

# Combating Crime in Romania, between Prevention, Intervention, and Criminal Liability

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## **Abstract**

*Combating crime represents a fundamental objective of the rule of law, and the effectiveness of this intervention depends on the clarity of the legal framework and the functionality of the institutions involved. In Romania, the legal response to criminality is regulated by the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and a series of special laws that define both the typologies of offenses and the means of prevention and punishment. This article analyzes from a legal perspective the main legislative and institutional instruments that underpin the state's response to unlawful acts. It considers the clear distinction between crimes and misdemeanors, with an emphasis on the sanctioning system and the principle of legality. Furthermore, the responsibilities of the police in applying administrative measures, such as identity checks or escorting individuals to the station, are discussed in the context of constitutional requirements concerning the protection of fundamental rights. The role of specialized structures, such as the General Anticorruption Directorate - DGA, is examined in terms of administrative efficiency and the prevention of institutional corruption. The criminal trial process is also highlighted as a guarantor of legality and public order, along with the importance of individualizing punishments to prevent recidivism and promote social reintegration. The study adopts a doctrinal and legislative approach, integrating domestic norms and European standards, with the aim of highlighting the legal coherence and administrative efficiency of the Romanian state's intervention in the field of criminal justice.*

**Keywords:** *Criminal law; public order; police powers; procedural safeguards; institutional integrity.*

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## **Introduction**

Combating crime constitutes an essential dimension of the functioning of the rule of law and of ensuring public order in a democratic society. In Romania, the normative framework in the field of criminal law has been strengthened through the adoption of the Criminal Code (Cod penal, 2009) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cod de procedură penală, 2017), both reflecting domestic developments as well as the requirements imposed by European Union integration. These instruments rigorously regulate the types of unlawful acts, the sanctioning regime, and the procedural mechanisms that guarantee the fairness of the justice process.

The implementation of these norms is supported by administrative structures with specific responsibilities in the area of public order. The Romanian Police, regulated by Law no. 218/2002, holds extensive competences in preventing and combating antisocial acts through measures such as identity checks and escorting individuals to the police station, under strictly defined legal conditions (Poliția Română, n.d.; Legea nr. 192/2019, 2019). In parallel, the General Anticorruption Directorate plays an essential role in detecting and sanctioning acts of corruption within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in accordance with Law no. 78/2000 and institutional integrity standards (Poliția Română, 2022).

In this context, the criminal trial is not merely a formal framework for holding offenders accountable, but also a guarantor of legality and of the protection of fundamental rights, including through the application of the presumption of innocence and the right to defense (Cod de procedură penală, 2017). Beyond punishment, the legal framework also emphasizes the individualization of penalties, educational measures, and the prevention of recidivism as complementary means of ensuring social order. The present paper analyzes these dimensions from a doctrinal and normative perspective, with the aim of highlighting the coherence and effectiveness of the institutional response to criminal phenomena.

## **Typology of Offenses under the Criminal Code and Special Legislation**

The classification of offenses is a core element of criminal law, providing the analytical framework needed to distinguish unlawful acts according to the social values they protect. This systematic approach is essential for ensuring consistency in judicial practice, proportionality in sanctions, and clarity in legal interpretation. In Romania, the typology

of offenses is primarily codified in the Criminal Code, which organizes them based on the protected interests - ranging from the individual and property to public authority and safety - while special legislation addresses specific categories of offenses with unique social or institutional implications. By examining both the general classifications under the Criminal Code and the particular offenses governed by special laws, this section aims to outline the structure of Romania's sanctioning system, emphasize the role of corruption-related provisions, and explain the practical distinction between crimes and misdemeanors.

### *Typology of Offenses under the Criminal Code*

The typology of offenses represents a cornerstone of criminal legal analysis, offering a systematic method to differentiate antisocial acts based on the nature of the protected social values. In Romania, this framework is codified primarily in the *Criminal Code of July 17, 2009 (Law No. 286/2009)*, complemented by specific provisions in special legislation, such as *Law No. 192/2019*, which addresses public order and safety (Cod penal, 2009; Legea nr. 192/2019, 2019). The classification serves not only academic and doctrinal purposes but also plays a critical role in ensuring proportionality in the application of criminal sanctions, in line with the principles enshrined in the *Constitution of Romania (Constituția României, 2003)*.

The Romanian Criminal Code organizes offenses into categories corresponding to the social values they protect, a structure laid out in Titles I to VIII of the Special Part. These categories include offenses against the person, property, authority, public safety, and the administration of justice, among others. Each title groups offenses that share a common protected value and a similar level of social danger, thereby guiding both prosecutorial strategies and judicial reasoning. For example, Title I addresses offenses against the person, such as murder (Art. 188), bodily harm (Art. 194), and unlawful deprivation of liberty (Art. 205), which safeguard life and physical and psychological integrity. Title II focuses on offenses against property, including theft (Art. 228), fraud (Art. 244), and breach of trust (Art. 238), which uphold ownership and possession rights. Titles III and IV regulate offenses against state authority, such as assault against a public official (Art. 257), and against the proper functioning of justice, such as false testimony (Art. 273).

This codified structure is reinforced by procedural guarantees found in the *Criminal Procedure Code of July 1, 2010 (Law No. 135/2010)*, which ensures that the classification of offenses directly

impacts procedural rights, the burden of proof, and admissible evidence (Cod de procedură penală, 2017). In addition, special legislation, including *Law No. 192/2019*, refines the legal landscape by delineating certain acts as misdemeanors rather than crimes, thus introducing a dual-track sanctioning system.

The importance of this classification is underscored by statistical data from the *General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police - IGPR*, which reported over 670,000 criminal offenses in 2024, of which approximately 58 percent were offenses against property, followed by those against the person (Poliția Română, n.d.; Poliția Română, 2022). This quantitative distribution shapes criminal policy priorities, leading to a strategic allocation of resources toward the most prevalent categories.

In a comparative European context, the Romanian approach aligns with broader Union-level principles on legal certainty and proportionality, as reflected in instruments such as the *General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR* (Parlamentul European & Consiliul Uniunii Europene, 2016). While GDPR specifically addresses data protection offenses, its emphasis on clear definitions, proportional sanctions, and procedural safeguards mirrors the rationale behind the Criminal Code's classification system.

The integration of criminal typology into legal practice is therefore not a static exercise in codification, but a dynamic process that responds to societal changes, judicial interpretation, and international standards. By maintaining a clear, well-structured classification, Romania ensures that criminal justice remains both coherent and adaptable, balancing the need for public order with the protection of individual rights.

### ***Special Legislation: Corruption, Service-related Offenses, and the Distinction between Crime and Misdemeanor***

Corruption and service-related offenses are regulated under Title V of the Special Part of the Criminal Code (Articles 289–309) and occupy a central position in the criminal justice system, given their profound impact on the functioning of public administration and citizens' trust in state institutions. Among the most relevant offenses are bribery (Art. 289), offering a bribe (Art. 290), influence peddling (Art. 291), and abuse of office (Art. 297). The particularity of these offenses lies in the fact that, although they are committed by individuals vested with public authority, their effects go beyond the institutional sphere, undermining the rule of law as a whole.

These acts are often difficult to detect and prove, requiring special investigative methods and dedicated structures such as the General Anticorruption Directorate – DGA. According to the Information Guide of the General Anticorruption Directorate – DGA (Poliția Română, 2022), the main sources of corruption reports come from citizen complaints and internal notifications, with the anticorruption hotline 0800 806 806 also playing an important role. In 2023, the General Anticorruption Directorate – DGA recorded an increase in reports of corruption within the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – MAI, suggesting a higher level of civic awareness and improved functionality of institutional reporting channels.

The distinction between crime and misdemeanor is essential for understanding the Romanian sanctioning system and for applying the principle of proportionality in legal liability. A crime represents the most serious form of legal norm violation, being regulated by the Criminal Code and attracting criminal sanctions such as imprisonment, criminal fines, or educational measures. A misdemeanor, by contrast, is an act of lower social danger, sanctioned administratively, usually through a fine, a warning, or complementary measures. Law no. 61/1991, as amended by Law no. 192/2019, provides a clear example of this differentiation. This legal act regulates behaviors that disturb public order and peace – such as causing a public disturbance or refusing to identify oneself – classifying them as misdemeanors, except in cases where their severity gives them a criminal nature.

Notably, Article 4<sup>1</sup> of Law no. 192/2019 introduces the concept of contraventional recidivism, allowing for harsher penalties when antisocial behavior is repeated. This distinction also has important implications for procedural rights: in the case of crimes, the Criminal Procedure Code applies, whereas for misdemeanors, the regime is governed by Government Ordinance no. 2/2001. In practice, law enforcement authorities must have clear and up-to-date criteria for correctly distinguishing the type of offense, in order to avoid abuse or inconsistent application of the law.

According to the report of the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police – IGPR (2024), over 1.2 million misdemeanor sanctions were applied last year, a significant portion of which targeted repetitive behavior. This highlights the need to improve administrative intervention and strengthen cooperation between the police and the judiciary to prevent the escalation of antisocial conduct.

## **Police Measures in the Prevention and Combating of Crime**

The operational activity of the Romanian Police is guided by a set of measures designed to prevent, combat, and investigate criminal acts while safeguarding the fundamental rights of individuals. These measures are embedded in a complex legal framework, primarily regulated by *Law no. 218/2002 on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Police*, complemented by special laws, internal procedures, and European data protection norms. Their effectiveness depends not only on procedural accuracy and institutional discipline but also on the ability to ensure proportionality between public safety objectives and the protection of individual freedoms, as required by the *Constitution of Romania* and relevant international instruments (Constituția României, 2003).

### *Operational Framework and Use of Police Measures*

In the sphere of crime prevention and control, police measures serve as a central instrument for operational intervention and the safeguarding of public order. The activities carried out by the structures of the Romanian Police - IGPR are grounded in *Law no. 218/2002 on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Police*, complemented by secondary regulations such as operational briefings and internal procedures. The application of these measures requires a careful balance between operational efficiency and the protection of fundamental individual rights, as established in the *Constitution of Romania* and relevant international conventions (Constituția României, 2003).

Among the most frequently applied measures are identity verification and escorting individuals to the police station, both serving preventive and coercive purposes. Article 31 of *Law no. 218/2002* authorizes police officers to verify and establish the identity of any person in order to prevent, detect, or sanction unlawful acts. *Law no. 192/2019* further refined the regulatory framework, stipulating the officer's duty to identify themselves and to clearly justify any intervention (Legea nr. 192/2019, 2019).

Escorting an individual to the police station constitutes a more intrusive measure, permitted only under strictly defined circumstances - when the person refuses to provide identification, cannot prove their identity, or has committed an act requiring additional verification. The *Police Measures Guide* (Poliția Română, n.d.) underscores the importance of proper documentation, informing the individual concerned, and limiting the measure's duration to a maximum of eight

hours. According to the 2024 report of the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police - IGPR, such escorting has proven effective in identifying suspects and deterring street-level offenses. Nevertheless, the measure's intrusiveness requires continuous personnel training and robust internal oversight to prevent abuses and ensure proportionality in relation to its intended purpose.

### *Identification Procedures and Safeguards for Personal Data*

The identification of individuals constitutes a fundamental process in maintaining public order, ensuring the security of citizens, and enabling the effective investigation of criminal acts. Within the framework established by the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police - IGPR, identification serves both a preventive function, by discouraging unlawful behavior, and an investigative one, by facilitating the prompt detection and sanctioning of offenses. Operational procedures provide that identification may be carried out through several methods, including the presentation of an official identity document, recognition by witnesses, or the interrogation of official databases. Document-based verification is most commonly performed by consulting the National Register of Persons or the police's operational databases, ensuring a high degree of accuracy and traceability.

In circumstances where individuals are unable to present official documents, identification may rely on supplementary sources such as eyewitness statements. However, such statements are considered inherently subjective and therefore must be corroborated with additional evidence to reduce the risk of mistaken identity. This procedural safeguard reflects the broader principle of proportionality, aiming to balance operational effectiveness with the protection of individual rights.

Law No. 218 of April 23, 2002 (republished) on the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Police (LEGEA nr. 218 din 23 aprilie 2002 [republicată] privind organizarea și funcționarea Poliției Române) expressly requires that all identification procedures be conducted with respect for fundamental rights, including the right to dignity and privacy. Every verification must be documented and justified, explicitly stating the purpose of the intervention. The operational framework also addresses the management of personal data obtained during identification, given that such activities inevitably involve the collection and processing of sensitive information.

Both national legal provisions and the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) impose clear restrictions

on the processing, storage, and dissemination of personal information, requiring that such data be used solely for specific, legitimate purposes and be protected against unauthorized access or excessive retention (Simionovici et al., 2020). These legal requirements underscore the obligation of police structures to implement robust technical and organizational safeguards, ensuring compliance with data protection principles while maintaining operational capability.

According to statistical data published by the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police - IGPR for the year 2024, more than 850,000 individuals were identified in operational contexts, with approximately 4% of them being escorted to the police station for further clarification. These figures illustrate both the scale of identification activities and the importance of applying them with strict adherence to legal and procedural standards. Maintaining a balance between the operational efficiency of police actions and the procedural safeguards guaranteed by the rule of law remains an essential priority in the functioning of public order structures.

### **The Role of Specialized Structures - General Anticorruption Directorate (DGA)**

Combating institutional corruption is a strategic priority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs - MAI, and in this context, the General Anticorruption Directorate - DGA plays a fundamental role in strengthening the integrity of personnel within subordinate structures. The establishment of the DGA aimed to create a functional and independent mechanism for the prevention, reporting, and sanctioning of corruption-related offenses, in compliance with the principles of the rule of law. The activity of this structure is based on clear legislation and a coherent strategy of institutional transparency and civic engagement, in line with the international commitments assumed by Romania in the fight against corruption (Legea nr. 161/2003; Poliția Română, n.d.).

The General Anticorruption Directorate - DGA, a specialized structure within the Ministry of Internal Affairs - MAI, has the legal authority to prevent, detect, and investigate corruption offenses committed by MAI personnel, based on Emergency Ordinance no. 120/2005, approved with amendments by Law no. 383/2005. The DGA's responsibilities cover both preventive actions, through awareness campaigns and continuous professional training, and repressive activity, conducted via specialized territorial units operating in cooperation with the prosecutor's offices (Poliția Română, n.d.).

In its 2024 Activity Report, the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police - IGPR reported a significant number of notifications received from both citizens and MAI employees, suggesting increased trust in internal control mechanisms (Inspectoratul General al Poliției Române - IGPR, 2024). According to the same data, the DGA handled 1,074 criminal cases involving corruption offenses, of which over 500 were initiated ex officio. Preventive activities targeted approximately 45,000 MAI employees who participated in training sessions.

The role of training is essential not only in reducing the incidence of corruption but also in fostering an organizational culture based on integrity, accountability, and respect for the law (Poliția Română, n.d.). Furthermore, interinstitutional cooperation with the National Anticorruption Directorate - DNA, the Superior Council of Magistracy, and the Public Prosecutor's Office is formalized and strengthened through cooperation protocols, reflecting the importance of an integrated approach to combating institutional corruption.

A relevant aspect of the activity of the General Anticorruption Directorate - DGA is the promotion of a direct relationship with citizens by offering effective tools for reporting and support. The toll-free hotline 0800 806 806 is available 24/7 and allows any individual to report, either anonymously or by name, suspicious behavior by MAI personnel. According to 2024 data, over 4,200 calls were received and analyzed, of which approximately 1,800 resulted in administrative measures or criminal referrals (Inspectoratul General al Poliției Române - IGPR, 2024).

In parallel, the DGA publishes annual information guides for both citizens and civil servants, clearly explaining the reporting procedures, the rights of those involved, and the steps to be followed after filing a complaint (Poliția Română, n.d.). Institutional transparency is further reinforced through annual reports and legal education campaigns conducted in schools, universities, and within the MAI. These initiatives aim to develop an anti-corruption culture at both societal and institutional levels, in line with international recommendations issued by GRECO and the European Commission.

Additionally, the DGA maintains an up-to-date website that provides access to statistics, examples of good practices, press releases, and preventive materials, thereby strengthening its connection with civil society. These measures reflect a transition from a reactive, sanction-focused approach to a proactive one, based on education, prevention, and active public participation in the fight against corruption (Poliția Română, 2022).

## **The Criminal Trial as an Instrument for Ensuring Order and Legality**

The criminal trial represents a fundamental pillar of the rule of law, serving to ensure compliance with the law, protect fundamental rights (Corsei, Țoncu, Talpa, 2023), and sanction criminal acts within a fair and predictable framework. Romania's Code of Criminal Procedure codifies the core principles of this process, providing strong judicial safeguards for all parties involved (Corsei, Ștefănoaia, 2022). The correct application of these norms contributes not only to establishing the truth but also to strengthening citizens' trust in judicial institutions and in justice as an impartial public service.

At the core of the criminal trial lie the fundamental principles set out in Articles 2-12 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which provide a coherent framework for the conduct of criminal investigations and trial proceedings. The principle of legality in criminal procedure means that no person may be prosecuted or tried except under the law and in the conditions established by it (Codul de procedură penală, 2017). The pursuit of truth is achieved through the administration of all relevant evidence in the case, with full respect for the principle of adversarial proceedings and the right to defense.

Another essential principle is respect for human dignity, guaranteed by Article 1 of the Constitution of Romania, which requires that any procedural act be carried out with respect for the physical and psychological integrity of the person. The presumption of innocence - enshrined in Article 4 of the Code of Criminal Procedure - obliges authorities to treat any person as innocent until a final conviction has been pronounced. This principle is reinforced by the prohibition on publicly declaring someone guilty before the conclusion of the trial, reflecting a fair and responsible approach by judicial authorities.

These principles are not merely theoretical statements but binding norms that guide every procedural stage and ensure the compatibility of criminal proceedings with international human rights standards, including those set out in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Terec-Vlad, 2022).

The criminal trial is structured around distinct judicial functions, each with a clearly defined role: criminal investigation, adjudication, and the enforcement of procedural legality. The criminal investigation, conducted by law enforcement bodies under the supervision of the prosecutor, is responsible for gathering evidence regarding the existence of the act, identifying the perpetrator, and establishing criminal liability (Codul de procedură penală, 2017). In this phase, the

legality of investigative acts is essential, as any irregularity may result in the exclusion of evidence or the nullification of the act.

The adjudication is carried out by the courts, based on the principles of adversarial proceedings, orality, and publicity, and it aims to resolve the case through the delivery of a final ruling. Throughout this process, respect for the right to defense is a sine qua non condition. According to Article 10 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the defendant has the right to be assisted by a lawyer at all stages of the criminal proceedings, and the absence of such assistance may result in the absolute nullity of the procedural acts.

The case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has established this right as a defining element of a fair trial, repeatedly sanctioning states that failed to ensure the possibility of a real and effective defense. The legality of procedural acts is guaranteed through mechanisms of judicial oversight and specific remedies: complaints against prosecutorial measures, exclusion of illegally obtained evidence, appeal, or cassation. Thus, the judicial functions are interdependent and aim to deliver justice in a fair, proportionate manner, in accordance with constitutional and conventional values.

### **Prevention of Recidivism and the Role of Criminal Sanctions**

The prevention of recidivism is a key component of criminal policy, reflecting the legal system's concern with the social reintegration of offenders and the reduction of repeat offenses. The role of criminal sanctions goes beyond punishing unlawful acts; it also aims to reeducate offenders and discourage repeated criminal behavior. In this regard, criminal law establishes legal institutions that allow sanctions to be tailored to the individual circumstances of each person, including minors or legal entities, in accordance with constitutional principles and European standards on proportionality and the individualization of penalties.

Individualization of penalties is regulated by Articles 74-106 of the Criminal Code and requires careful assessment of the specific circumstances of the offense and the offender, to ensure the application of a proportionate sanction. The court must consider the seriousness of the offense, the social danger, the criminal record, the offender's conduct, and any mitigating or aggravating circumstances (Cod penal, 2009). In the case of minors, the applicable sanctions are not classic punishments but educational measures, regulated by Articles 114-125 of the Criminal Code, which aim at rehabilitation and the prevention of juvenile delinquency. For legal entities, the sanctioning regime includes fines, dissolution or suspension of activity,

and prohibitions - sanctions that reflect the collective and organized nature of such entities. The individualization of penalties is a fundamental principle of criminal law, also upheld by the case law of the Constitutional Court, which has reaffirmed the state's obligation to avoid the automatic application of penalties without a concrete analysis. This approach not only respects human dignity but also actively contributes to the prevention of recidivism by tailoring criminal sanctions to each convict's reintegration needs.

A significant role in preventing recidivism is played by safety measures and educational measures - legal institutions that complement traditional criminal sanctions. These measures, provided under Articles 107-112 of the Criminal Code, can be individually applied to persons deemed dangerous to public order but who require a socio-therapeutic rather than a punitive approach. Safety measures include medical confinement, bans on being present in certain places, or prohibitions on practicing specific professions, while educational measures mainly target minors and may involve training programs, specialized supervision, and social assistance.

These measures do not primarily aim to punish, but to protect society and reduce repeat offending by supporting the individual's reintegration into a legally and socially normative environment (Cod penal, 2009). Specialized studies and data provided by judicial institutions show that applying such measures can have a significant impact on post-conviction behavior, especially in the case of minors and individuals with mental health disorders. Reintegration is, in fact, a major objective of modern criminal policy, which promotes restorative justice and aims to reduce social marginalization. The effectiveness of these measures largely depends on the quality of monitoring, the involvement of probation services, and cooperation with educational and medical institutions.

Another important direction in preventing repeat offending is the regulation of progressive misdemeanor sanctions. Article 4<sup>^1</sup> of Law no. 192/2019, which amends Law no. 61/1991, introduces the concept of "contraventional recidivism" and allows for the imposition of increased sanctions when antisocial acts are repeated within a certain time frame. This approach plays a significant role in prevention policy, targeting primarily acts with disruptive potential for public order - such as public alcohol consumption, disturbing the peace, or refusal to provide identification.

Through gradual sanctioning, the law aims to send a clear message of intolerance toward repeat behavior, without resorting immediately to criminal prosecution. At the same time, the introduction

of this mechanism raises concerns regarding proportionality and requires careful application to avoid turning misdemeanor sanctions into an abusive substitute for criminal penalties (Legea nr. 192/2019).

The role of the police is essential in enforcing these provisions, and operational guidelines require thorough documentation of prior misdemeanors and clear communication with the individual concerned. Thus, contraventional recidivism becomes an effective tool in preventing the escalation of antisocial behavior by discouraging repetition and fostering personal accountability.

## **Conclusions**

The legal and institutional dimension of combating crime in Romania reflects a system continuously adapting to the requirements of the rule of law and to the standards imposed by the European framework. The Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure are the essential pillars in shaping the normative response to various forms of violations of the legal order, providing clear definitions, solid principles, and transparent procedural mechanisms. In parallel, special legislation strengthens this framework by explicitly sanctioning acts with a high degree of social danger, such as corruption offenses or repeated misdemeanors, which are relevant in the analysis of criminal behavior.

The concrete application of legal norms is supported by specialized structures within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which perform essential functions in the prevention, identification, and sanctioning of unlawful acts. The activity of the General Anticorruption Directorate - DGA and the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police - IGPR demonstrates the importance of a well-regulated administrative apparatus, with clear intervention tools and effective control mechanisms. Respect for fundamental rights, including during identity checks, escorting to the police station, or identification through databases, must remain a constant practice - not merely a formal legal requirement.

The criminal trial also plays a central role in ensuring fairness and legality, and the judicial functions - criminal investigation, adjudication, and the exercise of the right to defense - contribute to strengthening public trust in the justice system. Last but not least, the individualization of sanctions and reeducation measures are essential for reducing the risk of recidivism and for the long-term protection of society.

By aligning the legislative dimension, rigorous procedural application, and institutional responsibility, the Romanian criminal

justice system can coherently respond to contemporary challenges related to the prevention and combating of crime.

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