



CITY OF ATHENS, MAYOR'S CABINET
INTERNATIONAL MEDIA DEPARTMENT

**Address by the Mayor of Athens
Dora Bakoyannis**

**"Athens, Two Years of Infrastructure Development,
Prospects, Potential and Hopes for the City's Future"**

**Athens Concert Hall (Megaron)
January 31, 2005**

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“ACCOUNTING FOR ATHENS”

Athens Mayor Dora Bakoyannis presented the following address at the Athens Concert Hall (Megaron) on Monday, January 31, 2005:

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Thank you all for honoring us with your presence at this event here tonight. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Dear friends,

For many years, 2004 has been a reference point for all Greeks.

It was in this year that we invested our greatest hopes of seeing our country and lives change.

There were some who were eager to see the much-need infrastructure works finally completed.

Others wanted to see Greece finally take its rightful position in the international spotlight.

Others still wanted to see economic growth and tourism gaining a new dynamic.

And most had hopes of seeing the country and its people change attitudes and practices.

For almost a decade, hundreds of thousands of people worked towards achieving one great goal: seeing our country put on its best face, making our fellow citizens proud and displaying our capacity as modern country.

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I am honored to be one of those people. One of the Greeks who worked towards this goal, especially at the finish line, the decisive last two years.

And if there is something to look back on in the end, it is the pride and joy of experiencing one of the greatest moments in our country's history; and a most momentous moment for Athens.

2004 was an exceptional year.

To be honest, dear friends, not a day goes by when I don't think about the worries, the tension, the hard work but also the joy, satisfaction and pride that these last two years brought us.

I still recall the anxiety over whether we would complete the works in time, have all our greenery in place, launch our cleanliness programme, but I also remember the smile of all Athenians the moment the whole world turned its eye to Greece.

Dear friends, it is difficult to describe these moments. It might even be out of place to use numbers and statistics to do so. That's why I do not want to speak much about what we did. After all, a great part of what we did is now part of our daily reality.

But I do have to say that in numbers one can always find a simple truth: miracles don't happen alone. Success is not without hard work. And in order to achieve our goals, we put in plenty of hard work, planning and coordination.

For every number and statistic there is a well-thought out plan. Thousands of people worked towards making the most out of a massive investment programme, the biggest for Athens.

Today, the City of Athens is keeping one more of its pre-election promises. We are accounting for all the work achieved.

We are letting you know what we've done, how we went about it and how much it cost. We are informing Athens residents about where we invested the City's funds, the money they trusted us with.



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At the end of this event, you will get a detailed copy of this information. This review will be sent out to all Athens citizens so that they know how every single euro was used.

It's a new beginning for the City of Athens. A beginning that marks a relationship of trust between our citizens and the City.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will attempt to outline our philosophy, how we went about materialising this philosophy and what we plan to do in the future.

Our basic aim, dear friends, has been to make Athens a user-friendlier, greener, more humane city; to highlight Athens' unique culture and history; to make Athens a friendlier city for its residents. But also to prepare Athens for a great challenge: the Olympic Games.

It was only natural that these preparations grew into a race of sorts. A long-term sprint one can say. We aim high.

Our policy for the first two years centered on four objectives.

First and foremost, the functional and aesthetic upgrade of Athens. To achieve this goal we undertook a series of projects that included planting greenery, renovating building façades, implementing a new cleaning regulation and upgrading a series of services which are directly related to our daily lives.

Secondly, the improvement of services rendered to our citizens.

Drawing up a social policy that would cover the needs of all our citizens.

And finally, highlighting Athens' image and promoting the city as a primary tourist destination across the globe. This will lead to the economic development of Athens, and is to the benefit of those professionals who work here.

Instead of opting to make interventions for the sake of impression, which is much easier, we insisted on planning programmes and projects with the aim of truly changing the standard of living in the Greek capital. And this was a very conscious decision despite being fully aware of the difficulties it would

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entail, especially in a city that is 3,000 years old, and where routine is hard to change.

The first step was to adopt a new way of looking at the city's finances. We worked methodically, we prepared and made the best of all the opportunities available in a competitive market.

In these two years, we've tried to ensure that the city's finances are at their healthiest ever. For the first time, the City of Athens has taken full advantage of the EU programmes it is entitled to.

We increased the City's investment by 505%. Our investment programme went from 18 million euros in 2002 to 91 million euros in 2004. City revenue increased at a fast pace. For the period 2003-2004, our revenue, loans aside, grew by 15% annually. At the same time we managed to cut spending.

We paid off the debts of past loans at an interest rate of 5.5%, and broke new ground in local government financing and investment by securing from the international banking market a new 15-year loan with a variable interest of 2.5%. **This strategic move secured 4 million euros for the City in the first half of its four-year term.**

We decided to stick to our decision to increase municipal taxes at the same pace with inflation rates ----- in efforts not to burden the taxpayer's pocket.

The City of Athens managed to secure 23 million euros in EU funds in the first two years. Compared to 2002 at only 1.2 million euros.

With these Community funds we financed infrastructure works and social welfare programmes aimed at decreasing unemployment rates in the less privileged districts.

We motivated those in debt to pay up. This may have had a political cost and might have brought about reactions because everyone was comfortable in a state of indifference and inactivity. But our decision was one that benefited the City and the majority of its residents, who are dutiful in paying their municipal taxes.

In the meantime, we demanded from all administrations what rightfully belongs to the City.



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Dear friends,

Our work would not have been complete had we not placed emphasis on issues that directly affect the improvement of the quality of life of Athens citizens.

The quality of roads and pavements and sufficient lighting. The need to care for people who have mobility problems and for the elderly.

And we did achieve a great deal in these first two years:

We renovated and remodelled roads and public spaces along **450** major streets, covering **750,000 square metres**.

We repaved 250,000m square metres of pedestrian walkways.

We improved the lighting in over 200 roads.

We upgraded city squares.

For the first time in the city's history, sidewalks now have non-skid tiles, 65km special grooved walkways for the visually impaired and over **1,000 wheelchair access ramps**, facilitating the movement of wheelchair users as well as of the visually or hearing impaired.

We upgraded many parts of the city, including central Varvakeios Square and the municipal market, which took on a new character in the historic centre of Athens; the Technopolis cultural and conference centres at the industrial complex at Gazi; the the Archaeological Museum garden. We redeveloped Athens' important landmarks, Lycabettus and Kolonos hills; renovated City Hall.

Our upgrade programme involves every Athens district.

We called on Athens residents to join the "Clean Up Athens" campaign for a cleaner city. And we made radical changes in the area of cleanliness, changing the overall image of the city.

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The fleet of garbage collection vehicles was expanded by 50% with the purchase of 70 state-of-the-art vehicles, bringing the total to 235 and securing waste disposal efficiency even during the most demanding summer months.

We implemented new littering regulations, imposing fines for offences ranging from littering to not cleaning up after pets

We planted 11,000 trees, shrubs and flowers citywide, in the parks and squares, along pedestrian walkways and historic hills, in the seven districts of the capital.

Our pre-election plan was to plant 10,000 trees over our four-year term, and we managed to exceed that figure in the middle of our administration. And that doesn't mean we will stop now.

Following years of conflict over which government body oversees the city's green spaces, we resolved the issue by taking over responsibility for the National Gardens and Lycabettus Hill. The City is now solely responsible for the planning and intervention in these two historic spaces.

Over 1,600 building facades have been restored and painted, contributing to the improvement of the city's overall image, further developing each neighbourhood and making Athens a colourful and welcoming capital.

This programme continues, further improving the public face of the city, with over 2,250 buildings ready to undergo renovation works.

I would like at this point to thank the sponsors who supported this venture and contributed towards the refurbishment of central squares, the Dourgouti refugee housing complex, the buildings on Kanellopoulou Square in Ambelokipi, Madrid Square in Ilissia, Varvakeios, Pangrati and Dexameni squares. Apartment buildings on all these squares were renovated with the economic support of six major sponsors, whom we will honor here tonight.

The City of Athens and the private sector successfully cooperated on many levels. And I can proudly say that we are committed to continuing this collaboration in the future.

The City launched one of its most ambitious initiatives - a 1.8 million euro programme for the collection, sterilisation and adoption of stray dogs. This programme, unprecedented in size and scope, managed to raise awareness

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and sensitise the public, and at the same time change international perceptions of our country.

The response to our call for volunteers proved overwhelming. More than 3,000 individuals of all ages expressed interest in the an unprecedented initiative entitled “Show Them the Athens You Love”, successfully promoting the city and paving the way for a new volunteerism ethic as well as encouraging the active involvement of citizens in City activities.

We organized cultural activities combining tradition with contemporary trends. Events like the Athens Carnival Season parties and concerts, European Day of Music, the Athens Jazz Fest and the International Dance Festival are all aimed at bringing culture to the people.

We renewed - on a healthier level - our collaboration with prominent musicians and our music ensembles, who are here tonight to give us a bright example of their work.

Our Christmas and New Year's celebrations, arts and culture programme for the duration of the Olympic Games, featuring 515 concerts, art installations and hundreds of works placed throughout the city, were warmly embraced.

Also worth mentioning is the city's boosted police force with over 500 officers manning the streets and ensuring the safe and smooth functioning of the city.

At the same time, we made sure that all shops in Athens abided by the required health and safety standards. We went a step further: we drew up a recommendation and suggested to the government legal adjustments to an obsolete legal framework so as to ensure transparency and reduce bureaucracy.

In tune with the need of an ever-growing multi-cultural population, we launched Athens International Radio 104.4 FM in collaboration with our own municipal station Athina 9.84, featuring programmes in over 12 languages. Foreigners and residents warmly welcomed the initiative.

The City of Athens has also paid special attention to ensuring its citizens are rendered the best of services. In the last two years, we set up seven new Citizen Service Centres (KEP), one in each district. In the meantime, we upgraded and expanded the Citizen's Hotline (195 number) providing new and improved services.

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We also upgraded our website into a dynamic portal - *cityofathens.gr* - offering information and very soon online services to Internet users.

At this point, I would like to speak a bit more about the development and initiatives of the City's social policy because I feel this should be the exclusive responsibility of local government.

Dear friends,

We've paid careful attention to drawing up a social policy that would cover the needs of all Athens citizens. This has been a priority for us and we have invested a great deal in social welfare and support.

Our Vocational Training (KEK) and adult education programmes offer the unemployed a chance to gain the necessary skills in order to successfully join the work force. At the same time, we sent out a loud message against social discrimination, which prevents vulnerable groups from having access to the work market.

Migrant issues are at the top of our agenda. Foreigners residing and working in our city make up 1/5 of the city's total population. We've worked hand-in-hand with NGOs to draw up a realistic and far-reaching immigration policy which supports foreigners and creates bonds between residents.

We launched special Greek language training programmes and opened two new child care centres in Neo Cosmos, which work with children from 16 countries.

Our welfare services offer shelter, food and medical aid to the less well-off. The City's shelters host over 160 people a day.

We also lend our support to community groups by encouraging their active participation in City events and initiatives.

The City of Athens is in close contact and cooperation with migrant and refugee associations as well as non-governmental organizations promoting equal rights and social cohesion. The City Service Centre informs on changes in the migration law, issues regarding residence permits and bureaucratic procedures as well as cultural events and activities.



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We built the first recreation centre for children with disabilities at the Acadimia Platonos. We also launched the Special Sports Department, a first of its kind, identifying the needs of people with disabilities and facilitating their integration into society by promoting active involvement in sport. The department, part of the City's Youth and Sport Organisation, also offers the use of municipal sports facilities to athletic associations for the disabled.

During the Paralympics, the City of Athens organised a number of events, encouraging the participation of people with disabilities by facilitating accessibility.

We also formulated a special action plan to fight drug abuse. We set up a network of bodies which exchange know-how and experience and work together to deal with contemporary social problems.

Finally, we made it a point to care for the elderly by upgrading our Friendship Clubs. In the last year, over 3,700 members visited museums, arts and cultural events free of charge.

We also improved our Help at Home programme, which currently caters to the needs of over 300 people.

Dear friends,

It would be a grave omission on my behalf had I not mentioned the city's finances. Especially now, knowing the challenge that lies ahead for our country's economy.

A challenge for Athens, which is undoubtedly the country's driving force of growth.

This growth is both about the quality of services rendered but also the environment in which these services grow. What worth would any business have if it were placed in a dirty street, with dirty sidewalks, no greenery in sight, in a neighbourhood of gray buildings that haven't been painted for over two decades? Now look at that same business when all these things start to change.



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That's why all our projects are aimed at securing the most functional and aesthetic upgrade together with the effective promotion of the city in order to boost the economic development of Athens.

This alone however is not enough.

Athens' economy is directly related to Greece's economy. With the help of the new government, it is time for us to move ahead with speed and efficiency, making the revolutionary reforms that have for years been put off or delayed.

Together we work towards economic development for the city and the country as a whole.

So that our work is integrated with the government's efforts, triggering a new period of rapid economic development for the city.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Today, we can proudly state that Athens lived up to the challenge of hosting the 2004 Olympics. This has been acknowledged not only within Greece but around the world.

The promotion of Athens and the positive impressions of the city generated internationally are important assets for the future.

However, the Olympic Games did not mark the end of an era. On the contrary, they represent the beginning of a new one. They set the tone as to how we should proceed from this point onwards.

We will continue to work just as we have done in the first two years. We will work methodically, in an organized and professional fashion and according to strict schedules.

This is the great challenge we all face. We must prove, as a country and a nation, that one need not put a knife to our throats to get the job done, but that – of our own accord - we are changing and overcoming bad habits and practices of the past.



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This is how we would like to be perceived, and, ladies and gentlemen, this is the attitude we have adopted at the City of Athens. This will continue to be the case in all fields.

Of course, we have many goals in mind! **The main tool of our efforts to boost development, and improve the quality of life and welfare of our citizens, is the City's Four-Year Investment Programme, approved unanimously by the City Council.**

Through this programme, the City of Athens will undertake works aimed at upgrading districts and neighbourhoods, works that will promote development of these areas.

Over the next two years, the City administration will focus on the following five priorities:

- **Firstly, the creation of a Greenery Network throughout the city. We intend to utilize unused spaces for this purpose and speed up the property expropriation scheme already in place.**

This plan has specific developmental aims: the upgrading of Akadimias Platonos park in Kolonos, the creation of a large park in a location at Lagoumitzi that we acquired in May and at Heldreich In Neos Kosmos, the establishment of a metropolitan park at Goudi, the redevelopment of Probonas Woods, the extension of Fix Square following the expropriation of the former AB cinema at Patissia, the creation of a park at the old Thermidas factory at Rizoupoli, and the new park at Kerameikos.

With the establishment of the Greenery Network, we aim to expand significantly on the amount of parkland in the city. We can no longer accept the fact that the municipality is not responsible for the management of the city's central squares and vacant sites.

Today, responsibility for the squares - including those of Monastiraki, Omonia and Kolonaki - and parkland, such as Ardittos Hill, Zappeion Gardens, Rizari park, Areos park, all located in the centre of the city, lies in the hands of all but the City of Athens.



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The public works and environment ministry oversees the squares, along with the culture ministry, the super-prefecture and various foundations, and all of them make decisions. This fragmentation of responsibility must change. It must change now.

As I have already mentioned, we have managed to change the status quo in two vital cases: the National Gardens and Lycabettus Hill. That is not enough.

We insist that the government entrust responsibility for the city's squares and green spaces – exclusively, and its entirety – to the City of Athens.

We are asking for something that is a matter of course. We are calling for legislative reform that allows for the handover of green spaces to the citizens of Athens, to the City of Athens.

- **Our second aim is to undertake comprehensive upgrading of residential areas, in accordance with urban planning studies.** The first example of this is the Kolokythous neighborhood, where the site of the former Voustasio factory will be redeveloped.

Another example is the Dourouti building project, where a modern art gallery and digital library will be established. Underdeveloped neighbourhoods will re-emerge as modern centres of culture and architectural innovation.

- **Our third aim, dear friends, is to support our social welfare infrastructure and encourage social cohesion.**

We have created a City Jobseekers Network with a total of 2 million euros in funding. We are introducing a series of initiatives aimed at boosting employment and encouraging enterprise.

We are continuing our efforts to upgrade existing Friendship Clubs and intend to create three new clubs.

We are expanding our playground network. We are upgrading all playgrounds, committed to ensuring that 50 playgrounds meet the strictest European safety standards. We also intend to establish more playgrounds for youngsters with disabilities, such as that located at Akadimias Platonos park.

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- **Our fourth aim is to improve the traffic management system.**

We are placing special emphasis on the setup of a new parking system. We also plan to create parking spots for residents of the city.

Two new privately-funded underground parking garages will be built. A ground-level parking garage is currently being built at the site of the former Minaidis-Fotaidis factory.

Meanwhile, 4,000 parking spaces for motorcycles are being set aside, in order to make the lives of both motorcyclists and pedestrians a little easier.

- **Our fourth and final aim, dear friends, is the consistent maintenance of the infrastructure we have created thus far.**

This is probably the greatest challenge we face. Thanks to our daily contact with citizens, I am well aware that residents would like Athens to remain beautiful and clean, as it was last summer. They prefer this to be the rule, rather than the exception.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The City of Athens is faced with an enormous task and must adopt a pioneering role in the national effort to create a new, modern model of administration.

Greek local government is at a crossroads. Decisions taken in the immediate future will determine whether we can adopt to modern, European models.

The New Democracy administration is conscience of these demands. Within the first few months of taking office, through the decisions it made, the government sent a clear message that it supported self-governance.

Change has taken place in key areas, facilitating the work of self-governing bodies. Part-time employment is being promoted. Overdue debts are being pursued.



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A vote has been taken on the framework of the new Theseus local government development programme. The review of the code for municipalities and community councils is proceeding.

These are important, positive decisions concerning local governance taken by the interior ministry.

However, we must not stop here. **We must initiate a substantial dialogue with the government, political parties, local government and our social partners on these and other issues, in a rapid, precise fashion.**

The basic issue concerning local governance is funding. A decision-making framework enabling economic independence for local government already exists.

Therefore, the constitutional dictate concerning the transfer of funds and responsibilities to local government must be strictly implemented.

Dear friends,
Another critical issue, one that relates to the environment, is urban waste management.

But before we make any decisions, we must admit to two facts: the first is that the policies followed over the past 15 years have failed miserably. Greece has come under fire from the European Union for the unacceptable methods and practices employed in this area.

The second is that local government has never truly wanted or tried to assume any responsibility for this issue.

This must end. We – that is, both local and state government - are obliged to formulate new policies. Modern, alternative solutions do exist, as long as we have the political will to move forward.

This coming spring, the City of Athens is taking a major step: it will implement a comprehensive recycling programme based on the sorting of waste at its source.



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Our aim is to provide citizens with various recycling alternatives, so that all of us, both residents and businesspeople, can adopt a new approach, one that we can put into practice. We are calling on the active participation of all citizens.

Recycling is not something that can be introduced through laws and mandates. It is a matter of each and every citizen assuming responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen,
The demands of both local and state government today call for radical reforms. In Greece, as in the rest of Europe, we must finally place our trust in local and regional forces.

That is why Greece has to adopt a new way of looking at local governance and the administrative structure of Greece, based on three strategies:

- **Firstly, a system of regional governance via the election of regional governors and councils. This is the model followed throughout Europe.** It is vital that we adopt this model, and create two levels of local governance
- **Secondly, the creation of self-governing metropolitan bodies in the country's key urban centres**

These agencies would be responsible for the creation of initiatives, strategic planning and policy coordination in basic areas such as: economic development, rezoning and urban planning, social policy, environment, waste management, transport, as well as civil protection and security.

These reforms would lead to the modernization and renewal of local governance.

Such radical change no doubt frightens some. However, this model already exists – and functions very successfully - in many European countries.

Personally, I believe that we could adopt a system of principles and rules similar to the French metropolitan governance structure.



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In Attica, for instance, the responsibilities I previously mentioned would be transferred to the relevant metropolitan body. The associated municipalities would not be affected in the least and would retain the responsibility for carrying out metropolitan policy.

Athens' competent authorities presently comprise: all ministries, a prefectural administration, a general secretariat, three self-administrative prefectural authorities, a common prefectural administration, 88 municipalities, 66 community councils, and a large number of public and private agencies such as the Athens Urban Transport Organisation, Attiko Metro, Athens-Piraeus Electric Railways, Intercity Bus Company, Athens Tram SA, the Organisation for the Planning and Protection of the Environment etc.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Gordian knot that surrounds Athens and its citizens cannot be untied. It must be cut completely.

Greater Athens is demanding that we proceed with the creation of the metropolitan model of governance that I am proposing.

- The third strategy involves **the support of municipalities, which must be viewed as business enterprises that carry out a developmental and social role.**

In order for municipalities to be able to undertake this mission, certain changes must take place. Changes that will allow for the economic autonomy and independence of local government.

These changes involve:

- **the utilization of alternative sources of funding to implement investment initiatives**
- **a system of local taxation, which is specific and allows for a reduction in state taxation**
- **the creation of an institutional framework that incorporates self-financed projects and programmes**
- **providing municipalities with the option of seeking bank financing**



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I am afraid that we have not kept up with the pace of change in Europe. Therefore, it is vital that bold, wide-ranging reform is introduced to Greece's administrative structure.

Great change that will not falter in the face of populist or demagogic reactions.

Deep-seated change where the main consideration is not the potential political cost but the great national, economic and social benefits that our society will enjoy as a result.

I have outlined the basic elements and also the main aims of our policies. I also conveyed my views on how Greek local government should be reformed.

We have completed the first half of a difficult yet wonderful journey. We have already achieved a great deal. We still have much to prove though.

The City of Athens, once considered the "sick man" of Greek administration, has proven that it is transforming itself into a modern, effective mechanism.

Today, I would like to express my thanks to all who have worked so hard to implement everything that I have mentioned.

I would like to thank the staff of the City of Athens, my associates, deputy mayors, city councillors, my office staff and all my colleagues. I thank our sponsors. But, above all, I would like to thank all Athenians.

I would also like to note the positive attitude of the municipal opposition. The entire city council met the great challenges we faced and worked together to the city's advantage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We all lived through a period that will forever mark the course Athens is following.

We saw the upgrading of neighbourhoods.

We saw the beautification of many areas of the city.

We saw the greenery multiply and buildings literally change face.

We saw the introduction of new institutions.



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We saw the streets and squares of Athens come alive, and fill with lively sounds and sights.

We saw Athens become the centre of the world and draw praise from millions of people.

We saw Athenians regaining their sense of pride in the city again, and feeling as if they are taking an active part in this great effort. And loving their city again!

This, to me, is the most valuable return on our investment and experience: we were able to love Athens again!

We regained a new self-confidence!

It belongs to us, but we also bear a great responsibility - to continue along the same path.

At the same pace! In the same spirit! With the same attentiveness!
To make the lives of all Athenians even better.

Thank you all! Thank you very much!



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