, whose ultimate owner is Richard Flimel, and Agunaki Enterprises Limited, which is controlled by the J&T Private Equity Group.

- Czech investors expanding.

In 2022, Grafobal (owned by Ivan Kmotrík) sold TA3 to Michal Voráček's Blueberg Media. Voráček is also the owner of Our Media, the publisher of the daily newspaper Pravda. He has a significant presence in TV and print, but it is far smaller than those of PPF and Penta.

- Other foreign media groups with lighter – but important – footprints.

Ringier owns Aktuality.sk via Ringier Slovakia Media and remains a major digital player. Bauer Media Audio owns Rádio Expres, Rádio Jemné and Rádio Europa 2 in Slovakia, having completed acquisitions in 2021. Compared with domestic conglomerates, these groups' ownership disclosures tend to be clearer due to their corporate structure and reporting practices.

Type of Information Missing and Main risks for transparency

The availability of data on Slovak companies is relatively good thanks to online registers such as the Obchodný register (Business Register) and the Register partnerov verejného sektora (RPVS), which provide free access to ownership information. Historical records with changes in ownership are also publicly accessible.

However, several critical information gaps persist in 2025:

- Foreign ownership layers: When companies are owned by foreign entities – particularly in jurisdictions such as Cyprus – transparency is reduced. The intermediate companies often do not publish detailed financial statements or shareholder lists.
- Exact shareholding ratios: While Slovak registers identify ultimate beneficial owners, they do not always specify exact share percentages at each level of the chain.
- Financial data: Even though turnover (tržby) is available for most Slovak entities via Finstat or the Financial Statements Register, financial data for foreign intermediaries (especially in Cyprus) is often missing. This makes it difficult to assess the economic weight of individual ownership layers.
- Digital-native outlets and YouTube channels: For newer media actors (e.g., Informácie Pravdy, Politika Dnes), ownership information is often absent or incomplete. Some channels appear to be run by individuals without formal registration, while others are linked to companies that provide minimal public data
- Editorial control mechanisms: Information about editorial statutes, safeguards against owner interference, or internal governance structures is generally not published by private media. This information gap makes it difficult to assess risks to editorial independence.

Distribution

Linear distribution remains a dominant part of the Slovak media ecosystem, especially in television, but its relative weight continues to decrease as online- and on-demand platforms gain popularity. Television still enjoys widespread reach across all age groups, but younger audiences are increasingly shifting to digital platforms, both for entertainment and for news consumption.

Television in Slovakia relies on a relatively diverse infrastructure. The most common distribution methods are satellite (DVB-S), IPTV and cable (DVB-C), with terrestrial (DVB-T/DVB-T2) being used less frequently. Since 2024, there has been a gradual shift towards hybrid models, with several major broadcasters beginning to integrate linear broadcasting with on-demand services in response to changing audience habits. TV Markíza, JOJ and TA3 have all developed or expanded their online platforms and mobile applications, offering catch-up and live streaming services.

Radio remains the most stable segment, with FM still dominant. DAB+ digital radio reaches around 70 per cent of the population, largely via regional and trial multiplexes. There is little enthusiasm among commercial broadcasters for investing in rapid expansion and no firm nationwide digital switchover date has been set. Print media is distributed nationwide by multiple providers, and there are no reported cases of discriminatory practices in print distribution.

Role of Linear vs. Non-Linear Distribution

Linear distribution continues to play a crucial role in reaching mass audiences and shaping the public agenda. Major TV networks are still among the most influential media in terms of public opinion, especially outside of urban centres. However, non-linear distribution has grown rapidly in recent years.

A notable development in recent years is the increasing reliance of traditional broadcasters on social media platforms to distribute their content. TV Markíza and JOJ use Facebook and YouTube to reach younger audiences; TA3 streams parts of its news programming online. These strategies are partly driven by declining linear advertising revenues and the need to remain relevant in a digital environment.

According to the 2025 Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Slovakia), 68 percent of the population use online sources for news, while 56 percent use television. Social media is used as a news source by 47 percent of people, while print is used by 9 percent. Therefore, the gap between online and TV in 2025 is 12 percentage points in favour of online.

By 2025, the relative importance of YouTube has grown further. These include both professional digital media brands and less transparent channels, whose ownership and funding structures remain unclear.

Relevant Non-Linear Distributors

Key non-linear distributors in Slovakia are as follows:

- Facebook (Meta) – 43% use it for news in Slovakia (67% use it for any purpose). It remains the leading distribution and engagement platform for publishers.

- YouTube – 21% for news (56% for general use). Important for broadcaster’s live/clip distribution and for newer actors.
- Instagram – 14% for news (34% for general use). Strong among younger audiences and lifestyle brands (e.g., Refresher, Startitup).
- Facebook Messenger – 12% for news (47% for general use).
- WhatsApp – 9% for news (39% for general use).
- TikTok – 7% for news (15% for general use) and growing with younger users.

Under the EU Digital Services Act, Meta (Facebook/Instagram), Google (Search/YouTube) and TikTok are designated as VLOPs/VLOSEs and publish transparency reports at EU level. However, they do not provide transparency regarding media ownership or editorial control over hosted content.

Legal Framework

Slovakia’s legal framework for media transparency has improved in the past decade, mainly through the introduction of beneficial ownership disclosure obligations and the reform of media services legislation. According to the provisions set forth in the Media Services Act, a single beneficial owner is prohibited from exercising control over an aggregate share of more than 60% of the advertising market in Slovakia. However, several structural shortcomings persist.

Although the legal framework requires companies registered in Slovakia to be transparent about their ownership, it does not provide mechanisms to ensure full transparency when foreign intermediaries are involved. Nor does it address the opacity of digital-only actors that are not registered as media entities.

In 2024, the Slovak Parliament controversially adopted a law that transformed RTVS into STVR (Slovenská televízia a rozhlas). This weakened the independence of public service media governance, as it gave the government greater powers to appoint the director general and members of the new supervisory council. This prompted concerns from both the European Commission and the EBU, who warned that the law could compromise editorial independence.

Key laws include:

- Law on Slovak Television and Radio
Zákon č. 167/2024 Z.z. o Slovenskej televízii a rozhlase Publications Act
- Publications Act
Zákon č. 265/2022 Z.z. o vydavateľoch publikácií a o registri v oblasti médií a audiovizie (Zákon o publikáciách)
- Media Services Act
Zákon č. 264/2022 Z.z. o mediálnych službách

- Electronic Communications Act
Zákon č. 452/2021 Z.z. o elektronických komunikáciách
- Competition Protection Act
Zákon č. 187/2021 Z.z. o ochrane hospodárskej súťaže
- Act on the Register of Public Sector Partners
Zákon č. 315/2016 Z.z. o registri partnerov verejného sektora
- Government Regulation concerning details on the publication of contracts in the Central Register of Contracts and information particularities concerning the contract conclusion
Nariadenie vlády č. 498/2011 Z.z. ktorým sa ustanovujú podrobnosti o zverejňovaní zmlúv v Centrálnom registri zmlúv a náležitosti informácie o uzatvorení zmluvy
- Law on the Commercial Register
Zákon č. 530/2003 Z.z. o obchodnom registri a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov
- Advertising Law
Zákon č. 147/2001 Z.z. o reklame
- Freedom of Information Act
Zákon č. 211/2000 Z.z. o slobodnom prístupe k informáciám

Main Risks to Transparency

The interplay of concentrated cross-sector ownership, foreign intermediary companies, non-transparent digital actors, and politicisation of public service media creates a multi-layered risk environment for media transparency in Slovakia.

- Concentration & cross-sector ownership (risk of instrumentalization)

A handful of financially powerful groups (e.g., PPF/CME, Penta/NMH, the JOJ cluster) control key parts of TV, print and online markets, while their core businesses lie outside media. This creates incentives to leverage outlets for political or economic influence. As Penta co-owner Marek Dospiva put it in 2015: „Vlastniť médiá nám dáva istotu, že bude horšie pre každého, kto na nás bude útočiť iracionálne.“ The dynamic remains relevant in 2025, with Penta still being a major player in print/online.

- Opacity of foreign ownership layers (Cyprus and other jurisdictions)

While Slovak registers (e.g., RPVS) disclose ultimate beneficial owners, intermediate holdings – often in Cyprus – rarely publish detailed shareholder lists or granular financials. This limits end-to-end mapping of control and makes public verification of ownership chains more difficult.

- Politicisation of public service media (STVR)

The 2024–2025 transformation of RTVS → STVR weakened safeguards against political interference. Appointment procedures for the new Council and Director General are less insulated from politics, a shift criticised by European and domestic media-freedom bodies. This reduces a key counterweight to private-sector concentration.

- Digital transparency gap (platform-driven news ecosystem)

Non-linear distribution – especially Facebook/YouTube and fast-growing TikTok/Instagram – now shapes reach and agenda, but many influential digital-only outlets and YouTube channels fall outside traditional media disclosure rules. Ownership, funding sources and editorial structures are often opaque, creating space for coordinated influence or disinformation.

- Fragmented regulation of state advertising

There is no centralised, public register tracking how state bodies allocate advertising. Decentralised, opaque spending enables selective placement and potential political favouritism, distorting market incentives and editorial independence.

- Lack of public ownership registry

The Media Services Council, the media regulator, monitors media outlets as part of the licensing process. However, the Council is not required to maintain a national media ownership database. While annual reports of the Media Services Council provide some level of transparency, there is no public registry in place.

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