



Fabrice Balanche is a well know expert on Syria. Then left-wing extremists attacked his lecture.

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*An attack by students on a researcher galvanized France, revealing the cowardice and extremist tendencies at universities.*

Clad in masks, with hoods and hats concealing their identities, they make their entrance into the lecture room. "Racists! Zionists! You are the terrorists!" they shout, brandishing a Palestinian flag and encircling the lecturer like a suspect being asked to confess to their crimes. "Admit it: you support Assad," a male voice proclaims.

A few days later, Fabrice Balanche can be seen packing his bag and leaving the lecture hall amid jeers and insults. The incident occurred on April 1 at Lyon 2 University. Since then, Balanche has been subjected to online abuse and slander. "These students are terrorizing the university," he told the NZZ. He now prefers to work from home to avoid being insulted and attacked on campus.

Meanwhile, citizens have demanded that authorities prosecute the students, while prosecutors are currently investigating the incident.

Balanche is a geographer who is fluent in Arabic and has extensive experience living in Lebanon and Syria. He conducted in-person research during the civil war, making him a highly regarded expert on the region. He has also been featured in interviews with Der Spiegel, the NZZ, and Swiss media outlets. His latest book, "[\*\*Leçons de la crise syrienne\*\*](#)" (Lessons from the Syrian Crisis), received an award. However, the recent events involving the 55-year-old have caused a stir in France.

According to news reports, there have been alleged incidents of an "Islamist blockade" at a university, with hateful slogans directed against Israel. Prosecutors are currently investigating claims of disruption to academic activities, while ministers and politicians from conservative and right-wing backgrounds are calling for severe punishment and labelling certain universities as strongholds of left-wing extremism and Islamism.



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Balanche

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L'heure n'est plus à la **naïveté**.  
Ouvrons les yeux :

Certaines **universités** sont  
devenues des **citadelles de**  
**l'extrême-gauche**.

**L'Affaire Balanche** traduit la  
pensée profonde de ceux qui,  
imbibés de **wokisme** et  
**d'islamo-gauchisme**, ne  
supportent plus la moindre  
contradiction.

**Max BRISSON**

Sénateur des Pyrénées-Atlantiques  
Porte-parole Les Républicains au Sénat



Some people, predominantly from the left-wing, minimize the problem and try to frame Fabrice Balanche as the victim of a regrettable misunderstanding or a non-existent issue. They claim that it's merely a case of some juvenile delinquents.

Upon initial examination, the events in Lyon may not appear as dramatic as some headlines



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suggest. However, they bring to light underlying issues that affect not just France, but the world at large. These include the radicalization of supposedly anti-racist activists who glorify terrorism as resistance, as well as the growing intolerance in universities that either tolerate or even encourage these tendencies.

### **Leftists Call on Muslims to Pray and Break Their Fast**

The incident started in February, when far-left activists occupied a university building, causing much resistance, singing karaoke, discussing topics such as war and revolution, and the history of Lyon's squatting movement. At the end of March, the situation intensified. The protesters not only established a prayer area for Muslims but also invited them to break their Ramadan fast together at the university, featuring depictions of women wearing hijabs and men with beards.

Since France is a strictly secular state, including its universities, President Isabelle von Bueltingsloewen ordered the hall closed. In response, left-wing radicals protested on March 28, blocking access to the university, insulting her as an Islamophobe and a racist, and accusing her of wanting to prevent Muslims from practicing their faith. The campaign was supported by left-wing student unions, such as Solidaires and Unef, and by groups like Intifada France, which expressed their solidarity in the name of Allah.

Four days later, an event involving masked individuals catapulted Fabrice Balanche to fame. On social media, a far-left faction took credit for the incident and accused Balanche of holding right-wing extremist views on Syria and Gaza. They demanded his dismissal to stop his alleged racist and genocidal rhetoric.

### **Balanche still carries the scars of his meeting with Bashar al-Asad to this day**

Fabrice Balanche doesn't seem fazed by being branded as an adversary. In fact, he claims, "I've had my fair share of hostility from far-left activists over the years." Moreover, he finds himself at odds with certain scholars due to their reluctance to acknowledge the validity of his insights into the Syrian conflict. It requires quite a bit of creativity to categorize Balanche as both a right-wing radical, a pro-Zionist, and a sympathizer of ousted Syrian president Bashar Al-Asad.

Al-Asad's regime was known for its hostility towards the Jewish state and its willingness to provide asylum to former Nazi officials. In his youth, Balanche identified as a communist, and in 1988, he made a trip to the USSR with a group from the French Communist Party. An event, according to him, that immunized him against doctrines forever. This sober





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perspective can also be seen in his work. It contains no sympathy for Assad's regime. However, since he met with the dictator in 2016, and, unlike other researchers, did not believe that democracy could emerge in Syria following Asad's downfall, he has been labelled a supporter of Asad. He is even referred to as such on Wikipedia.



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escape, Berlin

Balanche's reputation as an Islamophobe and supporter of genocide has been shaped by several factors, including a speech in which he linked headscarves, halal food, and Islamism. He also appeared on the conservative TV channel CNews. Just before his talk was disrupted, he praised the university's decision to ban the "islamo-leftist" Ramadan fast-breaking event. In the year 2023, following the tragic events of October 7th, he expressed his view on CNews that the potential displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip could be a strategy employed by Israel to eradicate Hamas.

**The university's vice president praises the terrorist Nasrallah**



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However, he claims that it was misunderstood as an opinion. "I was only describing a possible scenario," he said. Despite the absurdity of the accusations, the university has failed him. It tolerated far-left activists, and some professors even supported them intellectually. They tended to see Muslims as the new working class and Islamists as the subject of racist criticism.

The university's leadership played a major role in turning the "Balanche Affair" into a scandal. University President Isabelle von Bueltzingsloewen spoke in an interview about disturbing events, but accused her subordinate, Balanche, of harming the institution with his conspiracy theories. Given his positions on Gaza, she said she was not surprised that he had been affected. He, too, had to "find his place."

On April 14, the Federation of French Universities issued a statement claiming that "Islamism", as described by Fabrice Balanche, is imaginary. This followed the publication of an article that allowed the perpetrators to defend themselves. In addition, he characterized Balanche as a key figure in the far-right movement. The University's vice-Willy Beauvallet-Haddad promoted strongly the article. A few days later, it was revealed that this supposed ghost did exist. Additionally, it emerged that Mr. Beauvallet-Haddad had openly supported the extremist Islamist group Hezbollah on various social media platforms. Regarding its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in the fall of 2024, he wrote: "He has entered the pantheon of our hearts and the great figures of history." Nasrallah was described as Lebanon's true leader, being both brotherly and morally upright. But in the West, which has always despised the Arab Orient - a classic conspiracy theory - this will never be understood.



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Willy Beauvallet-Haddad

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Et le Sayyed n'est plus...l'émotion des peuples en résistance nous submerge. Le Liban des années 2000, celui des années de libération, de reconstruction, d'espoir et de victoires s'en est allé avec lui. Alors que nous entendions les bombes tomber autour de nous à l'été 2006, son visage et sa voix incarnaient pour nous comme pour beaucoup de Libanais et d'Arabes de toutes confessions, l'espérance d'un autre avenir, d'un Liban et d'un monde arabe, libres, unis et multi-confessionnels. C'était le vrai leader du Liban de l'après-guerre civile et tout le pays reste sous le choc de sa disparition, comme orphelin. Même celles et ceux qui ne se reconnaissaient pas dans le Hezbollah voyaient en lui une figure fraternelle, de droiture morale, rassurante, celui qui indiquait le chemin... Il est mort au milieu des siens pour la grande cause (palestinienne et arabe) et il a rejoint le panthéon de nos coeurs et des grands personnages de l'Histoire. Autant de choses que l'Occident, qui n'a jamais fait autre chose que mépriser l'Orient arabe, ses sociétés et ses aspirations, ne comprendra jamais.



rallah

### Officially, It's About Progress and Diversity

At the same time, Beauvallet-Haddad organized seminars in which Israel was portrayed as a colonial and apartheid state. Together with a researcher who likes to tell the media that the excitement over Islamist activities is an expression of an Islamophobic mood. Solidaires, a

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left-wing trade union with a radical stance, sponsored these seminars and is also represented on the university's board of directors.

Willy Beauvallet-Haddad is under investigation by the legal system for his remarks on Hezbollah leader Nasrallah, which were interpreted as an apology for terrorist acts. He has resigned from his position as vice president, but in a letter, he announced that he would continue his commitment as a lecturer, for the Palestinians and for a “diverse” and “progressive” university.



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promoted by Student Union “Solidaire”, December 2024

The individuals who assaulted Fabrice Balanche during his lecture on April 1st remain unidentified. President of the university, Isabelle van Bueltingsloewen, received death threats after voicing her opinion on the Balanche case. The source of the threats is unknown. Higher Education Minister Philippe Baptiste declared at the end of April that the Israeli Palestinian conflict is fuelling hysteria in social discourse. This is also the case at universities.

However, the mood in French society had already reached boiling point before October 7. Extremists on both the right and left were gaining influence. The former courted Islamists in



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large protests and elections, uniting against the West and Zionists. Jewish students are subjected to bullying in schools, and two educators have been murdered by fanatics in the past few years.

At university, students behave as if they were judges who summarily condemn unpopular researchers. In Grenoble, far-left extremists accused two liberal professors of racism in 2021 because they criticized the term "Islamophobia", which Islamists misuse all too often. The two of them required protection from the police.

Fabrice Balanche has not yet reached this point. He is determined not to stop. "You know, I lived through the war in Beirut in 2006. There were bombings every day for a month," he recalls. "You can take a lot."