

The Suavelos galaxy - a showcase of uninhibited racism

This website, which defends “white nationalism”, strives to thwart the laws and platforms’ terms of use to attract new audiences online.

They say they’re “positive and not depressive”, “confident and not defeatist”, and “open and non-elitist”. But the Suavelos’ creators claim to be mostly “white nationalists”, and even – quite simply – “racist”. This website, prized by some of the French far right, defends the idea that the “ethnic” issue takes precedence over others.

These nationalist messages expose the movement to the moderation of platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, which have hardened their tone in 2019 since the Christchurch attack and the El Paso shooting, which was perpetrated by white supremacists. Yet the Suavelos network does not disarm in the face of what it considers to be “censorship”, and multiplies their initiatives, creating secondary Facebook pages, Telegram channels, online chatrooms, an association for concealed purposes, etc.

We put all the pieces of this puzzle together, with the cooperation of the Belgian NGO EU DisinfoLab, which specialises in disinformation research in Europe. And it appears that Suavelos does not lack the imagination to spread their racist thinking, and strives to reach a wider audience than the nationalist fringe.

An openly racist ideology

The website Suavelos.eu was created in 2016 by two right-wing activists: Yann Merkado and Daniel Conversano. At first glance, the site has some similarities with another extreme right blog, Fdesouche. Presented as a “simple press review,” Suavelos denounces the supposed devastation of immigration on society and rejects “the multiracial society that is transforming whites into a minority.” There are many articles inspired by various events, i.e. “Clermont-Ferrand: she returns from her holidays to find a migrant squatting her home”, which are often shared thousands of times on social networks.

But unlike Fdesouche, founded by the former cadre of the National Front Pierre Sautarel, Suavelos is not content with being allusive, it is openly discriminatory. Suavelos.eu’s About Us section therefore lays their cards on the table, proclaiming to be “white nationalist” while affirming “the right of white to be at home”.

“I don’t deny being racist”, Daniel Conversano states when contacted by phone. “I have always found European civilisation superior to others; I prefer Mozart to the djembe. With us, the ethnic question is central”. Very common words from the mouth of an activist, for whom “it is necessary” to put in the Constitution that “France is a white country and must remain the majority”.

On the other hand, there is no question of promoting violence against “non-whites”. “We do not want that,” Daniel Conversano swears, but “I don’t see how a white man couldn’t take revenge after the tenth Islamist attack. What happened with Breivik in Norway will eventually come to us,” he said, referring to the 2011 attack by the far-right activist on the island of Utoya. Still, he himself has called for violence: he stated in a video, which has since been restricted

to private access, that he wanted to see “customs officers with guns” to shoot “the guys to swim” as spotted by BuzzFeed in 2017.

A galaxy of sites and Facebook pages

To spread their message, Suavelos has adapted to the codes of online information and social networks. The site includes, for example, a News section, but also a female version, Ms. Suavelos.

The Suavelos galaxy also counts among theirs the sites Bellica.fr (which defends “Western white feminism”), BuzzBeed.com (a supposedly parodic site that has sometimes served to spread false information), and Fluidracial.com, a site of xenophobic cartoons, particularly appreciated by former National Front Youth President Julien Rochedy. These sites also have accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.



But beyond these “official” relays, Suavelos relies on deceptive pages to target a wider readership on social networks. More than a dozen Facebook pages, such as “I support the police” or “I love and defend animals”, regularly share publications of the Suavelos galaxy, while undeclaring any link with them. This is a strategy commonly used by sensationalist sites to multiply their audience.



On the left, a message from the Facebook page “I support the police”, which relays an article from Suavelos.eu. On the right, the page “I love and defend animals” shares a post from Yann Merkado, co-founder of Suavelos (Facebook)

In this myriad of profiles, we also find the page *Beautés occidentales*, which regularly shares erotic photos of exclusively so-called “Western” women to approximately 5,000 fans. Managed by Yann Merkado, the latter alone illustrates the opportunistic nature of the movement: on the one hand, websites like *Bellica.fr* defend a “feminism” soluble in the ideology of the white nationalists. On the other, the creators of Suavelos multiply the misogynistic remarks. Accordingly, on the 9th September, Daniel Conversano gargled on his public channel Telegram for having found the recipe for a woman to “keep a man with almost certainty”. And, to detail: “make him eat well. suck it well (often enough), and value him during sex.”

Crowdfunding and advertising

Criticised for their passivity to hate speech, especially in the wake of the Christchurch attack in early 2019, platforms like Facebook and YouTube have now hardened the tone. “It’s getting worse,” said Daniel Conversano. “Before, Facebook removed everything that was against the law. Now, I have the impression that it removes everything that is critical of migration policy.”

Joined by Le Monde, a spokesperson for Facebook told us that Daniel Conversano, Yann Merkado, and Suavelos were banned from the network on Wednesday 11th September as part of an internal investigation that had been running for several months. “People and groups who spread hate messages, attacks or calls to exclude others based on their identity have no place in our services and are banned, according to community standards concerning dangerous individuals and groups”, Facebook’s spokesperson argued.

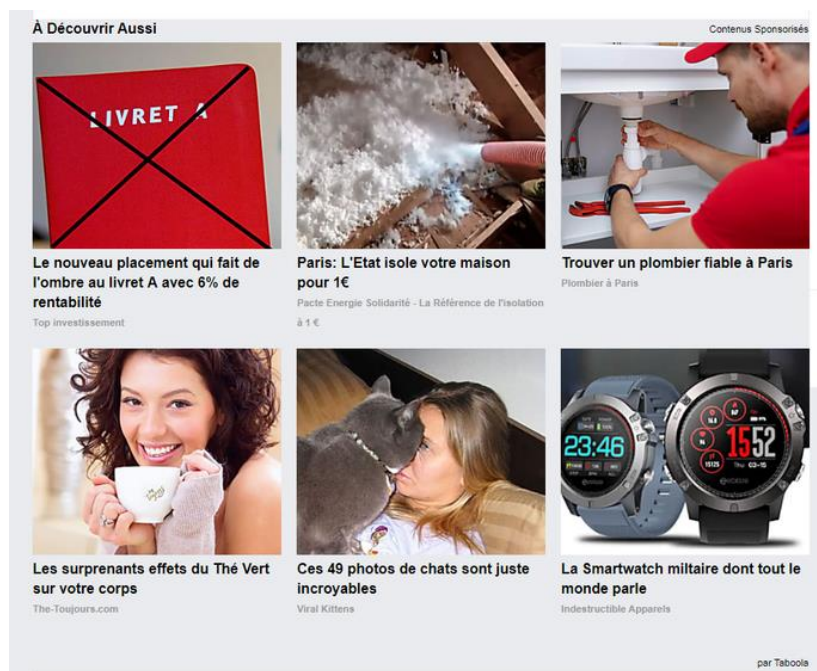
“The accounts we banned today violated these terms of use and will no longer be allowed to be featured on Facebook and Instagram,” they added. Messages of support for them will also be banned. “These are not decisions we take lightly,” commented Facebook. The main pages officially attached to Suavelos (Ms. Suavelos, Suavelos News, Occidentalism, etc.) as well as

the profiles of Yann Merkado and Daniel Conversano were not accessible on Wednesday 11th September. However, more than twenty pages indirectly related to the movement remain online.

In order to also prevent the vigilance of social networks, the movement multiplies the profiles it manages, which avoids losing everything in case of closure of a profile. This dispersion also allows networks to go under radar in many cases.

For example, Daniel Conversano uses the crowdfunding platform Tipeee to subsidise his digital activities: 129 members of his community pay him a total of €947 euros per month. When contacted, the platform did not comment on the case of Suavelos, instead simply indicating that it reported suspicious profiles to the authorities and removed them when their owners had “been sentenced or – failing that – are clearly in a high risk of being condemned for the content shared on their profiles”.

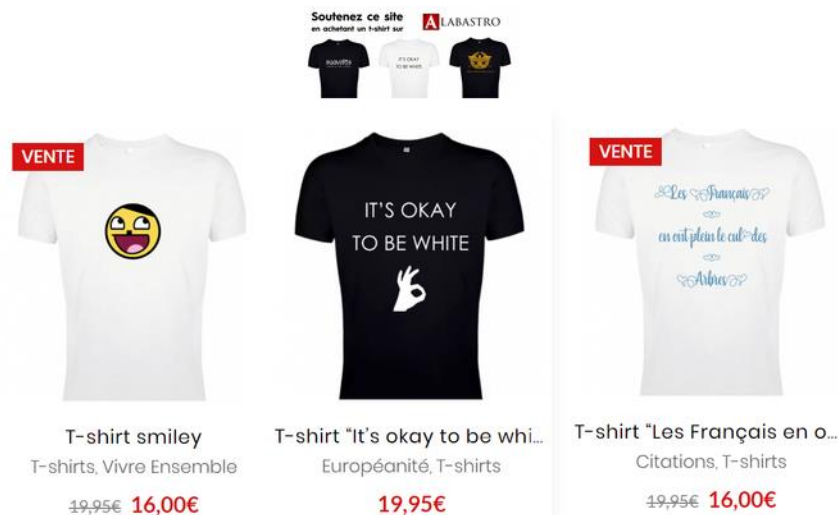
The openly racist nature of the Suavelos site doesn't prevent it from being financed by advertising. So far, Suavelos has collaborated with the Taboola advertising platform. Concretely, sponsored links appeared at the bottom of the articles of the site, and have allowed Suavelos to monetise its audience. But after being contacted by Le Monde on Tuesday 10th September, Taboola's CEO Adam Singolda told us that he'd permanently suspended the contract with Suavelos, judging the content of the site contrary to Taboola's charter, which prohibits including hateful content.



Ads from the Taboola module appear on news.suavelos.eu. Suavelos.eu

An e-shop registered at CCAS Grenoble

The Suavelos movement can also count on another source of revenue: the marketing of nationalist T-shirts, with Islamophobic or even fascist hints – one of them featuring an Adolf Hitler emoji – on their own sales website – Alabastro.eu.



Examples of T-shirts sold on the website Alabastro.eu. Alabastro.eu

An activity that Daniel Conversano relativised the importance with us, claiming he doesn't support "merchandising". However, the activist is directly involved in the assembly of this platform of sale.

Alabastro.eu is indeed linked by an association, Erasmus 3000, created in 2018, to "promote the historical and cultural heritage of Europe," according to its statement in the French Official Journal. The online sales site and the association are officially registered at 28 Arlequin Gallery in Grenoble, which is the address of the municipal centre for social action (CCAS).

When Contacted, the management of CCAS assured us that they were not aware of this situation. Registration at the CCAS is possible for anyone who requests it. In principle, it's for a person without a fixed address to benefit from an address to both receive letters and undertake administrative procedures.

But Daniel Conversano used it to establish both his association and the Alabastro site. An irregular approach, according to the Grenoble's CCAS, who claimed to have contacted the declarant and the prefecture to change Erasme 3000's address after our call.

Conversano confirmed with us that he was responsible for the registration of the association. "Did you say you were homeless when requesting access for the CCAS mailbox?" "I refuse to answer," he retorted, adding, "When you lead the fight I lead, you're careful". Comments that suggest that his use of the CCAS mailbox was for the simple purpose of not revealing his true address.

Daniel Conversano did not want to go into the details of the operation of this association, but it could well be something already mentioned in a video of *Frequence Occident* (a Suavelos

YouTube show) in early 2019. The members on the show explained that they had created an association to “develop community projects” in order to “become economically independent”.

Suavelos members also acknowledged in this video that they didn’t declare the association “nationalist” for legal reasons. In fact, the law provides that an association that incites discrimination or racial hatred may be dissolved by decree. When contacted, the prefecture of Isere explained that the Erasme 3000 situation deserves examination and may fall under this case.

By Adrien Sénécat