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# The French Groupe Union Défense and the Italian Far Right

## Part II: The Chatillon Matrix



Périne Schir

*IERES Occasional Papers, no. 27, September 2024*  
*"Transnational History of the Far Right" Series*

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# TransHistFarRight

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## Transnational History of the Far Right *A Collective Research Project led by Marlene Laruelle*

At a time when global political dynamics seem to be moving in favor of illiberal regimes around the world, this research project seeks to fill in some of the blank pages in the contemporary history of the far right, with a particular focus on the transnational dimensions of far-right movements in the broader Europe/Eurasia region.

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In the aftermath of the June 2024 European elections, the balance of power between the two far-right groups has been reversed: the Identity & Democracy (I&D) group, created in 2019 by Marine Le Pen of France and her Italian colleague Matteo Salvini, has relinquished its champion's belt to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, led by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

ECR surged by 11 seats, due to a large wave of support for the leader of the lead Italian governing party Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi, +18 seats) and the arrival of new French far-right party Reconquête! (+5 seats), offsetting the loss of the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party (-7 seats) since they were expelled from the government in October 2023. The I&D group lost 18 seats, weighed down by the heavy losses of Salvini's Italian Lega (-21 seats), which were not balanced out by the ever-increasing score of the French Rassemblement National (RN: +7 seats). According to the immediate election results, ECR and I&D had a total of 131 seats between them, arriving just short behind the left-wing Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D: 135 seats) and well behind the right-wing giant, European People's Party (EPP: 186 seats).

In an unexpected turn of events, on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the founding of the new Patriots for Europe group was announced at a press conference in Vienna by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, and former Austrian Minister of the Interior Herbert Kickl and MEP Harald Vilimsky. Soon, many of the former members of I&D joined the Patriots, including the Portuguese Chega, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Danish People's Party and the Belgium Vlaams Belang. Finally, on July 8, the French Rassemblement National and Italian Lega were announced as new members of the group, thus ending the merger process of I&D -- which no longer exists -- into the Patriots. The same day, Jordan Bardella, president of the RN, was named as the group's new president.

Today, the Patriots -- formerly I&D -- have regained the upper hand and third place in parliament with 84 seats, thanks in particular to the additions of Fidesz members, and Vox, which left ECR. More importantly, ECR and the Patriots now have a total of 162 seats, which means that a hypothetical alliance between the two far-right formations would give them a much greater say in European decisions than in the last mandate.

A formal alliance between ECR and the Patriots might appear unattainable, as it would presuppose a standardization of their strategies, including geopolitical ones, while significant divergences remain between the two groups—such as their divergent responses to Russia's war in Ukraine. However, an agreement in principle on certain key issues (notably on immigration, women's reproductive rights, or the rights of the LGBT community) would enable the two groups to coordinate their votes to move in the same direction.

Such a negotiation, if it were to take place, would presuppose the existence of effective channels of communication between the leadership of the two groups—that is, between Meloni and Bardella. The following article is set against this backdrop, revealing the existence of a network that acts as a bridge between the French and Italian far right, exemplified by Frédéric Chatillon.

While former Groupe Union Défense (GUD) leader Chatillon was the longtime adviser and communications guru of Marine Le Pen , since 2014 he has expanded his political and business operations from France into Italy—principally via his organizations Riwal Italia, Gruppo Edda, and Squadra Digitale.<sup>1</sup> His proximity to Le Pen and his growing influence in Italian far-right circles make him the ideal actor to play the role of liaison between the two factions.

## Background

Chatillon’s personal and professional life has been steeped in the French neofascist milieu for decades. His first wife, Marie d’Herbais de Thun, was a childhood friend of Marine Le Pen—and her grandfather, Marcel Chérel de la Rivière, was a longtime friend of the Front National (FN, forerunner of the RN) founder Jean-Marie Le Pen and a supporter of Prince Sixtus Henry of Bourbon-Parma, a Carlist pretender to the Spanish Throne.

These connections go even deeper with Chatillon’s current partner, Sighild Blanc : her grandfather, Robert Blanc, was a member of the Waffen-SS; and her aunt, Anne-Laure Blanc , was a member of the Groupement de Recherche et d’Études pour la Civilisation Européenne (GRECE) and Europe-Jeunesse (a Nouvelle Droite, neopagan scouting movement), and is also married to Jean-Yves Le Gallou, one of the co-founders of GRECE.

Chatillon first met Marine Le Pen in the early 1990s while she was studying law at the Panthéon-Assas University in Paris.<sup>2</sup> At the time, Chatillon was leader (from 1991 to 1995) of GUD, a violent, extreme-right student association.

### Historical Overview of GUD

GUD was founded in December 1968 by law students at Panthéon-Assas University. The organization was particularly active during the 1970s, launching numerous violent confrontations against left-wing student organizations. However, GUD moved further toward the margins until it officially self-dissolved in 1981.

In 1985, GUD helped found Troisième Voie (TV), a reformation of Jean-Gilles Malliarakis’ Mouvement Nationaliste Révolutionnaire (MNR). The choice of name for the new movement was linked to the many contacts that Malliarakis and the MNR had developed over the years with Italian nationalist-revolutionaries, including the main leaders of the Terza Posizione organization, such as Roberto Fiore and Gabriele Adinolfi.

GUD finally broke with TV in 1988, and then moved closer to the FN. From 1993 onwards—while Chatillon was GUD’s leader (1991–1995)—GUD took part in various actions with the FN’s youth section, the FNJ (Front National Jeunesse). Samuel Maréchal, father of Marion Maréchal, a former TV member and FNJ leader, tried to use GUD to counter Mégret, who had just left the FN, taking half its cadres with him. However, GUD opted instead to join Mégret and his Mouvement National Républicain, and formed the latter’s security force in 1997.

<sup>1</sup> As discussed later, Squadra Digitale is the Italian branch of the French political communications firm E-Politic. In turn, E-Politic is the successor of Chatillon’s Riwal France, which was dissolved in 2014 following prosecution for financial improprieties.

<sup>2</sup> “Le ‘nouveau FN’ de Marine Le Pen,” *Le Monde*, September 6, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2011/09/06/le-nouveau-fn-de-marine-le-pen\\_1568382\\_1471069.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2011/09/06/le-nouveau-fn-de-marine-le-pen_1568382_1471069.html).

In 1998, GUD distanced itself from Mégret and formed Unité Radicale<sup>3</sup> with another splinter group, Oeuvre Française, with its leader and founder Pierre Sidos. Following the failed July 14, 2002 attack on President Jacques Chirac by Unité Radicale member Maxime Brunerie, the movement was dissolved by the Ministry of the Interior on August 6, 2002. After UR's collapse in 2002, GUD went dormant. Unité Radicale's leaders and activists then dispersed, and some of them (notably Fabrice Robert and Philippe Vardon) founded the Bloc Identitaire in 2002. Between 2004 and 2009, GUD militants spent several years with the Rassemblement Étudiant de Droite (RED), a hard-right student movement.

On October 28, 2009, the newspaper *Minute* announced the reactivation of GUD, scheduled for the end of the year. GUD was indeed relaunched in 2010 by former RED leader Édouard Klein. In 2012, the presidency of this 2nd-generation GUD passed to Logan Djian—nicknamed the “Duce” and featuring a tattoo of the SS Charlemagne Division crest on his arm. In November 2016, Djian organized a conference entitled “Réveil des Nations” in Nanterre, attended by members of the Greek Golden Dawn party, the Italian CasaPound—including Sébastien Manificat, a.k.a. Sébastien de Boëldieu, CasaPound's ambassador—Spanish Movimiento Social Republicano (MSR) and Liga Joven, and other smaller European far-right groups.<sup>4</sup> Djian and GUD also attended the 1st Paneuropa Conference in Kyiv in April 2017, organized by European Reconquista groups. Manificat also attended the Paneuropa Conference in Kyiv. The 2nd-generation GUD remained active only until December 2017, when Djian was incarcerated for aggravated violence against a photographer during a left-wing demonstration.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, in May 2017, just a month after the Paneuropa Conference, GUD created Bastion Social (BS) with the help of Manificat. When Djian entered prison in December 2017, BS took over. BS leader Steven Bissuel immediately forged ties with CasaPound, in particular with its main ideologue, Gabriele Adinolfi, who was invited several times in 2018 to BS premises to give lectures.<sup>6</sup>

But the links go beyond a few courtesy visits. CasaPound has a clear interest in the development of BS: to have a partner organization in France. For this, they need a large, structured and organized movement with which to interact, not an elusive and vague underground movement. When CasaPound helped found BS in 2017, it gave them the keys to their own success: a new way of doing things, creating social events and opening bars and related venues. To develop these ventures, financial resources were needed. The Italians, for their part, have succeeded in setting up a veritable empire. In an in-depth investigation into the financing of CasaPound, the weekly news magazine *L'Espresso* revealed the existence of a vast entrepreneurial network: restaurants, clothing chains, barbershops, communications agencies, publishing houses, real estate companies, and more.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Lebourg, “L'Histoire d'Unité Radicale,” *Fragments sur les temps présents*, January 3, 2010, <https://tempspresents.com/2010/01/03/nicolas-lebourg-histoire-unite-radicale/>.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Dova, “Le jour où extrême droite et néonazis européens se sont réunis à Nanterre”, *Le Nouvel Obs*, December 16, 2014, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-politique/20141213.RUE7016/le-jour-ou-extreme-droite-et-neonazis-europeens-se-sont-reunis-a-nanterre.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Antoine Sillières, “Logan Djian, patron du Gud fiché S et voisin de Collomb,” *Lyon Capitale*, February 4, 2018, <https://www.lyoncapitale.fr/politique/logan-djian-patron-du-gud-fiche-s-et-voisin-de-collomb>.

<sup>6</sup> Marine Turchi and Matthieu Suc, “‘Bastion social’: Les secrets du nouveau GUD,” *Mediapart* (news site), June 5, 2018, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/050618/bastion-social-les-secrets-du-nouveau-gud?onglet=full>.

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Nicolini, “Tutti i soldi di Casa Pound,” *Centro Documentazione Giorgio Bertani*, March 10, 2021, <https://www.centrodocumentazionebertani.org/2021/03/10/tutti-i-soldi-di-casa-pound/>.



Members of Bastion Social are trying to emulate this by opening businesses, notably the “Made in England” clothing boutique in Lyon, and the “London Spirit” brand owned by GUD leaders Steven Bissuel and Logan Djian. Founded in 2016, the brand also notably sells licensed Pivert clothing, another brand owned by CasaPound member Francesco Polacchi, who is also a founder of the far-right student union Blocco Studentesco.<sup>8</sup> Down the same street in Lyon, the same Logan Djian runs Point d’Enclage, a tattoo parlor where Daniele Castellani, who was a CasaPound candidate in Rome’s municipal elections in 2013 and 2016, also works.<sup>9</sup> Their elders, the first-generation GUD, had already forged financial ties between CasaPound, and the GUD network Bastion Social was dissolved by government decree in April 2019. However, its dissolution took place only on paper, and the group re-formed the same year, in a decentralized and more local form. Whereas Bastion Social previously had six local chapters, there were around 15 after its supposed dissolution in 2019.

While Bastion Social did well in Lyon (France’s second-largest city), it never managed to establish itself firmly in Paris. GUD’s continued presence in Paris was then ensured by the splinter group Zouaves Paris, created in April 2018 by a neo-Nazi militant, Marc de Cacqueray-Valm n ier, a.k.a. Marc Hassin.<sup>10</sup> Under his leadership, the Zouaves have collaborated closely with Bissuel’s Bastion Social and expanded their network internationally. In December 2019, Cacqueray-Valm n ier took part in a kick-boxing championship in Ukraine. During the trip, he met members of the Ukrainian far right, including Olena Semenyaka, spokeswoman for the Azov movement—the civilian political movement of the Azov Battalion, a self-funded neo-Nazi Ukrainian volunteer militia—and international secretary of the National Corps. He also attended physical training at one of the Azov training bases, and took part in the Ukrainian Nazi black metal festival, Asgardsrei.<sup>11</sup> In January 2022, the Zouaves were dissolved by government decree and their leader, Cacqueray-Valm n ier, was sentenced to one year in prison for acts of violence against anti-fascist activists.

In November 2022, at a time when GUD’s main offshoots, Bastion Social and Zouaves Paris, had been dissolved, far-right activists announced the reactivation of GUD on November 6, 2022, the day after Jordan Bardella was appointed president of the National Rally.<sup>12</sup>

It was within the GUD milieu that Chatillon forged a network of friends and allies that would follow him throughout his various business and political ventures (nicknamed the “GUD connection” by the French media). Two members of this network stand out, both of whom also befriended Marine Le Pen during their time together in college: Jildaz Mah  O’Chinal and Axel Loustau.

Jildaz Mah  O’Chinal has been Fr d ric Chatillon’s right-hand man for many years. As students, they founded the Marteau de Thor association, which specialized in combat sports.<sup>13</sup> Together, they were active in GUD, which was headed by Chatillon in the 1990s. Together with Alain Soral and Philippe

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<sup>8</sup> “Pivert, la marque fasciste de CasaPound pour pigeons nationalistes,” *La Horde* (website), December 15, 2017, <https://lahorde.info/pivert-la-marque-fasciste-de-casapound-pour-pigeons-nationalistes>.

<sup>9</sup> Turchi and Suc, “ ‘Bastion social.’ ”

<sup>10</sup> Florian Loisy, Gwena l Bourdon, and Jean-Michel D cugis, “Enqu te sur Marc de Cacqueray-Valmenier, le sulfureux chef pr sum  des Zouaves Paris,” *Le Parisien*, February 8, 2022, <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/ultra-droite-qui-est-marc-de-cacqueray-valmenier-chef-presume-des-zouaves-paris-08-02-2022-TBCYP3EIPBA67GY2R7BR3ICAOE.php?ts=1720099985284>.

<sup>11</sup> S bastien Bourdon, “At Ukraine’s Asgardsrei, a French Connection,” *Bellingcat* (news site), May 1, 2020, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/01/at-ukraines-asgardsrei-a-french-connection/>.

<sup>12</sup> Chlo  Juhel, “Jordan Bardella et le retour du GUD,” *Le courrier de l’atlas* (magazine), November 8, 2022, <https://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/jordan-bardella-et-le-retour-du-gud/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Extr me droite: Une lettre de Jildaz Mah  O’Chinal,” *Mediapart* (news site), November 7, 2015, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/071115/extreme-droite-une-lettre-de-jildaz-mahe-ochinal>.



Péninque (another GUD member), O'Chinal founded the anti-Semitic conspiracy group *Egalité et Réconciliation* in 2007. Chatillon and O'Chinal accompanied Marine Le Pen on visits to Italy, notably in 2011. O'Chinal assisted Chatillon in organizing these trips, on which she met Mario Borghezio of the Italian far-right party *Lega Nord*, and a friend of the notorious terrorist Stefano delle Chiaie; and another in October 2011, during which she met Assunta Almirante, the widow of Giorgio Almirante, longtime leader of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*—a neofascist political party formed in 1946 by supporters of the former dictator Benito Mussolini. Furthermore, O'Chinal's wife, Florence Lagarde, was also the president of Marine Le Pen's microparty *Jeanne* (in reference to Joan of Arc), established in 2010. They both moved to Rome in 2014. He was marketing director of *Riwal*—a political communications company founded in 1995 by Chatillon and Loustau which became the main supplier of campaign material of the *Front National* from 2011 onwards—and signed *Riwal Italia's* articles of association when it was founded.<sup>14</sup>

Axel Loustau was also active in GUD in the 1990s under the leadership of Frédéric Chatillon. Accompanied by Chatillon, Axel Loustau met Léon Degrelle, former leader of the Belgian *Waffen-SS*, in 1992 to pay tribute to him. His father, Fernand Loustau, a friend of Marine Le Pen's father Jean-Marie Le Pen, was a former paratrooper and member of the far-right terrorist group, *l'Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS)*. Loustau Senior was also a former shareholder in the *FN* newspaper *National-Hebdo*, and set up the security company *Normandy SA* in 1977 as a service provider to the *FN*. He was also elected to the *Ile-de-France* Regional Council for *FN* in 2015.<sup>15</sup> Since January 2022, he has been the treasurer of *Jeanne*. Axel Loustau's *Agos* finance company is suspected of having bailed out 2nd-generation GUD leader Logan Djian, who had been indicted and remanded in custody for assaulting and torturing GUD's former leader, Édouard Klein.<sup>16</sup>

After leaving the GUD leadership in 1995, Chatillon founded the political communications company *Riwal*. The firm had a checkered history, involving shady business dealings with a variety of unsavory characters, including Syrian dictators Hafez and Bashar al-Assad. Chatillon's links to the Syrian regime extended back to his time leading GUD—the group received funding from Hafez al-Assad, who considered Chatillon an entry point for Western extremist organizations. One of *Riwal's* first foreign operations was *Riwal Syria*, which produced and disseminated pro-Assad propaganda. Chatillon's links to the regime were so close that, following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Chatillon participated in a Paris rally supporting Assad in October of that year (the rally was also noted for the frequent use of Nazi salutes among the demonstrators).<sup>17</sup>

Yet *Riwal* is best known for its work on behalf of Marine Le Pen and the *Front National*. The company regularly provided support for the party's campaigns—including printing campaign kits and producing other materials—and by the time of the 2012 presidential election, *Riwal* was essentially the leading force in Marine Le Pen's campaign. However, in 2014, the relationship between *Riwal* and the *FN* came under intense scrutiny from the French justice system, which accused the company of

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<sup>14</sup> Turchi and Suc, " 'Bastion social.' "

<sup>15</sup> Maxime Vaudano, Jérémie Baruch, Vincent Nouvet, and Pierre Januel, "La 'GUD connexion' toujours présente dans les coulisses de la campagne de Marine Le Pen," *Le Monde*, January 28, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/01/28/la-gud-connexion-toujours-presente-dans-les-coulisses-de-la-campagne-de-marine-le-pen\\_6111320\\_4355770.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/01/28/la-gud-connexion-toujours-presente-dans-les-coulisses-de-la-campagne-de-marine-le-pen_6111320_4355770.html).

<sup>16</sup> "Mort de l'ex rugbyman Federico Martin Aramburu: L'itinéraire violent du principal suspect, Loïk Le Priol," *Radio France*, March 23, 2022, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/mort-de-l-ex-rugbyman-federico-martin-aramburu-l-itineraire-violent-du-principal-suspect-loik-le-priol-6582476>.

<sup>17</sup> Laure Siegel, "Frédéric Chatillon, l'imprimeur radical du Front national," *Les Inrockuptibles* (magazine), April 25, 2012, <https://www.lesinrocks.com/actu/frederic-chatillon-limprimeur-radical-du-front-national-19951-25-04-2012/>.

misuse of corporate assets and misappropriation of funds. Among the allegations was that Marine Le Pen had directed her party to purchase expensive equipment from Riwal, and then claimed the purchases as a campaign expense to be reimbursed from the government. For example, the obligatory “campaign kits” were purchased by candidates for approximately €16,000 each and could be written off by those who won at least 5% of the vote. In total, it was estimated that Riwal made more than €8.9 million as part of the scheme.<sup>18</sup>

Following the trial, conviction, and dissolution of Riwal France, Chatillon relocated to Italy in October 2014.<sup>19</sup> He bought a residence near Palazzo Venezia in Rome—where Mussolini often spoke before crowds of supporters—and quickly began to extend his business ventures in Italy.

## Business Ventures in Italy

Between CasaPound and GUD, a small group of French people based in Rome act as a link: Sébastien Manificat; Thibaut Baladier, a.k.a. Xavier Eman, who has been a contributor to the Nouvelle Droite magazine *Éléments* since the late 1990s as well as a representative of Zentropa, a far-right support network linking France and Italy; Arnaud Naudin, a.k.a. Arnaud Menu, former editor-in-chief of Novopress (the Bloc Identitaire news site), and head of Radio Libertés, an offshoot of far-right website TV-Libertés.<sup>20</sup>

### *Riwal Italia*

Immediately upon settling in Italy, Chatillon established a new branch of his business, Riwal Italia, with fellow GUD alumnus O’Chinal. In fact, it was O’Chinal—not Chatillon—who signed the company’s deed of incorporation when it was established on October 8, 2014 (despite the fact that the company was headquartered in Chatillon’s apartment).

### *Restaurants*

In 2015, Chatillon and O’Chinal established a restaurant in Rome called Le Carré Français; in 2019, O’Chinal was replaced as co-owner by Eric Lorio, one of Marine Le Pen’s ex-husbands.

Also in 2015, Baladier and members of CasaPound (their lawyer, Domenico Di Tullio; and Chiara Del Fiacco, the romantic partner of Sébastien Manificat) set up Carré Monti, a bistro frequented by CasaPound members and which markets some Carré Français products. The Carré Monti team also includes French far-right activist Pierre Simonneau, who teamed up with the wife of CasaPound chef Gianluca Iannone in the Osteria Angelino restaurant chain.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marine Turchi and Mathilde Mathieu, “La «GUD connection» tient les finances de Marine Le Pen”,

*Mediapart*, October 17, 2013, L’affaire du financement des campagnes 2012 du RN | Mediapart  
<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/151013/la-gud-connection-tient-les-finances-de-marine-le-pen>

<sup>19</sup> In 2019, Chatillon was convicted for fraud in a similar 2012 scheme for Le Pen’s microparty Jeanne. He was sentenced to 30 months in prison and given a €250,000 fine. However, these penalties were overturned upon appeal. Samuel Laurent, “Le FN et plusieurs de ses cadres condamnés à une amende pour ‘recel d’abus de biens sociaux,’” *Le Monde*, June 17, 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/06/17/le-fn-et-plusieurs-de-ses-cadres-condamnes-a-une-amende-pour-recel-d-abus-de-biens-sociaux\\_6043131\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/06/17/le-fn-et-plusieurs-de-ses-cadres-condamnes-a-une-amende-pour-recel-d-abus-de-biens-sociaux_6043131_3224.html).

<sup>20</sup> Turchi and Suc, “‘Bastion social.’”

<sup>21</sup> Turchi et Suc.

Chatillon's daughter, Kerridwen, named for a pagan Celtic goddess, is known to work in the Carré Français restaurant and also frequents the Carré Monti bistro. She is the ex-girlfriend of RN leader Jordan Bardella and is the goddaughter of Loustau.

Since then, Jildaz Mahé O'Chinal has expanded his business. In June 2017, Carré Français launched a second restaurant in Rome, l'Éphémère. Three months later, he created (also in Rome) la Romanée, which sells French gourmet products.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Gruppo Edda***

In May 2021, Chatillon worked with Gian Luigi Ferretti and Massimo Corsaro to establish a holding firm called Gruppo Edda (apparently named after Mussolini's daughter) in Milan. Ferretti is a former member of MSI and a secretary to Mirko Tremaglia, who was a cofounder of MSI and a minister in former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's government from 2001–2006. Furthermore, Corsaro was also a member of MSI and served as a MEP from 2008–18 (for AN, PdL, and FdI). After the founding of Gruppo Edda, Ferretti, along with Chatillon's romantic partner, Sighild Blanc, were its legal representatives—but in October 2021, Ferretti sold his shares to Chatillon, who is now the majority shareholder.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that Ferretti's role was largely to lend his name to the venture in place of Chatillon's, so that the latter could avoid being named in the company's corporate structure in order to escape the notice of the anti-money-laundering police—to whom he is well known, particularly after being convicted in France in 2023 of fraud, embezzlement, and money laundering,<sup>24</sup> as well as ever since his appearance in the Panama Papers in 2016. Despite these efforts, Gruppo Edda caught the attention of Italy's anti-money-laundering police in 2021 and was associated to Riwal France and Axel Loustau.

## **Political Activity in Italy**

### ***Links to CasaPound***

Through Ferretti, Chatillon has also developed a close relationship with the neofascist movement and former political party, CasaPound. Ferretti regularly frequents the Cutty Sark, a bar in Rome founded by CasaPound president Gianluca Iannone and has had business relationships with London-based Davide Olla, the right-hand man of neofascist Roberto Fiore.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Turchi and Suc.

<sup>23</sup> Jérémie Baruch, Vincent Nouvet et Maxime Vaudano, "E-Politic: Les liaisons dangereuses du prestataire préféré du RN avec l'ultradroite identitaire," *Le Monde*, January 28, 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/01/28/e-politic-les-liaisons-dangereuses-du-prestataire-prefere-du-rn-avec-l-ultradroite-identitaire\\_6111359\\_4355770.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/01/28/e-politic-les-liaisons-dangereuses-du-prestataire-prefere-du-rn-avec-l-ultradroite-identitaire_6111359_4355770.html).

<sup>24</sup> Christophe Gueugneau et Marine Turchi, "Condamné pour escroquerie, Frédéric Chatillon reste derrière la communication de Marine Le Pen," *Mediapart* (news site), March 15, 2023, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/150323/condamne-pour-escroquerie-frederic-chatillon-reste-derriere-la-communication-de-marine-le-pen>.

<sup>25</sup> Fiore was among the founders of Terza Posizione in 1978, and is the founder and leader of Forza Nuova (est. 1997). He went into exile in the UK in the early 1980s to avoid arrest for his connection to the Bologna train bombing of August 2, 1980, in which 85 were killed and more than 200 were injured. He set up several businesses (including London Orange) while in exile in London, which he turned over to Davide Olla after returning to Italy in 1997. In 2014, a French subsidiary of London Orange was headquartered in the GUD premises belonging to Loustau.

These links also extend to Chatillon. He is a regular at Iannone's Rome-based restaurant chain Osteria Angelino and has also been spotted at social events organized by Pivert,<sup>26</sup> a far-right clothing brand founded by Francesco Polacchi, who is also a leader of CasaPound and head of far-right publisher Altaforte Edizioni.<sup>27</sup> In June 2020, Chatillon participated in demonstrations organized by CasaPound against covid-19 public health measures, and he is also known to be close to Sebastien Manificat.

### ***E-Politic and Squadra Digitale***

Since moving to Italy in 2014, Chatillon has taken on the RN's current social media guru, Paul-Alexandre Martin, as his protégé. Martin was previously a member of the Front National's youth organization, Front National de la Jeunesse (now Génération Nation), working in press and internal communications in 2011 and then serving as second-in-command of the organization in 2012.<sup>28</sup> Following the dissolution of Chatillon's Riwal France in 2014, it was re-established as E-Politic<sup>29</sup> under the leadership of Martin. Martin has become part of the restricted circle centered on Chatillon. This circle brings together members of the old GUD connection, such as Loustau and RN MEP Jean-Lin Lacapelle, with younger members emerging out of the RN's youth organizations, including Martin and his former roommate Julien Rochedy. Rochedy was president of Front National de la Jeunesse from 2012–2014 and has close ties to Loïk Le Priol, the GUD member who was jailed in 2022 for the 2015 torture of former GUD president Édouard Klein.

E-Politic was at the helm of the social media strategy for Marine Le Pen's 2022 presidential campaign.<sup>30</sup> While the firm's financial statements are not public, Le Monde has estimated that it has received at least €1.8 million from RN since 2015.<sup>31</sup> In advance of the 2019 European Parliament elections, the company provided various services for Jordan Bardella's campaign, including managing digital communications and speechwriting, for which it charged more than €400,000. Likewise, in 2020 it charged the Identity and Democracy group more than €486,000 for services such as "community management," "video postproduction," and newsletter editing.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, other communications firms linked to Chatillon have amassed large sums for their services for RN and ID. Before its liquidation in 2020, Chatillon owned 35% of the audiovisual company Stream on Fire—which was paid €69,000 in 2019 for streaming campaign events featuring

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<sup>26</sup> "Pivert, la marque fasciste de CasaPound pour pigeons nationalistes," *La Horde* (website).

<sup>27</sup> Massimo Pinca, "Turin Fair Kicks out Neo-Fascist Publisher after Protests," *Reuters*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/italy-books-auschwitz-idINKCN1SF12Y/>.

<sup>28</sup> Martin also ran for the European Parliament in 2014 and French National Assembly in 2012 and 2017, although he failed to win a seat. See Baruch, Nouvet, and Vaudano, "E-Politic."

<sup>29</sup> Chatillon and Loustau hold a 45 percent share in the company but have no formal connection to the firm. Their ownership is channeled through their holding companies, Groupe Erer (Chatillon) and Financière Wagram (Loustau). See Vaudano, Baruch, Nouvet, and Januel, "La 'GUD connexion' toujours présente dans les coulisses de la campagne de Marine Le Pen."

<sup>30</sup> Financial statements find that E-Politic was paid €770,000 for its work—with funds obtained by the RN via loans from Hungary. See Andrea Palladino, "Gli affari dell'estrema destra francese a Roma," *The Post Internazionale* (news site), March 26, 2023, *Il cuore della finanza nera francese trova casa a Roma* (tpi.it), [https://www.tpi.it/politica/affari-destra-francese-le-pen-a-roma-20230326994984/#google\\_vignette](https://www.tpi.it/politica/affari-destra-francese-le-pen-a-roma-20230326994984/#google_vignette); and Baruch, Nouvet, and Vaudano, "E-Politic."

<sup>31</sup> Vaudano, Baruch, Nouvet, and Januel, "La 'GUD connexion' toujours présente dans les coulisses de la campagne de Marine Le Pen."

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Januel, Elsa Trujillo, "Deux agences de com' du RN désavouées en appel pour leurs factures de campagne," *La Lettre* (Paris newspaper), January 4, 2024, [https://www.lalettre.fr/fr/action-publique\\_partis-et-elections/2024/01/04/deux-agences-de-com--du-rn-desavouees-en-appel-pour-leurs-factures-de-campagne,110134620-art](https://www.lalettre.fr/fr/action-publique_partis-et-elections/2024/01/04/deux-agences-de-com--du-rn-desavouees-en-appel-pour-leurs-factures-de-campagne,110134620-art).

Le Pen and Bardella, as well as another €60,000 from the European Parliament for video presentations for the RN's former parliamentary group, Europe of Nations and Freedom. Likewise, Chatillon's partner, Sighild Blanc, received more than €100,000 from the European Parliament for vague "printing" services<sup>33</sup> provided by her company Unanime (a subcontractor of Riwal) for the ID group.<sup>34</sup>

In 2017, E-Politic established an Italian branch, Squadra Digitale, headquartered at via della Scrofa 39 in Rome—the same address that houses the FdI headquarters.<sup>35</sup> In August 2021, Squadra Digitale moved its headquarters 100 meters away onto via D'Ascanio.<sup>36</sup> In December 2021, the company Couesnon (co-owned by Chatillon and Blanc) spent €2 million on an apartment in the same building, and in early 2022 Gruppo Edda also moved its headquarters to this building.<sup>37</sup> Martin named Laurent Lichty (a.k.a. Alex Vril) as secretary to manage the operations of Squadra Digitale. Lichty previously worked for E-Politic as a photographer/videographer following Marine Le Pen's 2017 campaign, and his Facebook presence has revealed his anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi sympathies.<sup>38</sup>

Although Chatillon and Martin have publicly denied any activity in Italian politics, a 2017 exposé in the Italian news magazine *L'Espresso* suggested that Chatillon's Italian businesses—particularly Squadra Digitale—were working with FdI and CasaPound.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

Chatillon is expanding his influence in Italy at a time when the Italian and French far right are undergoing a significant transformation. In France, the RN's traditional place at the head of the far right is being challenged by Reconquête!, founded by media personality Éric Zemmour. In Italy, FdI and the League are locked in an uneasy alliance—with splits quickly emerging as they navigate their roles as coalition partners.

Reflected on the wider European scene, these splits are representative of a larger division within the far right regarding its priorities and geopolitical position. On the one hand, Le Pen and Salvini represent a faction that has traditionally maintained close ties—including financial ties—with Russia, and has cast doubt on their support for NATO and their alliance with the US. On the other

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<sup>33</sup> List of contracts awarded in 2020 with a value greater than €15,000, Identity and Democracy, European Parliament website, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/contracts-and-grants/files/public-procurement/contracts-awarded/pg/en-contracts-awarded-id-2020.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Vaudano, Baruch, Nouvet, and Januel, "La 'GUD connexion' toujours présente dans les coulisses de la campagne de Marine Le Pen."

<sup>35</sup> Martin has also listed his personal address at the same location. See Vaudano, Baruch, Nouvet, and Januel; and Palladino, "Gli affari dell'estrema destra francese a Roma."

<sup>36</sup> Palladino, "Gli affari dell'estrema destra francese a Roma."

<sup>37</sup> Palladino.

<sup>38</sup> During the April 2017 campaign, the French news site Rue89 published an exposé detailing Lichty's Facebook network—including various anti-Semitic cartoons he liked and neo-Nazi pages he followed. The report also surmised that his pseudonym, "Alex Vril," may be based on the Vril Society, a circle within the pre-Third Reich Nazi group known as the Thule Society. Nolwenn Le Blevenec and Juliette Montilly, "Le jeune photographe de Marine Le Pen qui like le nazisme," *Le Nouvel Obs*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/sur-le-radar/20170425.OBS8523/le-jeune-photographe-de-marine-le-pen-qui-like-le-nazisme.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Andrea Palladino, Giovanni Tizian, and Vergine, "Tutti i soldi e le società di CasaPound e Forza Nuova," *L'Espresso*, November 8, 2017, <https://lespresso.it/c/inchieste/2017/11/7/tutti-i-soldi-e-le-societa-di-casapound-e-forza-nuova-cosi-si-finanziano-i-partiti-neofascisti/22037>.

hand, Meloni and the FdI represent a current within the far right that is strongly anti-Russian and pro-NATO/US.

Interestingly, Chatillon currently appears to straddle this division. Chatillon has long been a close associate and adviser to Marine Le Pen—and there is currently no indication that he plans to abandon her in favor of Zemmour. However, in Italy, Chatillon's E-Politic/Squadra Digitale has developed stronger links with FdI.

In addition, the rapid expansion of Chatillon's business empire in Italy following his relocation there in 2014 suggests the continued growth of his money-laundering operations. In particular, the opening of bars and restaurants operated by his associates (such as O'Chinal and Lorio) and the launch of the holding company Gruppo Edda (again, nominally established by Ferretti and Blanc rather than by Chatillon himself), provide textbook examples of attempts to evade the law and surreptitiously move money undetected.

Furthermore, all signs point to the use these illicit funds to build out the far-right messaging apparatus based around Squadra Digitale/E-Politic, to the benefit of the Fratelli d'Italia and CasaPound. The proximity of Squadra Digitale's operations to the FdI headquarters (first in the same building, now a stone's throw away) is no mere coincidence, and Chatillon's close links to the CasaPound network make the absence of any collaboration highly unlikely.