

Making Things Happen in Debian

Changelog, Methods, Lessons Learned

Andreas Tille

Winterthur, 2026-08-29



Fun fact: Local media coverage

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- It took two days until Sruthi was in Indian media
 - It took more than two years until I made it into German media.

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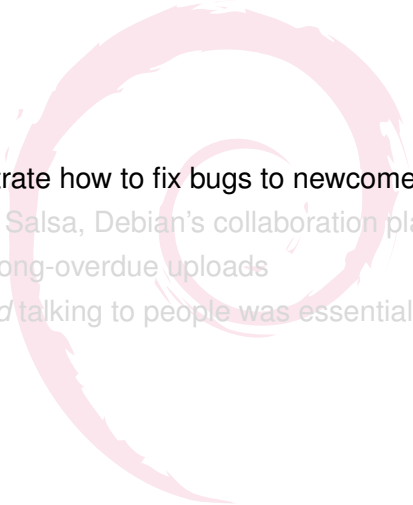
Agenda

- 1 DPL Changelog
- 2 Methods
- 3 Lessons learned

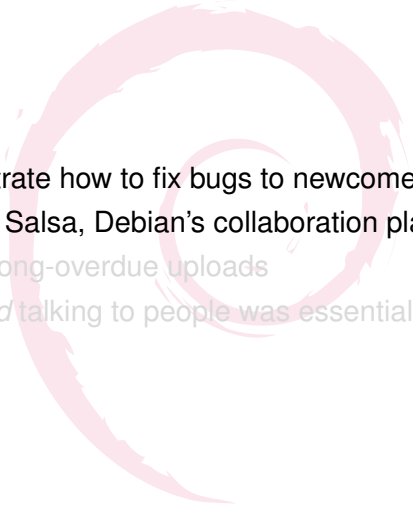


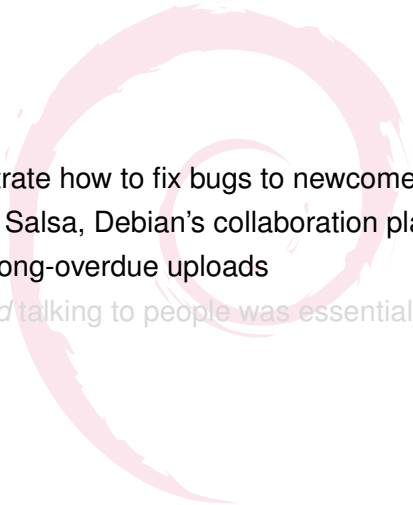
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- Initial idea: Demonstrate how to fix bugs to newcomers
 - Migrate packages to Salsa, Debian's collaboration platform
 - Pick packages with long-overdue uploads
 - Doing something *and* talking to people was essential for progress

2024-08: Bug of the Day

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2025-01: Stop posting on X

- Publicity team no longer posts on X
- Platform no longer aligned with our values
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2025-10: Creating Archive and DFSG team

- Historically grown situation changed thanks to a hint born inside the team
- Splitting responsibilities of distinct tasks
- Timed to follow the Trixie release
- Faster processing
- Make new processing more transparent
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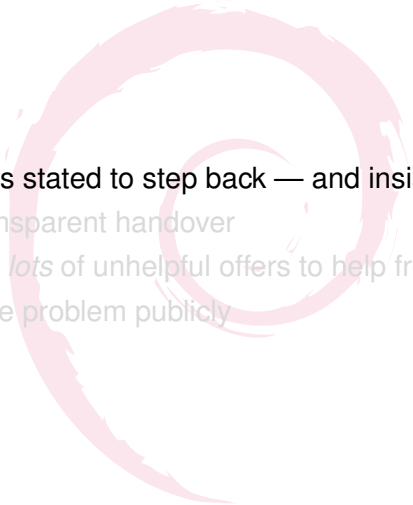
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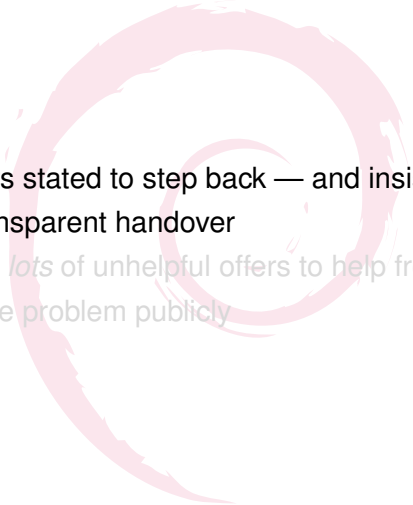
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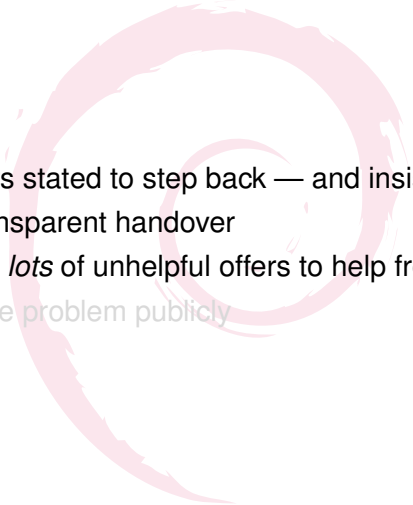
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 - Announced in Bits (2026-02)
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Collaborative maintenance

- Salsa: our main collaboration platform:
1700 out of 41583 source packages missing (4.09%)

2026-05-10: 1910 out of 40558 source packages missing (4.71%)

- Professionalism in process is what makes volunteer projects scale
- Strict maintainership: historically sensible, increasingly a source of friction
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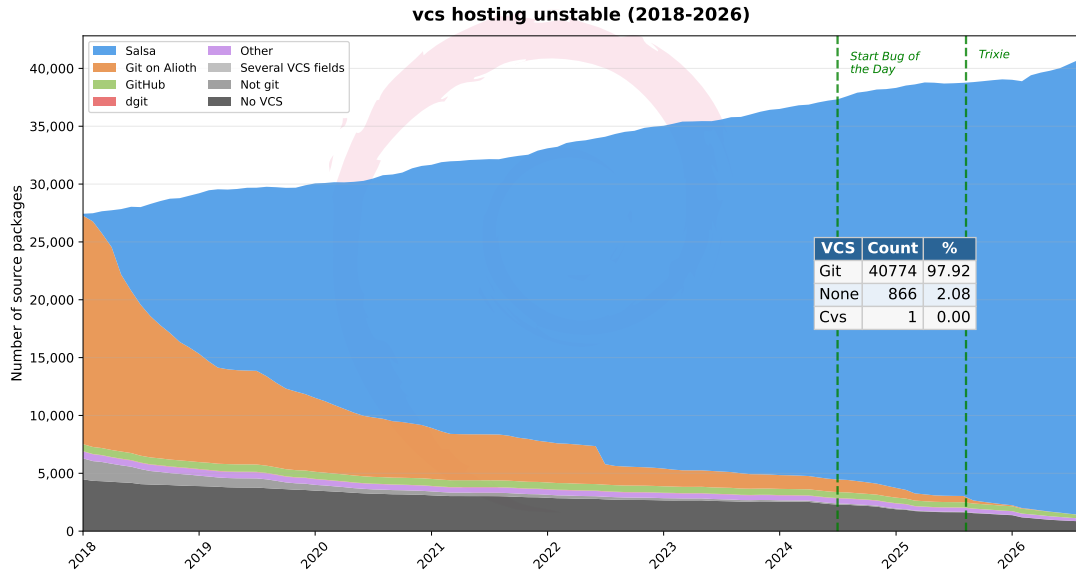
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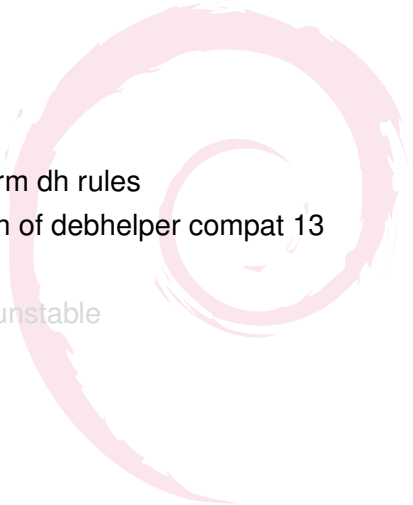
Vcs hosting in unstable



Package modernisation trends

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- Migration to short-form dh rules
 - Widespread adoption of debhelper compat 13
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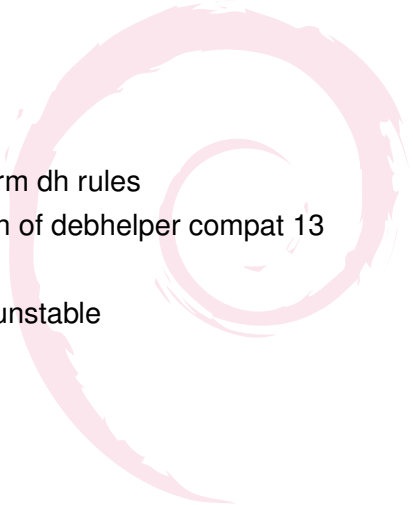
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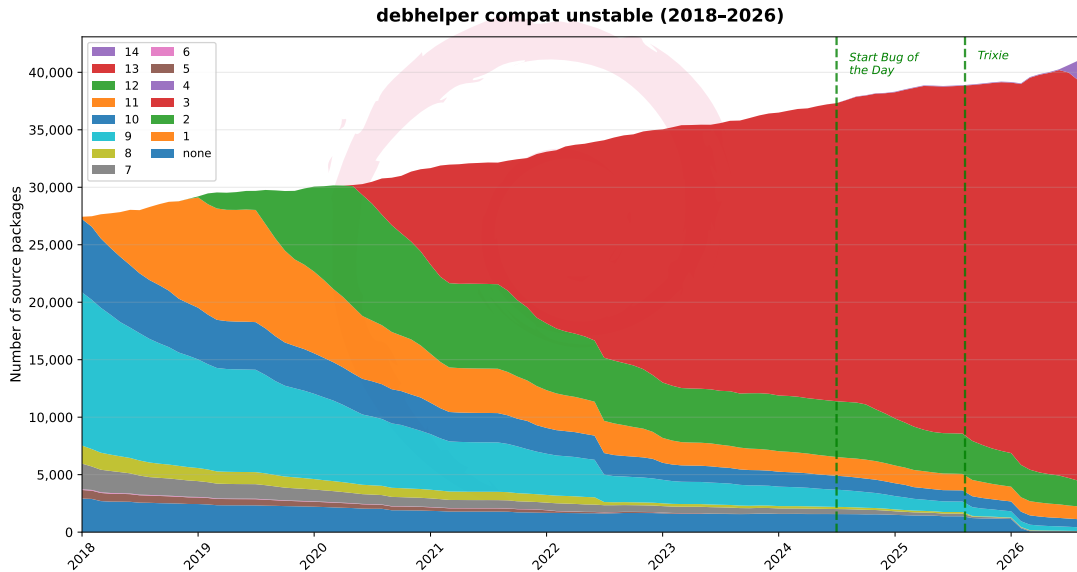
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Debhelper compat level, no cdb's



Failed to change: Loosen strict ownership of packages

Debian is a community — collaboration in packaging tasks remains hard.

Attempts to solve problems caused by strict ownership:

NMU Practiced since 1996 (sharutils 4.2.1-1.1), documented 2002 in developers-reference 3.0 – still constraints

Uploaders Header since 2002-01; 2005: debian-policy 3.6.2.0 enabled team addresses as Maintainer field

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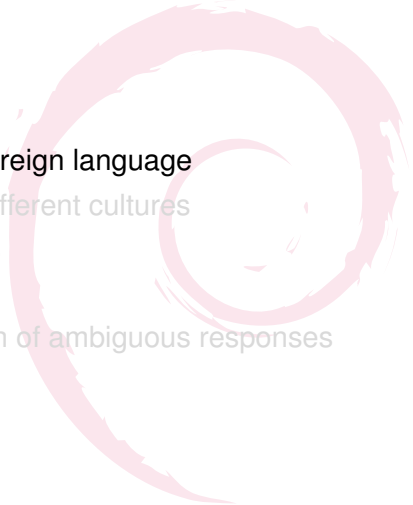
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 - Communication in different cultures
 - Controlling emotions
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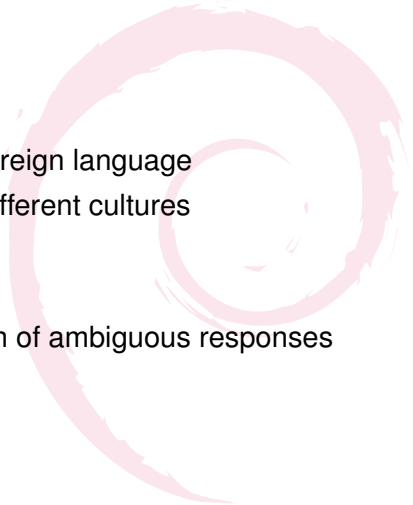
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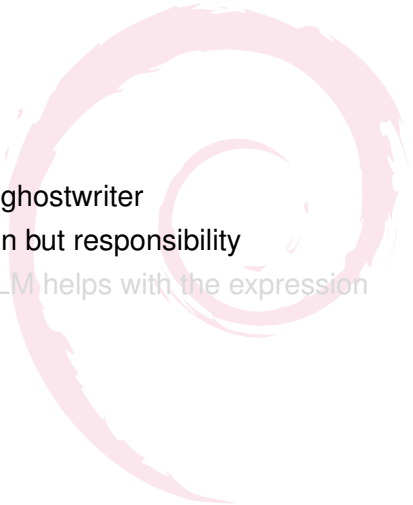
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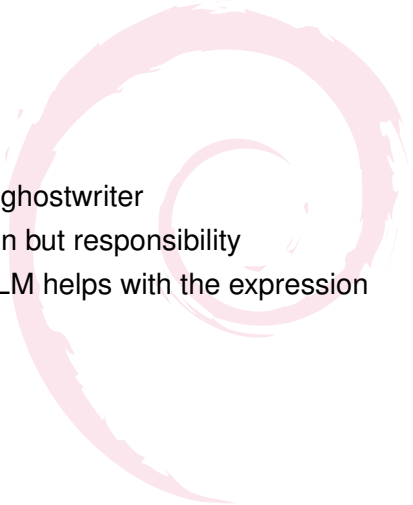
LLMs — a legitimate tool

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- Tool for clarity, not a ghostwriter
 - Not depersonalisation but responsibility
 - I own the intent — LLM helps with the expression

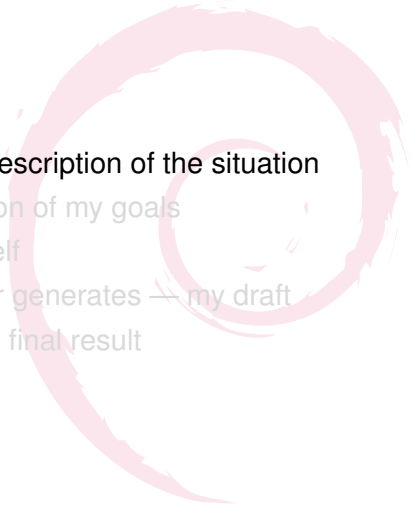
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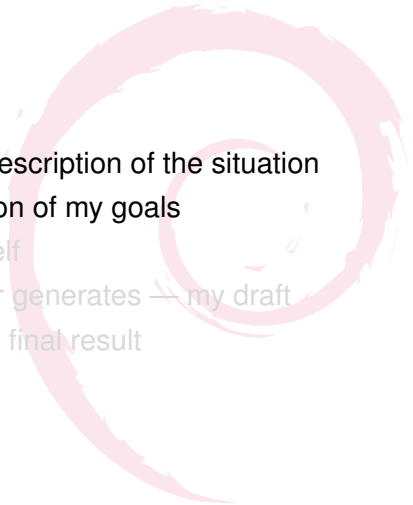
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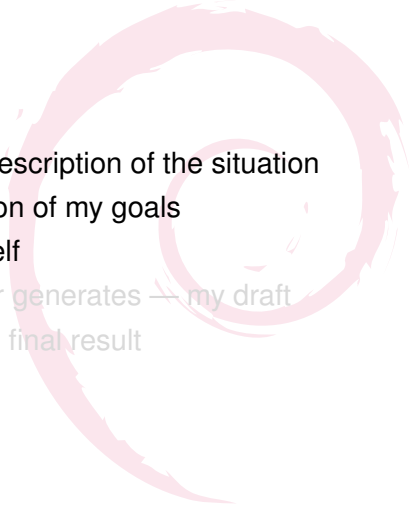
Usage of LLMs as editor not author

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- I provide a precise description of the situation
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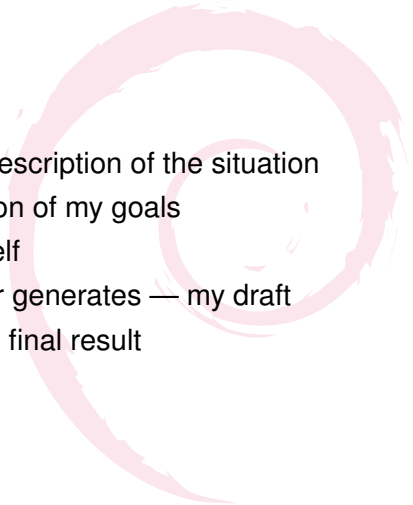
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Results of GR: LLM usage in Debian → permissive

- Proposal 5 “Responsible Use of Generative AI” won
- Existing standards for quality, correctness and maintainability apply
- Other permissive proposals also strong: P2, P4 and P6 defeated all non-permissive proposals
- Preferred: responsible neutrality over additional restrictions or an explicit recommendation to avoid LLMs
- Non-permissive P1 and P3 failed their majority requirements
- P8’s climate argument did not lead to restrictions
- Clear rejection of an LLM ban:
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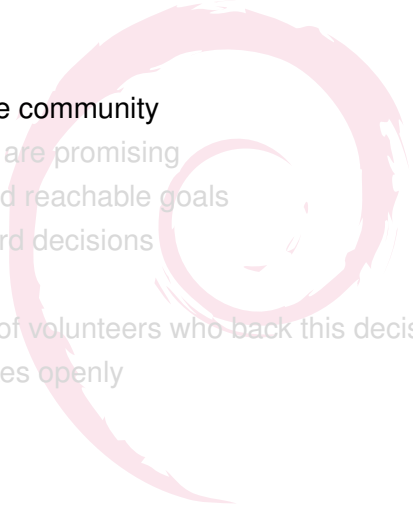
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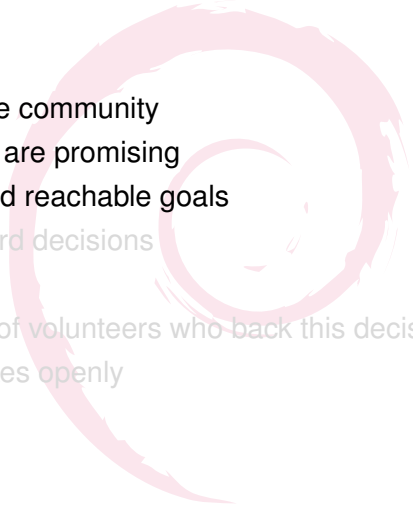
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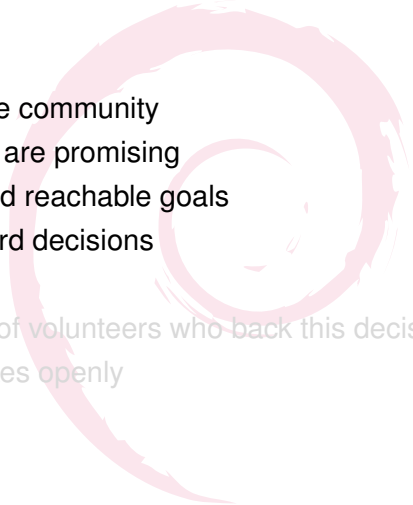
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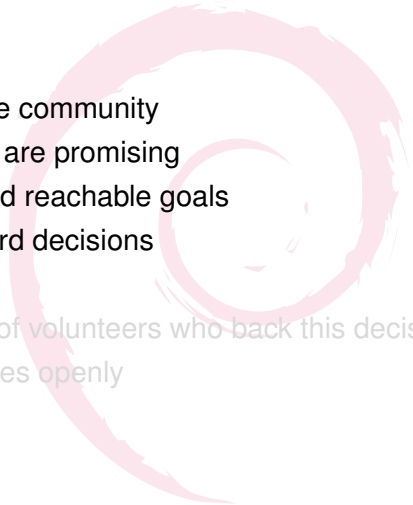
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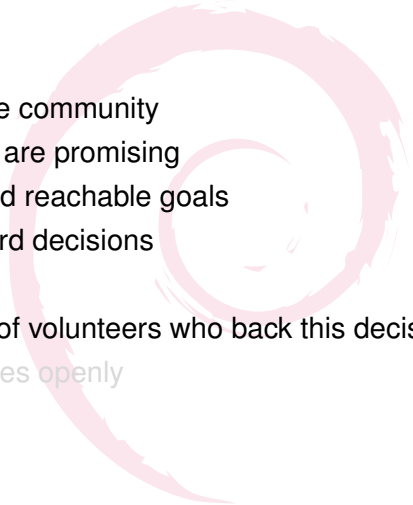
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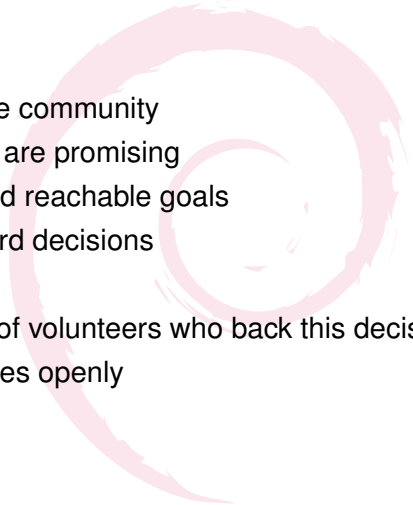
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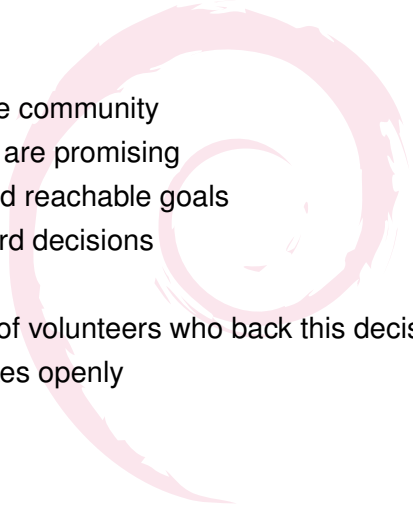
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 - Don't fear pushback
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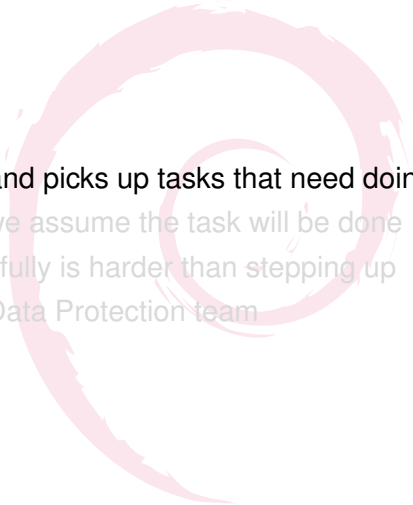
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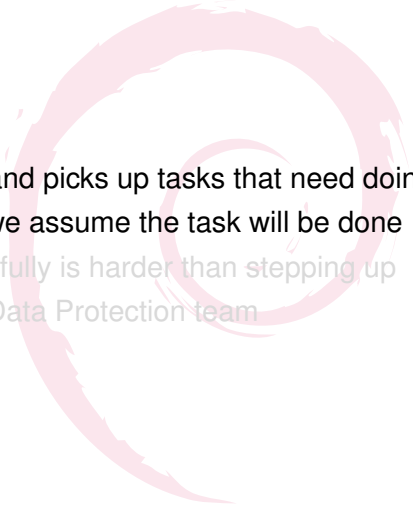
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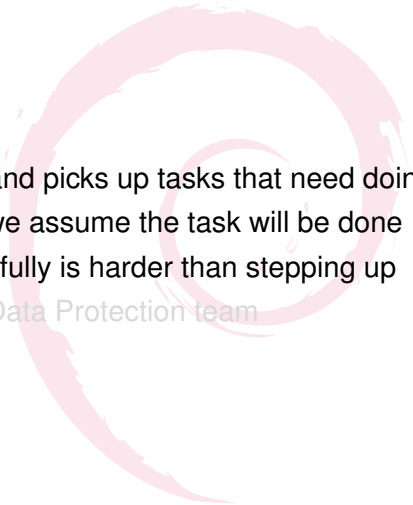
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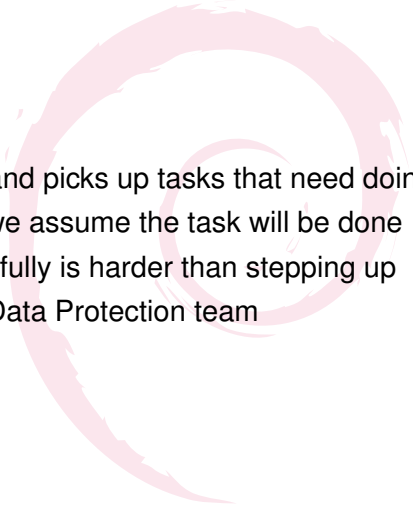
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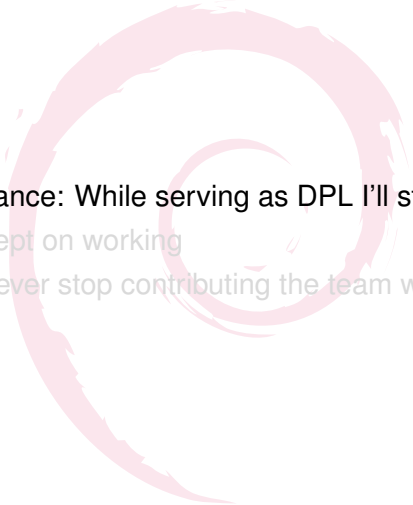
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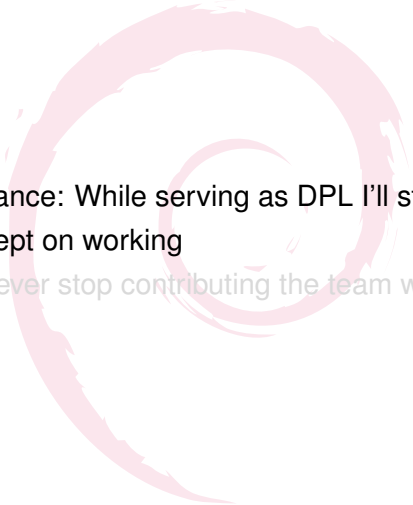
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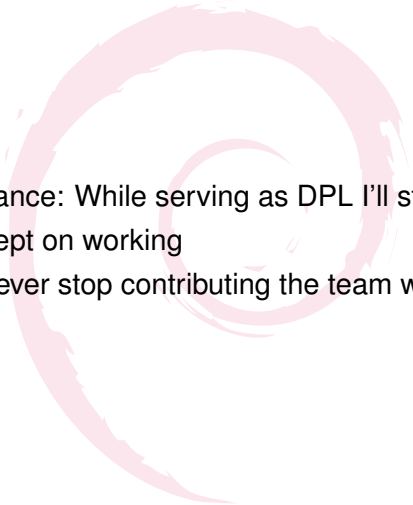
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- Whatever I said, the interpretation was “DPL has said”
- It took one year to understand things and another year to change things.

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