

Beat: Politics

## FRENCH TOWN TO HOST INTERNATIONAL KEBAB FESTIVAL IN RESPONSE TO FAR-RIGHT MAYOR

### MAYOR OF SOUTHERN TOWN OF BEZIERS

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**USPA NEWS** - The 62-year-old French Far-Right Mayor of the southern city of Béziers, Robert Menard, since entering politics, he has loudly pursued an anti-immigrant agenda, even going so far as to count the Muslim schoolchildren in his city. Now kebabs, a staple food for many immigrants in Europe,...

The French Far-Right Mayor of the southern city of Béziers, Robert Menard, since entering politics, he has loudly pursued an anti-immigrant agenda, even going so far as to count the Muslim schoolchildren in his city. Now kebabs, a staple food for many immigrants in Europe, have become his latest target.

The trouble began last week, when a video of Menard ranting against kebab restaurants in his city was aired on French TV. In the video, the mayor justified his decision to block restaurants opening in Beziers's historic city center by explaining: 'We are a nation of Judeo-Christian tradition.' Menard then said that there were too many kebabs in his town, and that he would block new kebab restaurants opening in Beziers. (Washington Post)

Although it started out as a joke, an event was launched on Facebook to let people know about the world's first kebab festival in Beziers, which would take place in May next year. Some 40,000 people immediately said they were 'going', with a similar number saying they were 'interested'.

That 'Festival' is the brainchild of Baptiste Fluzin, a Paris-based executive who has no ties to Bezier. He told WorldViews that he was appalled by Robert Menard's comments and created a Facebook event page to mock him. 'I think that stupid politicians needs to be laughed at,' Baptiste Fluzin said. 'We need to hold a mirror to their stupidity instead of being shocked.'

Therefore Robert Menard has doubled the number of municipal police, and issued them earlier this year with semi-automatic pistols - even though their main concerns are minor offences and traffic violations, and they leave serious crimes and investigations to the police nationale... At the same time, the town was plastered with giant posters of handguns boasting "From now on police officers have a new friend". 'A police force which is armed gets respect,' Menard has told BBC.

In September, Robert Menard has sparked outrage by storming into a squat and telling a family of Syrian refugees, 'you are not welcome in this town'. He is shown marching into a squat surrounded by police, including an armed guard Angry that the refugees have allegedly broken in, 62-year-old Mr Menard uses a translator to say: "You are not welcome in this town. You came in this apartment breaking the door.'... The astonished refugee - a man in his 30s "" asks if there is anywhere else he can go, and then says he will leave "after one month' ...But Mr Menard tells him that he has no interest in refugees who ""break in' to properties, and tells him that he can ""go where he likes'.' (Daily Mail)

Although elected with the official support of Marine Le Pen and the far-right Front National, he has deliberately stayed outside the party. This leaves him free 'to say what I want when I want'. But he is an important figure to the Front National. Last year Le Pen's party gained a record 11 mayors across France, but Béziers, with a population of more than 71,000, is by far the biggest town run by a Front National-aligned mayor. (The Guardian)

Ménard lived in Béziers as a teenager but was shaped by his early years in Algeria in a family of pied noirs, or European settlers, in the French colony. His father was a member of the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète paramilitary group in French Algeria that fought against Algerian independence. Ménard recently sparked more headlines and outrage from the left when he changed the name of a Béziers street that marked the end of the Algerian war of independence. (The Guardian)

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