

French police linked to far-right murder of rugby player Federico Aramburu

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6 May 2022

Ex-international rugby player Federico Martin Aramburu was shot dead by far-right activists Loïk Le Priol and Romain Bouvier in the early hours of March 19 on an avenue in central Paris. However, French media have downplayed this horrific murder, which came as polls showed neo-fascist presidential candidate Marine Le Pen close to winning the April 2022 elections.

There is mounting evidence of close ties between the killers and French security forces. On April 20, four days before the run-off between Le Pen and sitting president Emmanuel Macron, French rugby website quinzemondial.com reported: “At the home of Loïk Le Priol, objects with police insignia, among others, were found. Moreover, a policeman of the Regional Directorate of the Judiciary Police reportedly passed part of the evening with Le Priol and Bouvier, before the altercation and the gunshots.”

The course of events is well-documented. At Le Mabillon bar, Le Priol and Bouvier attacked Aramburu and his companion, ex-rugby player Shaun Hegarty, for trying to defend an unidentified homeless man. Eyewitnesses said that after the homeless man asked for a cigarette, Bouvier and Le Priol called him “subhuman” and launched a racist diatribe against him. Aramburu and Hegarty asked the pair to be more respectful, to which they responded, “We’re at home here,” and “You can’t tell us what to do.”

Le Priol and Bouvier then repeatedly struck Hegarty and Aramburu in view of the bar’s security cameras, before staff intervened and broke up the altercation.

The two ex-rugby players left the bar, stopping at a hotel on Boulevard Saint Germain. When they exited the hotel, a car pulled up alongside them driven by Le Priol’s girlfriend, Lyson Rochemir. Bouvier and Le Priol exited the vehicle and both fired multiple shots at

Aramburu and Hegarty. Aramburu was hit four times in the back and declared dead at the scene.

After shooting Aramburu, the assailants fled. Rochemir and Bouvier were found and arrested by French police in the days after the attack. Le Priol was picked up by Hungarian police in Záhony, a village on the border with Ukraine, on March 23. He told police he had military training and “was going to Ukraine to fight.” Military equipment was found in his vehicle. Le Priol was returned to France on March 31.

All three of Aramburu’s assailants remain in custody. Rochemir is charged with complicity to murder, Bouvier and Le Priol with illegal possession of weapons and murder. Le Priol’s lawyer successfully petitioned for his client’s initial hearing to be held behind closed doors, claiming his client’s family had received “death threats ... from the Basque community, the extreme left and the ultra-left.”

Aramburu was born in La Plata, Argentina to a family of Basque origin and was often associated with the Basque Country by rugby fans. He is survived by a wife and three children. He enjoyed the most successful period of his career with Biarritz Olympique, which has a large number of Basque supporters.

Before retiring in 2012, Aramburu enjoyed a successful career, playing both in France and internationally. He began his career playing rugby sevens before switching to the 15-man format of the game in 2004. In an eight-year career he made over 50 appearances for Biarritz Olympique, winning the French championship twice, and 22 appearances for the Argentine national team, scoring a try in the 2007 Rugby World Cup. He also played professionally for Perpignan and US Dax in France, Glasgow Warriors in Scotland, and Club Atlético San Isidro in Argentina.

Aramburu’s murder has been condemned by the

rugby community. On April 18, sports newspaper *L'Équipe* published an open letter titled, “Federico Martin Aramburu, assassinated for defending his values.” It states, “[Aramburu was] Murdered because he opposed extremist and fascist ideas. ... Never again must a human being die in these conditions, never again must a family be bereaved because of extreme right-wing ideology, we will continue to fight for our values, our ideas, we will always fight against those who want to let hate enter our country.”

The letter also rejected accounts of Aramburu’s death as apolitical or isolated: “No, Federico's death is not a news item or a common crime, as some would have us believe.”

Indeed, few reports have detailed the ties of Aramburu’s assailants to the French state, their previous, unpunished crimes, or their friendships with active police officers.

Le Priol entered the Marines at 17. While serving in the Commandos in Mali he took part in multiple raids in 2013 and 2014, earning two military commendations. According to *Marianne*, while serving in Djibouti in 2015, he “beat and strangled a prostitute,” leading the French state to pay 350,000 Djibouti Francs (€1,700) to secure his release. After escaping conviction, he was officially discharged from the military but kept working privately on French military contracts. He reportedly drank heavily, and his lawyer claims he has PTSD.

Bouvier studied at Paris-Assas university and had been Le Priol’s friend since they met in the far-right *Groupe Union Défense* (GUD). By 2012, they both knew Julien Rochedy, ex-head of the Young National Front, the former youth movement of Marine Le Pen’s National Rally.

After returning from military service in 2015, Le Priol became more active in the GUD. In February of that year, Le Priol and Bouvier were convicted for drunkenly assaulting two 19-year-olds with brass knuckles outside a nightclub, but only received one-year suspended sentences.

In October 2015, the pair were prosecuted for torture after Le Priol filmed himself, Bouvier, and others beating and sexually humiliating former GUD president Édouard Klein. Bouvier was not held in custody, while Le Priol served only 10 days in prison before his €25,000 bail was posted by Financiere Agos, a murky

financial firm linked to the GUD. Though the assault took place in 2015, Le Priol’s trial has never taken place, and has been repeatedly postponed. It is currently scheduled for June 1, 2022.

Le Priol’s private contracting for the French military continued for two years after this prosecution, only being cancelled in 2017 following an internal investigation. During this period, Le Priol was romantically involved with a daughter of Frédéric Chatillon, the former GUD president who was Marine Le Pen’s public relations adviser. He has been on the Directorate General of Internal Security’s watch list for a number of years.

The entire French political establishment is implicated in the downplaying of Aramburu’s assassination. The murder took place in the final campaigning for the first round of the French election, and revelations of Le Priol’s police ties came to light just before the second round on April 24.

Nonetheless, the facts of the case—a known far-right criminal on bail for torture socializing with cops before going on to shoot a man dead—were not commented on by any candidate, including those presenting themselves as “left.” It is apparent that a vigorous public discussion of Le Priol’s ties to Le Pen’s entourage would have brought to light the true nature of neo-fascist politics. Such a discussion was denied to French voters and to the public.



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