

After the European Elections: Raphaël Glucksmann Won't Unite the French Left

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France's Parti Socialiste is on the rise ahead of the EU elections, under lead candidate Raphaël Glucksmann. He's appealing to disappointed Macron voters — but his campaign is also squarely aimed at killing off the alliance of France's left-wing parties.

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Less than two weeks before voters across the European Union go to the polls, France's far right appears to be sailing toward an historic victory. Lording it over a fragmented political landscape, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National is credited with as much as 32 percent support going into the June 9 vote. Led in this contest by the twenty-eight-year-old Jordan Bardella — an incumbent member of the European Parliament (MEP) and the Rassemblement National's official president since 2022 — the far-right party has a cozy double-digit lead over the other seven tickets that register in [opinion polls](#). Most tellingly, the Rassemblement National looks ready to trounce Valérie Hayer's list representing the party of President Emmanuel Macron, which hovers in the mid-to-high teens in most estimates.

While the scale of the Rassemblement National's success will only be known after the votes are counted, all signs point to a major defeat for the president. Macron is entering the final quarter of his presidency in arguably his weakest position yet, without a majority in the National Assembly and increasingly isolated in Europe. "I'm not the one who chose the far right as my political opposition," Macron said on May 26, fine-tuning his own alibi. Others will argue that EU elections are usually unenthusiastic affairs, even in an era of chronically declining voter turnout. Often dominated by the chance to air either a nationalist protest vote, or else the pro-EU identity of the upper-middle classes, it could be said that these elections provide a poor bellwether of the actual balance of French politics. Many will thus be tempted to downplay the significance even of a considerable Le Pen victory.

Yet this election is also a chance to settle other, sometimes petty scores and win other political battles ahead of the 2027 presidential election. In close third place after Hayer's list — and salivating at the possibility of besting the president's force — Raphaël Glucksmann is again leading the Parti Socialiste (PS) list. After being initially courted by Macron, Glucksmann founded the center-left party-cum-personal electoral vehicle Place Publique in late 2018. An essayist and political consultant, he was chosen to lead the PS's European campaign the following year when he was first elected as an MEP to Strasbourg. It's a post from which Glucksmann has sought to cultivate a reputation as a nonpartisan and thoroughly pro-EU progressive, an advocate of human rights causes such as the plight of the Uyghurs in China, and a staunch critic of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

In more humble terms, Glucksmann is the candidate of France's just-left-of-center elite. This is the segment of opinion that feels an aesthetic distaste for the president's pigeonholing of French politics into a duel with the far right, but that shrinks just as easily from cultivating a genuine alliance with voters and social movements to the left. In this sense, Glucksmann is indeed the candidate they are looking for.

Decimated

Once the dominant force on the Left, the Parti Socialiste was decimated in the 2010s by defections toward two different camps. One was the center that rallied behind Macron (pre-2017, he was himself a minister in the government of PS president François Hollande). The other was the camp of ex-PS stalwart Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who quit the party in 2008 to establish an autonomous force that would eventually morph into France Insoumise, currently the largest left-wing bloc in the National Assembly.

Those who stayed in the Parti Socialiste never accepted their sudden marginalization or their party's junior position behind Mélenchon, who proved himself the Left's most eligible presidential candidate in the 2017 and 2022 elections. And while the PS leadership under party secretary Olivier Faure agreed to join the Mélenchon-dominated broad-left alliance NUPES ([New Ecological and Social Popular Union](#)) in 2022, the conservative faction of the PS began just as quickly to undermine the left-wing alliance.

Even before that year's parliamentary elections, Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was an easy opportunity for internal dissension, given France Insoumise's long-held opposition to NATO — seen on the center-left as a betrayal of the strategic realism needed in an age of renewed East-West conflict. But more was in store after the Hamas-led attacks on October 7. The PS establishment seized on allegations of antisemitism on the far left — and secured its goal of suspending the PS's participation in the NUPES alliance last fall.

Their long-term strategic bet is that there's a window of opportunity to restore the PS to its former grandeur. Assuming that Macron's coalition is in the opening throes of its own implosion — after all, the incumbent president can't seek reelection — the PS elite thinks that it is naturally positioned as a receptacle of the progressive wing of the president's party. A reinforced PS would then enjoy the critical mass to reimpose itself over Mélenchon and his supporters.

But a Glucksmann-led PS restoration would likely aggravate the French left's worrying electoral problems. Through the Macron years, the Left has scored important successes in urban France, from Paris to the next-biggest cities like Lyon, Marseille, and Grenoble. Arriving just shy of qualification for the runoff in the last two presidential campaigns, Mélenchon's "coalition" has essentially brought together middle class, progressive urban residents (the type of people now geared to support Glucksmann in the EU elections), and working-class voters in the near-suburbs. But it has struggled beyond these sectors, notably in less diverse working-class areas in rural and peri-urban France. A quintessential representative of France's savvy technocratic elite, it's hard to imagine a Glucksmann-inspired Parti Socialiste breaking out of that bind. What's more, his cool progressivism has little to offer to the ties that Mélenchon has been able to build in the multiethnic working class of the major urban centers.

Child of the Establishment

Beyond the electoral math, Glucksmann's past likewise raises eyebrows. The son of the pundit-philosopher André Glucksmann, Raphaël is a golden child of Paris's late-twentieth-century intellectual aristocracy in its most vapid, mediocre, and holier-than-thou form. In his first political life, he fashioned himself as something of a young neo-con, working from 2009 to 2012 as [a consultant](#) for Georgia's then president Mikheil Saakashvili and arguing for a France firmly committed to NATO-led humanitarian interventionism. Glucksmann appeared at a rally in 2007 during the presidential campaign of Nicolas Sarkozy, although he now claims to have not supported the future right-wing president that year and that he was purely in attendance for [book-writing purposes](#).

Political conversions are not in and of themselves a bad thing, of course. One should only be thrilled that someone — especially a pure product of the political and cultural establishment — could move from the Right to the Left. It's all too rare in France these days. But there are reasons to doubt the extent of Glucksmann's progressive turn.

As a candidate, he is representative of the forces that want to contain the social movements that have provided some energy to French politics through the otherwise moribund Macron years. Glucksmann sells himself as a no-exceptions advocate of universal human rights — in contrast to the alleged “campism” of the Mélenchonist left, only muffled in its criticism of rights abuses and authoritarian regimes in Syria, China, or Russia. But Glucksmann's own human-rights-ism is partial at best.

Like the Parti Socialiste more broadly, [he has avoided calling out](#) the genocidal intent and effect of the Israeli state's war on Gaza. Closer to home, he has been largely inaudible in criticizing France's domestic clampdown on pro-Palestine and cease-fire organizing. Instead he has pandered to allegations of a new wave of antisemitism, designed to demonize all pro-Palestine protests, and offered a [latent endorsement](#) of the police intervention to break up the student occupation of Paris's elite Sciences Po (his own alma mater).

In all likelihood, France Insoumise will find itself behind Glucksmann and the PS this June. But the party would be wise to not dismiss this result as merely symptomatic of the particularities of the European elections. Voters may rightly wonder about France Insoumise's real position on Europe — and the lingering value of the party's threats to abandon the EU treaties — or nurture doubts about its past position on the Ukraine crisis. There are likewise highly legitimate concerns about the lack of internal democracy within France Insoumise: it should not be a matter-of-fact assumption that Mélenchon will be the force's anointed candidate in 2027, after two unsuccessful bids under its banner as well as a previous one in 2012 under the Front de Gauche ticket.

France Insoumise would benefit from not ostracizing those in its camp like François Ruffin or Clémentine Autain who want to open more to the center, albeit without ditching the democratic radicalism that explains this force's success. To its credit, the France Insoumise list led by incumbent MEP Manon Aubry did argue for a left-wing unity ticket, even if that would mean rallying behind a candidate from a different party.

But it seems like the window for a convergence like this is closing. The center-left's refusal to form an electoral alliance this time around was, ostensibly, about France Insoumise's supposedly egregious positions on international politics. Unofficially, it was about jockeying for power before the 2027 presidential election. In this regard, a Glucksmann success next weekend will only strengthen the hand of the conservative establishment within the Parti Socialiste, its belief in the

possibility of out-flanking Mélenchon, and its hope that it can use the breakup of Macronism to ride back to prominence, if not power. It's probably a fantasy. But in the face of the unceasing advance of the far right, fantasies are not without their appeal.

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P.S.

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