

Ljupcho J. Nedelkov (Macedonia)

THE ISSUE OF THE IDENTITY OF THE MACEDONIAN PEOPLE

- The symbolic code for a personal and collective identity -

Abstract: A fact is that, the syntagmas personal (individual) and collective (group) identity: national, religious, gender, political, cultural, social, professional, are more and more present both in the scientific discourse as well as in the political arena and the everyday life. The studying of ethnic identities, especially when dealing with the Balkans, in the last two decades has become an important segment of ethnological and anthropological studies of scientists from this field as well as other disciplines. However, usually, in spite of the clear framework for defining them, their basic meaning is modified more and more in order to ascribe a bigger meaning to one individual or collective identity than another. To achieve this purpose people use tools not usually used to define the components of identity: oldest people, Aryan blood, pure community, identification with solar and astrologic symbols and ascribing ethnic characteristics to such symbols, etc. In that context, in the following text we will try to provide the basic framework in defining the components when forming personal and collective identities (ethnic, national) through the example of the Macedonian people on one hand, and the Greek propaganda aimed at preventing the Macedonian identification on the world arena, on the other hand.

Key words: identity, personal, collective, ethnic, national, professional, identification symbols, Macedonian nation, Greek nation, democracy, choice, forming one's own identity.

Should the issue of the identity of a people refer to the rhetorical question: *Who came first, the chicken or the egg?* According to the Greek intellectual and scientific potential, the answer is YES. If you want to have your own identity, then you must prove the unprovable. However, what should the term identity entail?

The answer to the discernment of one's personal (individual) identity, which entails the attainment of one's own cultural code, built on the basis of one's own personal view of the world and one's own attitude towards others – different than one's self, lies in the response to the question: *"Who am I?"*, *"Where do I come from?"*, *"Where do I belong?"*, *"Where am I going?"* etc., and the response to these questions will depend on the context of the question, your relation to the person asking the question, their level of knowledge, the motive for asking the question, your capability to read the situation etc. Another valid answer suggests that there is no "true I", because my identity continuously forms and reforms throughout the experience of life and relating to the world (Bowie, 2009:63; Erikson, 1968:22; Majstorović, 1979: 209-210). According to some authors, in a sociological sense, the terms personal – individual identity and the process of identification mean association of an individual with a specific social group, and acceptance of

the values, norms and behavioral models characteristic for that group (Sociološki leksikon, 1980:220). Therefore, whoever we are, we do not exist as isolated individuals, but rather we belong to some hierarchy of social groups. At the same time we can belong to a household, family, village or city, parish or an electoral unit. We belong to ethnic or cultural groups or, perhaps, we strongly affiliate with some religious or professional lifestyle community.

We are unaware of our own identity until we come face to face with a group that is different. Therefore, personal – individual identity means a built attitude of an individual towards other individuals that can be in opposition: *I - you; mine - yours*. Example: *I am a Macedonian and I identify myself with all Macedonians that speak the same language, have developed a cult to a common ancestor and have created their own myth, history, culture, customs, etc. You are Greek because you identify yourself with the Greek people that developed its ethnical code for collective identification and!* This level of identification can be presented through opposition: *we: they, ours: yours* etc. This creates a group (collective) identity that can have: social, professional, ethical, cultural, criminal or some other kind of “identification code”. The link entails various levels of identification: from personal and micro-group to ethical, national, all the way to regional and civilizational levels of identification. Hence, *personal identification* with some *ethnic entity* is the core of the creation of the *ethnic* and *national* identity expressed through the desires of the individual.

Undoubtedly *ethnic groups*, *ethnic communities* and *ethnic identities* are related to the history of humanity. We find them in all parts of the world and in almost all historical eras since the development of human communities. Ever since we know about the history of humanity, archeological findings, remnants from material culture and written sources suggest that we find cultural and ethnic diversities almost everywhere.

This cultural pluralism exists both today and in the past. It is difficult to find a community with homogeneous components (with a single natural DNA or, in other words, of pure blood and breed). We must also take into consideration the fact that the original *proto-ethnicities*, *ethnic groups* and *identities* come before the *nations* and *national identities*.

Every debate about *ethnical and national identities* is accompanied with serious terminological difficulties. Therefore, when we start researching these two phenomena, first we should become familiar with these two similar, but still different terms and entities: first, the term – *ethnic entity* that stands together with *ethnic community* and *ethnic identity* and, second the term *national entity*, which follows the terms *nation*, *national community*, *nationalism* and *national identity*. We have to discern the difference between those two entities and between those two communities, collectivity and identities (ethnic and national).

Ethnic identity contains the *ethnic code* of an ethnic group as a type of cultural collectivity that emphasizes the roles of myths and historic memories, and features one or more cultural differences: language, religion, customs, folklore etc. A. Smith (Smith, 1998:40) highlights the historical, symbolic and cultural attributes of an ethnic identity. This author differentiates six main attributes of an ethnic community: 1) collective common name; 2) a common ancestor myth; 3) common historic memories; 4) differentiating elements of a common culture; 5) association to a specific “motherland”; 6) developed

solidarity with the common population.

The common ancestor myths (although they are not facts) are the basis of the developed feelings for the collective ethnic identification. Also, the “common historical memories” can be a type of myth. These are the so called *subjective elements* of ethnic identification. The ethnic attributes of objective nature represent (variable) elements of the common culture that differentiate one ethnic group from another: language, faith, customs etc. This suggests that the components of an ethnic group are not forever and do not have primeval character. They are variable. Accentuating and strengthening these attributes leads to strengthening the feeling of affiliation to a particular ethnic community and vice versa, their weakening and disappearance leads to weakening and losing the feeling of ethnical identity, and ultimately to the disintegration of the ethnic community (Smit 1998: 41-44). This means that the ethnic identity is not an invariable set of “cultural symbols” (beliefs, values, language, norms, symbols, customs, rituals etc.) which, as such, would be transferred from generation to generation within the framework of an ethnic community.

On the other hand, *national identity* contains the following components: 1) historic territory – motherland: nations are territorial bound entities, and hence the need for a common motherland; 2) common myths and historic memories; 3) common culture: members of a nation have a common culture, common myths and historic memories; 4) common legal rights and duties within a legitimate legal system; 5) common economy. Therefore, this author defines nation as an appointed community of people with a common historic territory, culture, economy and a common legal system (Smit, 1998: 30, 32).

The territorial, economic, legal and political dimensions of the national identity represent *external functions* of the national identity, while the ethnic and cultural dimensions constitute the *internal function* of the national identity. In other words, the territory receives its name and clearly defined borders where its distinctive economic, legal and political system applies. Such a territory is marked with symbols (flag, shield, anthem), as external identification markers, which become national symbols: *The Republic of Macedonia has its territory with internationally determined borders, where the external and internal functional elements apply.*

On the other hand, the cultural content of an ethnic identity can be surmised in two levels: 1) manifest signals or signs – dialectic characteristics that individuals find and highlight in order to express their identity: folk costumes, language, residence, lifestyle; 2) basic value orientations, such as criteria for morality and nobility used to pass judgment about individual acts. The fact that someone belongs to an ethnic community suggests that he/she should be a specific type of person possessing that particular fundamental identity, which, in turn implies that he/she has the right to be judged or to judge other people based of the criteria associated with that identity. In other words, the ethnic categories represent a nucleus which can hold contents of different shapes and sizes in different sociological and cultural systems (F.Bart 1997: 221)

Therefore, the previously mentioned components of national identity are not *sui generis*, but rather entities created in relation to some other entities, in a specific historic context. *But is this really so in practice? Why, specific communities and nations cannot, of their own choosing, determine the symbols of their personal and collective identification? Is the word democracy a Greek privilege and what does this word really mean?*

Has the process of formation of other collective identities ended with the formation of the Greek nation?

We will try to shed some light on some of these questions using the example regarding the issue of the flag and the name of the Macedonians as elements for external identification of the Macedonian people:

Considering the situation in Yugoslavia, the first multiparty Macedonian parliament adopted the Declaration of Independence on the 25th of January 1991, followed by the decision to launch a referendum on the 8th of September 1991. The Macedonian parliament decided to ask the following question on the referendum:

Are you for an independent Macedonia with the right to join a future alliance of sovereign states of Yugoslavia?

At the vote, according to official information, 1,132,981 citizens with the right to vote voted out of a total of 1,495,626 or 71.85 percent. Out of the total number that voted on the referendum, 1,079,308 citizens voted “YES”, or 95.09 percent (or 72.16 percent of the total number of citizens with the right to vote). The results themselves describe the success of the Referendum. The commission concluded that the people with the right to vote in the Republic of Macedonia massively voted “for” an independent and sovereign Macedonia.

On the 8th of September, on the square Josip Broz Tito, today known as square Macedonia, the President of the Referendum Commission announced the initial results. Those results suggested that Macedonia voted to become an independent and sovereign country. Formally the will of the people for an independent country was confirmed with the Declaration to accept the referendum results on the 18th of September 1991 in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.¹

The new situation required the introduction of new symbolic codes for ethnic and national identification: flag, name, anthem, shield etc.

In that regard, Macedonia, as its flag, chose the sixteen pointed star of Kutlesh also known as the Sun of Vergina, and chose “Republic of Macedonia” as its name.

The sixteen pointed sun or the star of Vergina was unknown to the public and did not have any political context until Manolis Andronikos discovered it in 1977 in an old ancient Macedonian tomb in Vergina, a small village community 40 km northwest from Thessaloniki. The tomb also had a golden coffin decorated with the sixteen pointed star or sun. Andronikos suggested that the coffin contain the remnants of Philip the second, the father of Alexander the Great, and therefore Andronikos thought that the sun or star with sixteen points is a symbol of the Macedonian royal family. Since, according to Greek history, the Macedonians were ancient Greeks, the sun of Vergina should be an identification symbol of the Greek people (Andronikos, 1978:33-41).

Suddenly, the Sun of Vergina as a symbol found its way on t-shirts, brooches, key-chains, medals, plaques and a whole host of other places. The Greek government started using this symbol in an official context; started to print postage stamps with the sun of Vergina; printed the head of Alexander the Great on one side of the 100 dramma coin and the sun of Vergina on the other. The sun of Vergina was placed on Greek airports, banks and other public buildings. This symbol found its way even on the pay toll receipts on the major roads in Greece (Shea, 2008: 190-191). The Greek archeologists stood in de-

¹ <http://mk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Референдум>

fense of this symbol. According to them, it is a PanHellenic symbol symbolizing the four elements of nature: fire, water, earth, air, enriched by the 12 gods from Olympus: Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, Poseidon, Aries, Hephaestus, Artemis, Demeter, Hestia, Aphrodite, Athena and Hera. This symbol was found on many objects: vases, shields, coins, statuettes, etc., on places that belonged to the Ancient Macedonians. The symbol was also found in places outside of the ancient territory of the Macedonians: ceramic objects from Mykonos, Boeotia, Crete, etc., and it is related to Heraclius who was an idol for Alexander the Great. More detailed information can be found on the webpage: (The Macedonian star is Greek simbol: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13Jul2009) 13 Jul 2009 - 5 min). In that context, the Greek parliament, in February 1993 proclaimed and adopted the sun of Vergija as a national symbol, thinking that it has sufficient arguments to prove that Macedonians are Greek, and therefore no other country may steal or arrogate Greek history. Of course, Greek historiography searches for the symbol only on Greek territory and during time frames connected to their mythic heroes. However, it suffices to look at the webpage (<https://www.google.com/search?q=the+sumerian+civilization>), in order to see that the symbol of the eight and sixteen pointed star also appears in the Sumerian civilization as a sign of the Goddess Inanna. This begs the question: Do Greeks, through Alexander, want to steal the cultural heritage of the Sumerians? History shows that a symbol with a modified iconography can be used by different peoples and institutions. Let us remind ourselves of the “double headed eagle”: this symbol is used by the Orthodox Church, we find it on the shields of Germany, USA, Albania, Serbia and a whole host of other places. If this so, then why cannot the Macedonians use the sun of Kutlesh as the symbol of their collective identity?

On the other hand, the Macedonians have their own story. During the multi-millennial history of Macedonia, the sun appeared as a dominant symbol. Mainly the sun can be seen carved or painted in stone steles, sacral buildings and ritual objects, clothes, shields and coins. The oldest solar symbols on the territory of Macedonia date from the time of the Neolithic period, the so called “barbarian idyll”. The wonderful pottery from Neolithic times, full of symbolism related to weather seasons, clearly testifies to an emphasized cult towards the sun and the cosmos. Something else that corroborates the fact that the cult to the sun is truly accentuated, are the examples with “Cocev Kamen” and the observatory “. These locations were used for cult rituals, as well as for following the stars which facilitated the creation of a precise calendar that helped determine the time of harvesting or other important dates, which in turn suggests the existence of a highly developed civilization among the ancient Macedonians. The seal from Govrlevo, which shows the twelve pointed sun, not only confirms the sun as a symbol of the people from Macedonia, but also suggests the possibility of an organized state that existed much earlier than the legends about the ruling house of the Macedonians, related to the mythic semi-god Heraclius and his descendent Temen.² The twelve pointed and the eight pointed sun were mainly used by the Macedonian kings of the Antigonid dynasty. We see it on the shields of the Macedonian king Demetrius, a member of the eponymous dynasty. The coins issued by Antigon Dason also feature the eight pointed and the twelve pointed suns.

Following the continuity of the sun symbol with eight, twelve and sixteen points, it appears in various periods of Macedonian history. Of special interest is the terracotta icon from Vinica which, coincidentally or not, illustrates a story from the Old Testament

2 <http://www.mn.mk/aktuelno/3379>

featuring the stopping of the sun above the Palestinian city of Gavaon, described in the book of Joshua. This illustration shows that while Joshua, with God's help stops the sun until the final victory of his soldiers, his companion Caleb dressed in a chain-mail which features the letter M holds a symbol with the sun.³ In the middle ages the symbol of the sun can be seen on the cloak of Tsar Samoil, discovered in his tomb. Also the sun motif is featured on numerous frescoes and icons in churches from various periods. However, the sun can be found even in people's houses, placed on the walls and ceilings as protectors of the home.

The Italian – Macedonian research team of the International Rock Art Federation (IFRAO) recently discovered an engraving of the sun about 3,000 years old (from the end of the bronze and the beginning of the iron age) near Kratovo. The sun has been engraved using primitive tools, has eight rays and is set within a square frame. Currently it is stored in the premises of the Italian Embassy in Skopje.⁴

In spite of all of that, the Greek government considers any attempt of the Republic of Macedonia to use this symbol as an irredentist attempt to arrogate the Greek history and territory. Therefore the Greek government introduced a trade embargo toward Macedonia. The Macedonian government finally gave up the use of this symbol with the Interim Agreement with Greece in 1995. In exchange Greece gave up the economic blockade. Macedonia agreed to introduce a new flag, and abandoned the stylized sun with sixteen points on a red background. However, immediately thereafter Greek comments appeared on the internet:

*What kind of a nation agrees so easily to erase its national symbol from its flag, and to change that flag with a flag that looks a lot like the Japanese flag before the Second World War; this nation must not have its own national symbol?*⁵

After the abandonment of the flag, the name Macedonia became a major obstacle to the collective identification. Now the Macedonians should not even call themselves Macedonians. The democratic right to select one's own name is only an abstract notion. The Greeks think that the name Macedonia is Greek and that it refers to the territory that, in the past, was inhabited by ancient Macedonians which are basically Greek. According to them, the Macedonian nation is formed in 1944 by the leader of the SFRY Josip Broz Tito who decided to form the new Yugoslavian federation with six republics. According to the Greek historiography Tito gave to the southern province, known at the time as "Vardar Province", the name People's Republic of Macedonia. This area was mostly inhabited with Slavic population made up of ethnic Bulgarians and Serbs, also known as "Tito's nation" - Macedonia. The language of this nation belonged to the western Bulgarian dialects and was called Macedonian and became one of the official languages of Yugoslavia.⁶ Hence Greece thinks that it has the exclusive right to use the name Macedonia for its province and its people.

3 <http://www.mn.mk/aktuelno/3379>

4 <http://www.ndm.org.mk/ndm/index.php?>

5 <http://www.cc.ece.ntua.gr/~conster>

6 <http://www.intersticeconsulting.com/documents/FYROM.pdf>

This begs the following logical sequence of questions: *If the name Macedonia is Greek then why don't the Greeks use the name Macedonia for identification, but rather they use Greece and Greece which names are not of Greek origin? What does the following tourist invitation suggest: Come to Helada and Greece to visit Macedonia? Where did they wait until the late 1980s to apply the name Macedonia all of northern Greece? Ultimately, what is behind the attempt to block the Republic of Macedonia from joining the international institutions under its constitutional name?* Maybe this has to do with a political euthanasia of the name Macedonia and Macedonians which the Greek collective memory identify not as someone who unified them, but as someone who conquered them.

Even if the Macedonian people were *Tito's nation and creation*, as the Greek historians claim, even then it has the right to choose a name for its collective identification, especially considering the no other country of people identify themselves under the name Republic of Macedonia.

On the other hand, the name Macedonia is sacred and unique for the Macedonians, and the Macedonian people have built, under that name, its personal and collective identity.

However, Greece obstinately blocks the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, in spite of the fact that Macedonia made several concessions: Greece expressed a concern that article 3 and 49 from the Constitution of Macedonia incite territorial pretensions. In order to appease the concern from possible territorial pretensions, on the 6th of January 1992 the Macedonian Parliament enacted amendments I and II of the Constitution which modified the articles 3 and 49. On the 7th of April 1993, the UN Security Council, with its resolution 817, refused the admission of Macedonia into the United Nations with a recommendation that the country should use a temporary reference "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" for all purposes within the UN, until the resolution of the differences regarding the name. The General Assembly, with its Resolution 225, admitted Macedonia as the 181st member of the UN. The temporary reference, which reflects the recent past of Macedonia, begins with small letters since it is not a name, but rather a descriptive term and the reference is not an international name, but should be used only in the UN. To confirm that, Macedonia receives a seat in the UN under the letter "t" from "the former...". (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

On the 18th of June 1993 the Security Council enacted the Resolution 845 requiring an acceleration of the resolution of the differences, and the secretary general appoints Sairus Vens as a special envoy. Mr. Vens played this role until 1995, when Mr. Mathew Nimits was appointed.

On the 13th of September 1995, Greece and Macedonia signed an Interim Accord, wherein both parties agree that: Macedonia shall guarantee that the preamble and articles 3 and 49 of the Constitution do not contain territorial pretensions and it shall change its flag (with the sun of Vergina), and Greece shall not block Macedonia's accession into international organizations, and the parties shall continue the discussions about the differences under the auspices of the UN. (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

From 1995 to 2008 the mediator Mathew Nimits proposed multiple possible solutions that were not acceptable to at least one of the two parties.

On the 3rd of April 2008, on the Summit of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) in Bucharest, Macedonia did not receive an invitation for membership, in spite of the sup-

port from the USA, because it could not resolve the name dispute.

The fall of 2008, Macedonia instigated a process before the International Court of Justice with reference to violations of the obligations to the Interim Accord inflicted by Greece, i.e. the alleged blocking of Macedonia's accession into NATO. The Court is expected to make its decision in 2011/12.

In 2009, Macedonia received from the EC, an invitation to open negotiations for membership in EU, as well as a requirement formulated as follows: "the agreeable and mutually acceptable solution of the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, remains essential". Macedonia does not receive a date to start negotiations, in 2009 nor in 2010.

The discussions lead under the auspices of the UN with the mediation of Mr. Methew Nimits, have considered various possible solutions, however unsuccessfully. According to informal sources, the latest proposal from 2008 suggests that the Republic of Macedonia should remain the official name in the Constitution (in Macedonian language), the name of the country in all international organizations (i.e. UN, EU, NATO) should be "Republic Northern Macedonia", the Security Council should propose that the name "Republic Northern Macedonia" should be used in inter-governmental official relations. The name "Macedonia" in itself cannot be used by any of the two parties as an official name of the country or the region. Both parties can use, although not exclusively and for unofficial purposes, the term "Macedonia" and "Macedonian". The passports shall contain both names: Republic Northern Macedonia in English and in French and Republic of Macedonia in Macedonian language. This proposal can be interpreted as a proposal that sways towards a name for international use. It sways that way because, in addition to international organizations, the suggested name should be used in bilateral relations as well. However, although the Security Council can recommend the use of this name in bilateral relations, still every country has the sovereign right to decide under which name it will establish diplomatic relations. (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

In 2009/11 the prime ministers of Greece and Macedonia, Papandreu and Gruevski held several meetings and made efforts to converge the standpoints regarding the name differences, of both countries.

The Greek position: "one name that will not contain the word Macedonia" for all uses, evolved into "one name that will contain the word Macedonia and a geographic designation" for all uses. The position "erga omnes" or "for all uses" can be interpreted in two ways: "for all international uses", including the passport, or "for all uses", including the internal use of the name. Greece, on several occasions refused the proposal Republic of Macedonia (Skopje) for international use. (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

The Macedonian position in the dispute involves a solution that will not change the Constitution of Macedonia in order to change the constitutional name and will not jeopardize the Macedonian national identity, the distinctiveness of the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian language. The majority of the people will have to agree to such a solution on a referendum. (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

What do the people think of when they think of their identity?

The people continue to oppose any change of the name, i.e. almost half of the population firmly opposes any change to the name. Regarding the possible solutions, 45.3% responded that they would not accept any change, 44.6% responded that they would not accept any geographic designation, 39.6% think that the name should be preserved event at the cost of delays, and 58.4% would answer "no" to a possible referendum question

asking for a name for all international uses. The majority that will not accept any change is larger among the ethnic Macedonians (57% are for no change). These standpoints have changed slightly since December 2010 (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

There is a small window for compromise after the decision of the International Court of Justice (36.9 % of the people expect a decision in favor of Macedonia). A total of 40.5 % of the population consider the European and Atlantic integrations important and think that a compromise with Greece should be accepted provided that it poses no threats to the *Macedonian identity, culture and language*. The possible compromises include “the double formula” (20.8%) and an agreed name for international organizations (19.2%). The majority of the people want a solution within a year, and most of them expect it in the medium or long run or never. A possible model for a compromise acceptable to the people, although the research suggests that this has only minor support, is “North Republic of Macedonia” or “Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)”, as an agreed name to be used in international organizations (UN, EU and NATO). (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

The identity is the granite red line. The majority of the people (69.4%) and a vast majority of the ethnic Macedonians oppose any definition, within the UN, of their nationality/citizenship as, for example, “citizens of the Republic of Northern Macedonia”. A vast majority (74%) of the population and of the ethnic Macedonians (87%) and most of the citizens of all ethnic groups oppose any clarification to the language within the UN involving, for example, Macedonian language (official language of the Republic of Northern Macedonia). (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

There is a consensus that the name will be decided on a referendum. The Majority of people (64%), from all ethnic and political party affiliations want the decision on the name to be made through a referendum. The support for the referendum increases since December 2010, including among the ethnic Albanians.

On the referendum, 58.4% would vote against an agreed name for all international uses, every fourth person would join independently organized protests against the change of the name. (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20)

The population fears that Greece will ask for new concessions regarding the identity and the language until they utterly destroy the Macedonian identity (40.4%) and that people will be divided into traitors and patriots (21.7 %). These two threats affect the survival of the nation and probably constitute the main motif for rejecting a compromise. The two fears, the one of new concessions and the one of disunion can be overcome with specific solutions. A possible solution for the fear of new concessions requested by Greece is the proposal made by Gerald Knaus of the European Stability Initiative (ESI) suggesting that the possible agreement between Greece and Macedonia to come into force on the day when Macedonia accedes to the EU (Macedonia would have already acceded to NATO under the temporary reference). In that case, instead of an inhibitor would become a promoter of the Macedonian membership in the EU, and Macedonia would know that it will not have any new obstacles on the road to EU, regardless of whether such obstacles are set by Greece or countries that oppose the enlargement (possible referendum in Franco or vetoes from EU members states under the influence of the extreme right wing). The second fear, of disunion, can be overcome with the application of a “Framework Model”, i.e. the possible agreement with Greece will have to be formally approved, in writing, by all political parties (Kolekovski, 2011: 7-20).

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