

# Gaullist presidential candidate Sarkozy allies with Italy's post-fascists

“Show me your friends, and I will tell you who you are”

Peter Schwarz  
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If one judges the French Gaullist presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy on the basis of the above-cited Greek proverb, he emerges as a politician with firm links to extreme right-wing forces within European politics. One of Sarkozy's closest political friends is Gianfranco Fini, the head of Italy's post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance—NA).

In 2005, the Italian translation of Nicolas Sarkozy's book, *The Republic, Religion, Hope*, appeared with a preface written by the leader of Italy's right wing, and this year Fini repeated the favour with a preface to the Italian edition of *Testimony*, Sarkozy's latest tome. In both editions, Fini's prefaces are announced in large print on the title page of the books.

Fini lavishes praise on the leader of the Gaullist Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). He describes Sarkozy as a man who understands how “to actualise ideas in daily life and apply his experience as cabinet minister to the major global problems with which he is confronted: immigration, public order, administrative reform, burning suburbs and the crises of prominent enterprises such as [the French-based power generation and transport company] Alstom.”

The newspaper of the NA, *IL Secolo d'Italia* (The Italian Century), notes a close intellectual affinity between Sarkozy and Fini, and writes of “a certain symbiosis of politics, character and generations.”

In return, Sarkozy has responded with his own expressions of admiration. In the summer of 2006, he held an extensive discussion with Fini in Rome. He turned down an invitation to attend the NA's congress in February this year because of conflicting obligations, but nevertheless sent greetings to the conference in which he enthusiastically extended his support to the

Italian right.

Sarkozy expressed his “very best wishes” to “dear Gianfranco” for “the successful organisation and execution of this meeting, which I am convinced will once again confirm the fact that the NA represents one of the most important constructive forces on the Italian political landscape.”

Sarkozy conveyed his greetings to “all sympathisers of the NA,” who, “to the extent they have followed you on the way to renewal, have enabled the NA to become what it is today—an organisation which, together with Forza Italia [Berlusconi's “Forward Italy”], embodies the spirit of the modern and innovative right.”

Sarkozy continued: “The courage to fight against preconceived ideas together with intellectual independence, which enables you to dare to promote innovative solutions—these are two features that enable the Italian right to stand up to the Unione [Italy's governing centre-left coalition led by Romano Prodi] as a people's movement, which we must absolutely cultivate in order to remain the most important force for the modernisation of political life.”

Sarkozy's gushing effusions of sympathy and support for the Alleanza Nazionale is significant on a number of counts.

The NA is the direct successor organisation to the Italian Social Movement (MSI), the neo-fascist party that for decades during the post-war period formed the basis for the recruitment of long-time supporters of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Fini, now 55 years old, was for an extended period the right-hand man of MSI leader Giorgio Almirante.

In 1977, Fini became president of the MSI youth organisation, and in 1987, he succeeded Almirante as

leader of the MSI. In 1994, as a minister in the first government led by Silvio Berlusconi, Fini praised Mussolini as the “greatest statesman of the twentieth century.”

Since then, Fini has publicly dissociated himself from Italy’s fascist past on several occasions and sought to cloak the NA in the mantle of a more moderate form of national conservatism. This does not apply to the party as whole, however, which still bears the fascist symbol of a flame in the colours of the tricolour on its coat of arms. Pictures of the Duce continue to adorn the walls of the party’s headquarters, and the party includes numbers of skinhead neo-fascists as members.

On a European level, the NA works with right-wing nationalist forces. The party’s European Parliament deputies belong to the parliamentary group Union for a Europe of the Nations, which includes various right-wing nationalist parties that are, in the main, opposed to the European Union.

Among the parties active in the Union for a Europe of the Nations are the notoriously racist Italian Lega Nord (Northern League); the right-wing Polish ruling parties Law and Justice, Samoobrona and the League of Polish Families; the right-wing Danish People’s Party; and the nationalist French Rassemblement pour la France, established by Charles Pasqua.

Sarkozy’s UMP, on the other hand, is officially aligned with the European People’s Party, which includes Europe’s major conservative and Christian Democratic parties, including Germany’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU).

There is nothing accidental in Sarkozy’s flirtation with Italy’s post-fascists. As the son of a Hungarian nobleman, Sarkozy had to fight his way to the top of the UMP and win the party’s presidential candidacy in a sometimes bitter struggle against the Gaullist establishment.

He is attempting to develop new mechanisms of rule for the French bourgeoisie under conditions in which France has been repeatedly shaken in recent years by militant social protests, while the influence of the French Socialist Party, Communist Party and trade unions—which up to now have contained these movements of working class opposition and thereby propped up the bourgeois order—has declined.

In his campaign for this spring’s presidential

election, Sarkozy has sought to combine authoritarian appeals for the strengthening of the state apparatus with populist demagoguery aimed at frustrated layers of the petty bourgeoisie and confused sections of workers. In so doing, he seeks to draw on the traditions and ideology of fascism.



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