

November 10, 2011 Thursday 13 Heshvan 5772 23:14 IST



Print



Back to original article

THE JERUSALEM POST

JPOST.com
Israel's best-selling English daily and most-read English website



Photo by: Amos Ben-Gershom / GPO

Sarkozy, c'est fini

By EMMANUEL NAVON
10/11/2011

The majority of French Jews voted for Sarkozy in 2007. Yet believing that he can still count on the Jewish vote this time around will only prove just how much of a fool the French president is.

French songwriter Hervé Villard became famous overnight in 1965 with his love song “Capri, c’est fini” (Capri, it’s over). The song truly sounds like a broken record but Villard made a fortune out of it, selling 2.5 million records. Could disappointment be such a universal feeling that it speaks to our hearts, even when accompanied by the dullest melody? And would I get 2.5 million downloads on iTunes if I were to write a song entitled “Sarkozy, c’est fini?” After all, there must be more than 2.5 million people who are disappointed in the French president. Seeing as I’m not a musician I’ll have to settle for words only.

Since immigrating to Israel eighteen years ago, I forewent my right to vote in French elections. With my voluntary expatriation, I no longer share in France’s destiny. In 2007, however, I made an exception.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy impressed me, and twice I made the trip to the French consulate to cast my vote. Sarkozy was an outsider. The son of a Hungarian immigrant, he was raised by a Jewish grandfather and grew up as the ugly duckling in a posh Parisian suburb. As opposed to the rest of France’s political leadership, he was not an intellectual clone of the National School of Administration (ENA), the French elite school for government. But, mostly, he sounded sincere when he said that he intended to replace French economic dirigisme with pro-market policies and when he spoke fondly of Israel and of America. Indeed, it seemed too good to be true –and it was.

Sarkozy turned out to be a temperamental control-freak whose economic reforms proved meager and whose foreign policy ended in disaster. His “Mediterranean Union” project was a flop: Apart from angering his European partners (especially Germany) by not consulting with them on his half-baked ideas yet still expecting them to share the cost of their implementation, Sarkozy made an utter fool of himself. In July 2008, he threw a grand party in Paris to launch his now defunct “Mediterranean Union” with embarrassing guests such as deposed Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Sarkozy thought that his “Mediterranean Union” would convince Turkey to give up its EU bid, while Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan had already made the choice of a pan-Islamic foreign policy.

Worse still, Sarkozy went out of his way to rehabilitate former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi in order to sell French nuclear plants and military aircrafts to Libya. Shortly after his election, Sarkozy hosted Gaddafi in Paris and then flew to Tripoli to celebrate “a strategic partnership” between France and Libya. While the then-presidential candidate was giving fine speeches on France’s international role in promoting human rights, he was also conducting business deals with Gaddafi – a prime example of a human rights violator. It seems that Sarkozy simply underestimated the risks of doing business with a corrupt leader, and predictably Gaddafi pocketed Sarkozy’s “rehabilitation certificate” but failed to deliver. Aside from his fury towards Gaddafi, Sarkozy was put out to pasture by all of the Arab revolts for exposing his government’s cozy relations with despotic Arab dictators. Subsequently, the shamed president decided to re-brand himself as Zorro,

bombarding Gaddafi with the very planes he had tried to sell him.

Sarkozy also unsuccessfully tried to play the tough peace-maker vis-à-vis Russian President Dmitry Medvedev when the latter bombarded South Ossetia in the summer of 2008. "It is not done to try and preserve your bygone empire by using military force against independence-minded leaders," Sarkozy explained to Medvedev. Yet Sarkozy himself behaved similarly in the former French colony of Côte d'Ivoire, where the French army toppled Laurent Gbagbo, the outvoted president who had been instrumental in undoing France's neo-colonialism in his country.

Sarkozy's hot-headedness and duplicity may come across as music to Israel's ears. Sarkozy has Jewish origins, and he started his political career as Mayor of Neuilly – an affluent Paris suburb with a powerful Jewish community. As Interior Minister under former president Jacques Chirac, he took a firm stand against anti-Semitism. He became friendly with then-chairman of Likud Binyamin Netanyahu and his speeches were full of praise for Israel. Apart from his position on Jerusalem, his address to the Knesset in June 2007 was as good as it could get in favor of the Jewish State.

Today, Sarkozy's attitude toward Israel is undistinguishable from that of his predecessors: he is obnoxious and confrontational and France's "Arab policy" is back in full gear. In 2009, Sarkozy granted the Légion d'Honneur (France's equivalent of the Presidential Medal of Freedom) to Charles Enderlin, the French journalist who falsely accused Israel of killing Muhammad Al-Dura, thus igniting the second Intifada and acts of vengeance including the beheading of the journalist Daniel Pearl.

Despite Netanyahu's gestures towards peace and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' refusal to negotiate, Sarkozy now blames Netanyahu and absolves Abbas for the current stalemate. He encouraged Abbas' statehood bid at the UN and recently voted in favor of UNESCO's admission of "Palestine" as a full member state. He reportedly declared Israel's demand to be recognized as a Jewish state by the Palestinians as being "ridiculous." And finally, in a private conversation with US President Barack Obama recently, Sarkozy badmouthed the Israeli prime minister by calling him a "liar" and saying that he couldn't stand him.

Sarkozy's speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2011 was no less idiotic. He attributed the source of the stalemate as being a "method problem," yet later on in the speech he paradoxically attempted to present said method as the key to resolving the conflict. And the tenets of said method? To negotiate a final status on Jerusalem, borders and settlements within a pre-set timetable.

Precisely the same method that the Oslo process, the Road Map and the Annapolis conference wanted to use.

Most French Jews and indeed, most dual French-Israeli citizens, voted for Sarkozy in 2007. However, if Sarkozy thinks that despite his antics, he can still count on the Jewish vote today, he is very much mistaken.

In the Socialist Party's primaries, the rabid anti-Israel candidate Martine Aubry was defeated by the moderate and conciliatory François Hollande. On the far-right, Marine Le Pen is at pains to prove her pro-Israel credentials and to distance herself from her anti-everything (including anti-Semitic) father.

Sarkozy has lost the Jewish vote and his likely defeat in the upcoming French elections will be well deserved.

Sarkozy, c'est fini.

The writer is an International Relations Lecturer at Tel Aviv University and the founding partner of the Navon-Levy Group Ltd., an international business consultancy. He is also the author of numerous books on Israel's foreign policy, including most recently, From Israel, With Hope: Why and How Israel will Continue to Thrive.



Print



Back to original article

[About Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [RSS](#)

All rights reserved © 1995 - 2011 The Jerusalem Post.