

Despite National Rally's rebrand, Israel is still stuck with a Le Pen dilemma - comment

France's National Rally (RN) has admittedly rebranded itself and made pro-Israel statements, but it shed neither its antisemitic grandees nor its pro-Russian credentials.

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Marine Le Pen, member of parliament and member of the French far-right National Rally (Rassemblement National - RN) party parliamentary group during a debate about the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, at the National Assembly in Paris, October 23, 2023.

The Jewish and Israeli dilemma vis-à-vis Europe's far Right is especially acute in the case of France, because France is the first major European power where a far-right party has become one of the largest in parliament, and because [Le Pen's party](#) has been at pains to shun its antisemitic history and to display pro-Israel credentials. RN has consistently advocated Israel's right to defend itself following the [October 7 attacks](#); it has criticized ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan's request to issue arrest warrants against Israel's prime minister and defense minister; and it has condemned French President Emmanuel Macron's decision to ban Israeli companies from the Eurostat defense show.

It also rejects the recognition of a [Palestinian state](#) without a peace agreement with Israel. Hence have many French Jews voted for RN, and hence has Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli tweeted his support for Le Pen.

Are they Le Pen's dupes? Answering yes would be generous: They are her useful idiots.

As revealed by French author and journalist Caroline Fourest, Jordan Bardella – the 28-year-old poster boy of RN and its candidate for prime minister – once described Alain Soral as a “great sociologist.”

Soral is a convicted antisemite and a Holocaust denier who has called for a united front of fundamentalist Christians and Islamists against the Jews. According to Fourest, no one has contributed to the spread of antisemitism in France more than Soral. His patron is Frederic Chatillon, a self-described Germanic pagan who once

headed GUD (“groupe union défense), a fascist student group with ties to the National Front (the forerunner of RN).

As president of GUD, Chatillon geared the organization toward anti-Israel propaganda and he came up with antisemitic slogans such as “In Paris like in Gaza: Intifada;” “Death to capitalist and socialist Jews;” and “Sarcelles and Deauville are occupied territories” (Sarcelles is a Paris suburb with a large Jewish community, and Deauville is a popular beach town where many Parisian Jews vacation). Chatillon is an admirer of Syrian President Bashar Assad and of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He was Le Pen’s adviser when she first ran for the French presidency in 2012.

Controversies, alliances, and challenges

In January 2009, Chatillon attended an anti-Israel demonstration (organized by an organization named after Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin) together with convicted Islamist Abdelhakim Sefrioui, who launched the social media campaign that led to the beheading of French school teacher Samuel Paty. Chatillon owns the PR company Unanime, which provides services to the far-right Identity and Democracy group at the European Parliament.

Bardella entered the inner circle of the Le Pen family thanks to his former girlfriend Kerridwen, who is Chatillon’s daughter. Kerridwen wears a Celtic Cross, a symbol of Celtic Christianity that has been adopted by white supremacists in Europe. Bardella also used to work as parliamentary assistant for Jean-François Jalkh, a Holocaust denier and long-time member of RN.

Le Pen claims that she has cleaned up her party. She kicked out her antisemitic father Jean-Marie in 2015, and she cut ties with Germany’s right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Yet these moves can neither erase RN’s past, nor the many “black sheep” candidates whose existence Bardella has recently acknowledged. The National Front was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen and by former Waffen-SS members Pierre Bousquet and Léon Gaultier, by Holocaust denier François Duprat, and by Roger Holeindre – a member of the terrorist OAS organization, which tried to assassinate Charles de Gaulle for his decision to pull out from Algeria.

Despite some cleaning-up and toned-down rhetoric, however, RN is steadfast in its pro-Russian foreign policy. Le Pen admittedly trashed campaign flyers ahead of the 2022 presidential election because they included a picture of her with Putin (Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022), but RN’s ties with Russia are intact. Many RN candidates are openly supportive of Putin.

Among them is Pierre Gentillet, co-founder of the pro-Russian Pushkin Circle. An RN-led French government would realign France with Russia, itself an ally of Iran. Russia would be able to count on a major European power to undermine the US-led world order – something incompatible with Israel’s national interest.

France’s LFI Party, the largest faction in the joint left-wing list (inappropriately named “Popular Front”) in the newly elected National Assembly, is admittedly worse. It is antisemitic and anti-Israel. Among its members, David Guiraud is a fan of Soral, questions the atrocities of October 7, and accuses Israel of putting Palestinian children in ovens; Aymeric Caron says Israel supporters are not his fellow human beings, and that the recent rape of a 12 year-old Jewish girls by a Muslim gang received media attention just because the victim is Jewish; Thomas Portes says Israel voluntarily enabled October 7 to justify the “genocide of the Palestinian people;” Danièle Obono has described Hamas as a “resistance movement;” and Rima Hassan calls Israel “a

monstrosity” and accuses the IDF of training dogs to rape Palestinians. The list goes on.

French Jews who voted RN when it faced the Popular Front in the run-off cannot be blamed for trying to deny victory to such antisemites. But they uncritically bought into the RN’s superficial rebranding. Many French Jews now realize that their life in France has reached a dead end. Some are thankfully moving to Israel – though, admittedly, Israeli politics will hardly offer them solace.