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STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF A PROJECT PROPOSAL: ENTERING IN THE EVALUATOR MIND FOR A MORE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION



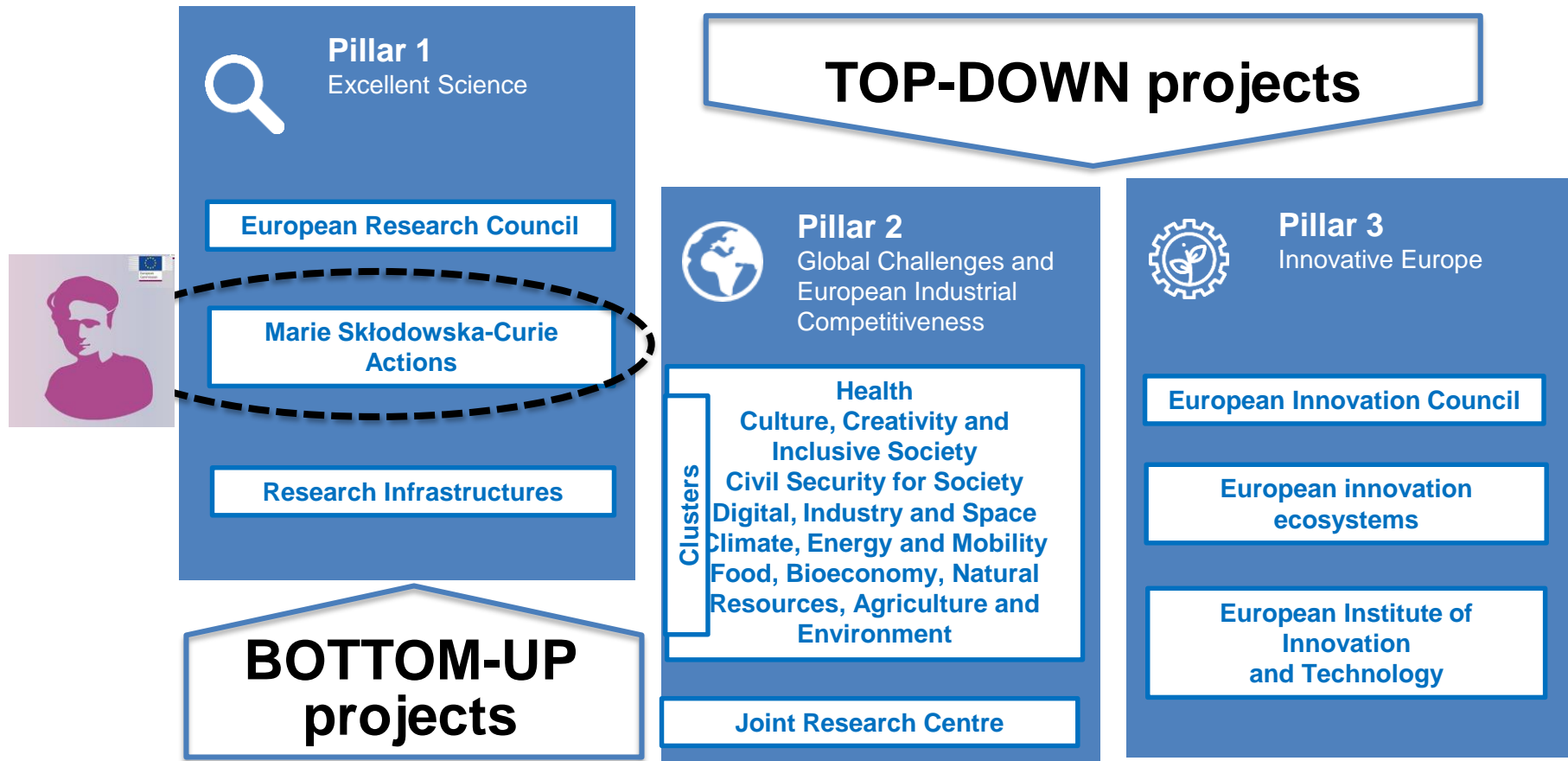
Alessandra della Torre

Department of Public Health and Infectious Diseases

My expertise: Evaluator and Vice-Chair of MSC Life Science Panel



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[NB: the application process for the other EU funding schemes is similar and much of the advice can be more broadly applied]

My expertise: Evaluator and Vice-Chair of MSC Life Science Panel



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European Postdoctoral Fellowships are open to researchers of any nationality who wish to engage in R&I projects by either coming to Europe from any country in the world or moving within Europe.

→ *Outgoing phase*: 12 and 24 months



Global Postdoctoral Fellowships are open to European nationals or long-term residents who wish to engage in R&I projects with organizations outside EU Member States and Horizon Europe Associated Countries

→ *Outgoing phase*: 12-24 months in a non-associated Third Country,

→ *Mandatory return phase*: 12-months in a host organisation based in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe Associated Country

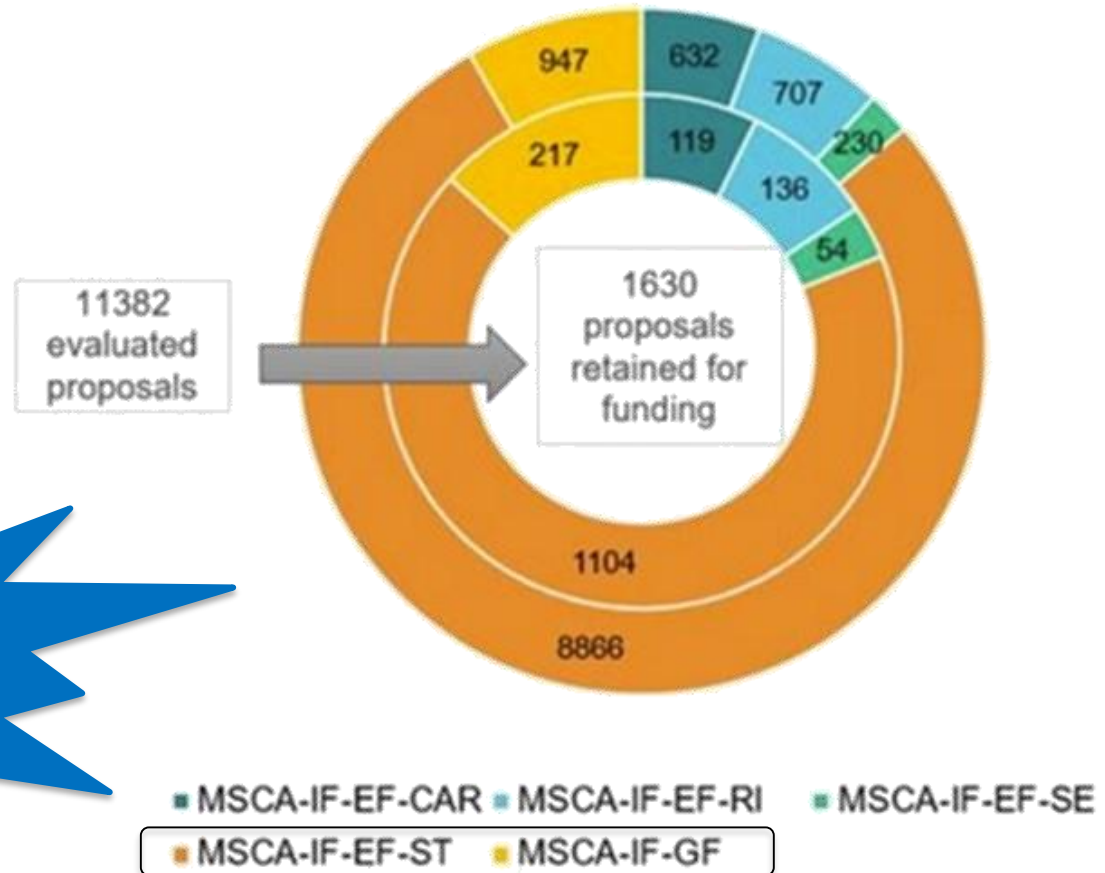
Alessandra della Torre

Dept of Public Health and Infectious Diseases



MSC PROGRAMME IS HIGHLY COMPETITIVE

Success rate in 2021
= 14.3% (10-16%)



Comments and scores



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Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

5

Very Good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

4

4.9
↑
↓
4.0

Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.

3

3.9
↑
↓
3.0

Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

2

2.9
↑
↓
2.0

Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

1

1.9
↑
↓
1.0

The proposal **fails** to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

0

Excellent

Very Good

Good

Fair

Poor

Every single small shortcoming in the proposal greatly reduces the chances of success

My expertise: Evaluator and Vice-Chair of MSC Life Science Panel



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Key figures (2014-2020)



+65,000

Researchers,
including
25,000 PhD
candidates

37%

Researchers
from outside
of the EU

6.2 billion €
Under
Horizon 2020

+1,000

Doctoral
programmes

+4,500

Companies
supported

42%

Female
researchers

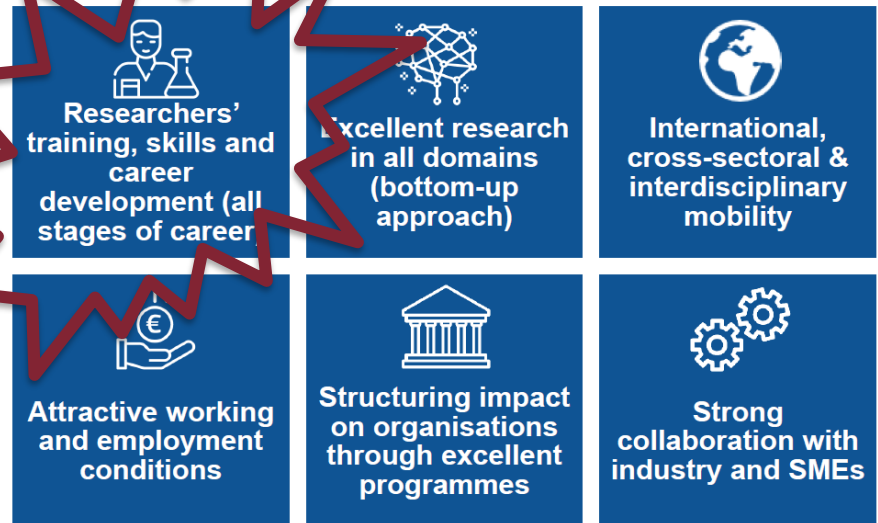


MSC programme is the flagship Horizon EU career development support programme (2021-27 budget = 6.6 billions€)

GOAL:

to enhance the creative
and innovative potential of
postdoctoral researchers
(≤8 years from PhD) with new
skillsets acquired through
advanced training as well as
international, interdisciplinary,
and intersectoral mobility

Key features



The information in this presentation is preliminary and subject to the adoption of the work programme

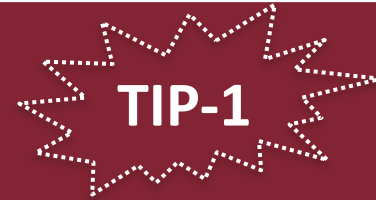


**MSC programme is the flagship
Horizon EU career development
support programme
(2021-27 budget = €6.6 billions)**

GOAL:

**to enhance the creative
and innovative potential of
postdoctoral researchers
(≤8 years from PhD)**

**with new skillsets acquired
through advanced training as well
as international, interdisciplinary,
and intersectoral mobility**



**NEVER FORGET THAT MSC
FELLOWSHIPS ARE
TRAINING PROJECTS,
NOT (ONLY) RESEARCH
PROJECT.**

**Need to emphasize
2-way knowledge transfer**



Horizon Europe Programme

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

Application form

Staff Exchanges (HE MSCA SE)

Project proposal – Technical description (Part B)

Version 1.0
7 October 2021

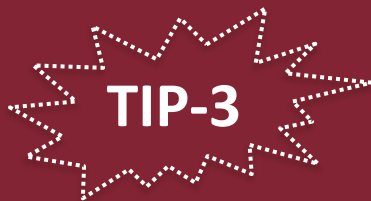


**STUDY AND STRICTLY
FOLLOW EU PROPOSAL
TEMPLATE AND THE
MANUAL FOR APPLICANT**



MSC PROGRAMME IS HIGHLY COMPETITIVE

- ✓ Excellent research proposal
- ✓ Excellent applicant
- ✓ Excellent two-way transfer of knowledge
- ✓ Excellent implementation
- ✓ Excellent impact
- ✓ Strong adherence to instructions to applicants



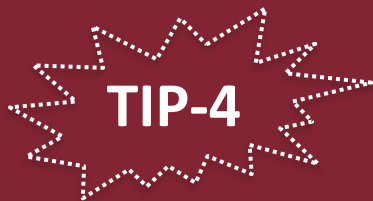
The EXCELLENCE NEEDS TO BE
CONVINCINGLY SUBSTANTIATED
IN EVERY PARAGRAPH OF THE PROPOSAL

- ✓ Clearly state the bases of the «excellence»



MSC PROGRAMME IS HIGHLY COMPETITIVE

- ✓ Excellent research proposal
- ✓ Excellent applicant
- ✓ Excellent two-way transfer of knowledge
- ✓ Excellent implementation
- ✓ Excellent impact
- ✓ Strong adherence to instructions to applicants



**DON'T BE OVER-AMBITIOUS,
PRESENT A CREDIBLE AND REALISTIC WORK PLAN**

The evaluation process



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TIP-5

**EVALUTORS HAVE
DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERTISE
IN THE RESEARCH FIELD.**

**Need to provide ALL relevant
information in a clear and
straightforward manner**

The evaluation process



TIP-6

EVALUTORS ARE USUALLY UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO FINALISE THEIR REPORTS: HELP THEM!

- ✓ Be synthetic 'less may be more'
- ✓ Avoid redundancies, bad layout, meaningless illustrations
- ✓ Use consistent wordings

The evaluation process



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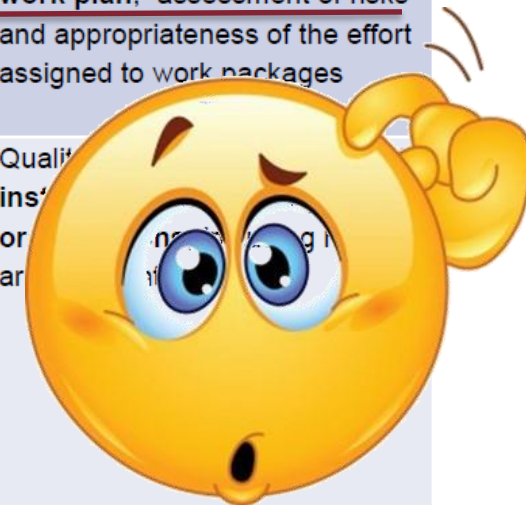
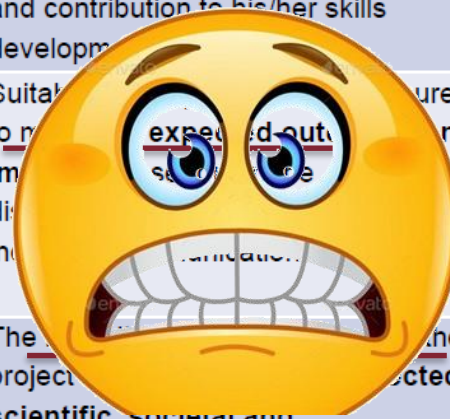
TIP-7

EVALUTORS ARE USUALLY UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO FINALISE THEIR REPORTS: HELP THEM!

- ✓ align your objectives to EU ones
- ✓ follow the proposal structure, show them clearly what they expect to see

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships

EXCELLENCE	IMPACT	Quality and efficiency of the implementation
<p>Quality and pertinence of the <u>project's research and innovation objectives</u> (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)</p> <p>Sound <u>methodology</u> (including interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary and other innovative research project practices)</p> <p>Quality and appropriateness of the <u>researcher's professional experience, competences and skills</u></p> <p>Quality and appropriateness of the <u>two-way transfer of knowledge</u> between the researcher and the host institution</p>	<p>Credibility of the measures to <u>enhance the career perspectives and employability</u> of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development</p> <p>Suitability of the measures to <u>maximize the impact</u> of the project in the <u>scientific, societal and economic</u> impacts</p>	<p>Quality and effectiveness of the <u>work plan, assessment of risks</u> and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages</p> <p>Quality and efficiency of the <u>implementation</u> of the project</p>
50%	30%	20%



Tips for Excellence:

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



EXCELLENCE

Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)

Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project, and the quality of open science practices)

Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

50%

- ✓ **Structure, structure, structure!**
- ✓ **Attract the evaluator's attention by highlighting in BOLD key steps of the project, its crucial concepts and key words.**
- ✓ **Don't provide excessive technicalities and details which can confuse the evaluators, but try to accompany them throughout the proposal contents.**

Tips for Excellence:

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



EXCELLENCE

Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)

Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project, and the quality of open science practices)

Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

50%

- ✓ Be balanced between describing the current state-of-the-art and your project
- ✓ Be balanced between too technical details and basic explanations
- ✓ Highlight interdisciplinarity. Explain how expertise and methods from different disciplines will be brought together and integrated in pursuit of your objectives.

Tips for Excellence:

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



EXCELLENCE

Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)

Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project, and the quality of open science practices)

Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

50%

✓ Define the overall goal and decline it into more specific/operational objectives

✓ Objectives need to be **SMART**

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Relevant
Time-bound

***Substantiate
each of the
these!!***

Tips for Excellence:

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



EXCELLENCE

Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)

Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project, and the quality of open science practices)

Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

50%

- ✓ Carefully choose the host group.
- ✓ Highlight complementarity between applicant and host and how these fit with project goal and implementation.
- ✓ Demonstrate excellence of host group/institutions, even if top ones!
- ✓ Write CV highlighting aspects relevant for the proposal. **VERY GENERAL TIP!** Proposed should be complementary to the CV

Tips for IMPACT:

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



IMPACT

Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development

Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities

The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal and economic impacts

30%

- ✓ Explain how the project will decisively advance your scientific career
- ✓ Show what benefits your project can bring to the scientific and not-scientific communities, and describe a well-planned dissemination and outreach strategy. **Don't be too general. Provide examples.**

Tips for IMPACT:



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MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



IMPACT

Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development

Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities

The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal and economic impacts

30%

- ✓ **Highlight relevance to the challenges identified in Horizon Europe, EU missions, and UE Sustainable Development Goals**

Tips for IMPLEMENTATION:

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships



Quality and efficiency of the implementation

Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages

Quality and capacity of the host institutions and participating organisations, including hosting arrangements

20%

- ✓ **Be consistent with research objectives/work packages.**
- ✓ **Provide a convincing work plan for your project. Include realistic and convincing **MILESTONES** and **DELIVERABLES**.**

decision-
making points,
check points

tangible results
of your work

- ✓ **Describe SWOPs and risks and provide contingency plans.**

Max 10 pages between the 3 sections

Align the section lengths to the weighting of evaluation criteria

“Excellence” (weight 50%)

MAX 6 pages!

“Impact” (30%)

“Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation” (20%)



FINAL TIPS



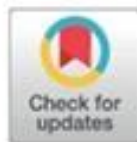
Get as much feedbacks as possible

- ✓ By supervisors and close colleagues
- ✓ By “test-readers” out of the research field
- ✓ By MSC grantees

But be a selective listener

- ✓ If your proposal is not selected for funding, take advantage of reviewer’s comments (ESR), and if possible address the criticisms and resubmit!

PLOS COMPUTATIONAL BIOLOGY



EDITORIAL

Ten simple rules for a successful EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral (MSCA) fellowship application

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OPEN ACCESS

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***THANKS
FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!***

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