Ripostelaique.com is owned by the Israel-based nonprofit organization Riposte Laïque. The site’s donation page (Nous aider) also provides a mailing address in Gisors, in the Normandy region of France. Riposte Laïque’s publishing director, Guy Sebag, is based in Acre, Israel, according to the site’s Contact Us (Nous contacter) page.

Riposte Laïque - which means “secular counterattack” in English - has helped to organize conferences such as the International Assises against the Islamization of our countries (Des Assises internationales contre l’islamisation de nos pays) in 2010, according to the website’s Contact Us page. The nonprofit organization has published more than a dozen books, which are for sale on the website, with titles such as “Immigration; the French shipwreck” (“Immigration; le naufrage français”) and “Why and How To Forbid Islam” (“Pourquoi et Comment Interdire L’Islam”).

Ripostelaique.com also generates revenue from donations. The website does not run advertisements.

Riposte Laïque says on its Who Are We? (Qui sommes-nous?) page that the website “claims secular and republican principles, and brings together left and right-wing patriots who do not accept the Islamization of their country, and the implicit silence of the left and the right, in the face of this mortal danger to our values.” (“Il se réclame des principes laïques et républicains, et réunit des patriotes de gauche et de droite qui n’acceptent pas l’islamisation de leur pays, et le silence complice de la gauche et de la droite, devant ce péril mortel pour nos valeurs.”)
Riposte Laique primarily publishes opinion articles and videos on French politics and social issues, particularly articles that negatively portray France’s Muslim population and immigrants. Many articles promote Marine Le Pen’s far-right party Rassemblement National (RN) and its anti-immigration stance.

Typical headlines include “If we are at war, what is Macron waiting for before he shoots on scums?” (“Si nous sommes en guerre, qu’attend Macron pour faire tirer sur la racaille ?”), “Against the criminal Macron and his genocide killers, the first complaints...” (“Contre le criminel Macron et ses génocidaires, les premières plaintes...”) and “Brexit: the British are lucky to have Boris, we only have the pipsqueak.” (“Brexit : les Anglais ont la chance d’avoir Boris, nous on a le Freluquet !”).

Ripostelaigue.com publishes content written by unpaid contributors who are not professional journalists, website founder Pierre Cassen told NewsGuard in an email. Articles generally summarize and add commentary to reports from other news organizations, including reliable sources such as Franceinfo, 20 Minutes and Le Parisien; as well as websites that NewsGuard has found to publish false and misleading information, such as BVoltaire.fr and Dreuz.info.

Riposte Laique has repeatedly published false information and conspiracy theories, on topics including the 2020 coronavirus outbreak and the April 2019 fire that ravaged Paris’ iconic Notre Dame cathedral.

For example, a March 2020 article titled “Coronavirus: some simple and practical recipes” (“Coranovirus: des recettes simples et pratiques”), promoted an ineffective treatment for coronavirus, suggesting users drink a mix of magnesium chloride and water. The article suggested consuming the mixture “in case of a coronavirus infection, or in order to preventively reinforce your immune system.” (“en cas d’infection au Coronavirus ou de renforcement préventif de votre système immunitaire”). “Contrary to what a few ‘skeptical scientists’ are saying, the magnesium
chloride... works perfectly and we obtain convincing results,” the article said. (“Contrairement à ce que certains ‘sceptiques scientifiques’ affirment, le chlorure de magnésium (...) fonctionne parfaitement et on obtient des résultats probants”).

As of March 2020, the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the French Health Ministry have all said that there is currently no known treatment for the coronavirus strain responsible for the 2020 outbreak. The organizations and several scientists have suggested washing hands and distancing oneself from others are the only effective preventive measures.

The UK’s National Health Service has also said that high doses of magnesium chloride can cause diarrhea.

A February 2020 article titled “Confirmed: the coronavirus is indeed a biological weapon” (“Confirme : le coronavirus est bien une arme de guerre biologique”), citing an interview with American law professor Francis Boyle, claimed that the coronavirus was “created in a Canadian laboratory in Winnipeg (sic), in which Chinese researchers were working, [and] was smuggled to the Wuhan lab.” (“le virus, élaboré dans un laboratoire canadien à Winnipeg (sic), dans lequel travaillaient des chercheurs chinois, a fait l’objet de contrebande en faveur du laboratoire de Wuhan”).

The claims made by Boyle and Ripostelalique.com are unsubstantiated. There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 was engineered in a lab, nor that it was smuggled out of Canada and into China. In February 2020, a report by the World Health Organization-China joint mission found that “since the COVID-19 virus has a genome identity of 96% to a bat SARS-like coronavirus and 86%-92% to a pangolin SARS-like coronavirus, an animal source for COVID-19 is highly likely.”

PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. all concluded that there is no evidence that the coronavirus was stolen by Chinese spies from a Canadian lab. The CBC did, in fact, report that two Chinese scientists were escorted from the lab
in July 2019. However, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) told the CBC that they were asked to leave due to an investigation of what it described as a “policy breach” and “administrative manner,” and that the matter was not connected to the coronavirus outbreak. “This is misinformation and there is no factual basis for claims being made on social media,” PHAC spokesperson Eric Morissette told the CBC in January 2020.

On some archived versions of the website, the two articles cited above contained the tags “Free Spirits,” and “Points of View,” which, according to the site’s contact page, are articles that “are places of free expression, and do not engage the editorial staff of RiposteLaïque” (“des lieux de libre expression qui n’engagent pas la rédaction de RL”). The website does not make it clear that the content is submitted by users, and appears on the website alongside news content produced by the staff.

The site has also published false claims about the April 2019 blaze at the iconic Notre Dame cathedral. A May 2019 article titled “Notre-Dame: a fire of such violence impossible without accelerant” (“Notre-Dame: un feu d’une telle violence impossible sans accélérateur”) said that the conclusion that the fire was an accident “does not match the first reactions of some construction and restoration professionals.” (“Or cette hypothèse ne colle guère avec les premières réactions de quelques professionnels de la construction et de la restauration d’ouvrages.”) The article referenced more than 10 anonymous social media posts, including some that claimed that someone used a fire accelerant to speed the spread of the fire.

Paris public prosecutor Remy Heitz told reporters the day after the April 15, 2019, fire that “nothing suggests that it was a voluntary act.”

In June 2019, the site published an article titled “No to Freemasons rebuilding Notre-Dame de Paris” (“Non aux francs-maçons pour reconstruire Notre-Dame de Paris”), and claimed, without evidence, that the church
would be reconstructed by a “freemason project which aims to turn it into a vulgar amusement park for the Olympic Games” (“projet maçonnique qui vise à la transformer en un vulgaire parc d’attraction pour les Jeux olympiques”). The author of the article also described the cause of the fire as “dubious.” (“origines douteuses”).

In June 2019, the Paris-based Masonic organization Grand Orient of France told the news site L’Opinion that it was collecting funds to help the reconstruction of the cathedral as a “gesture of republican generosity” (“geste de générosité républicaine.”) However, the organization will not participate directly in the reconstruction of the cathedral.

The site has also published false content that advances nationalist views. For example, in January 2019, the site published an article titled “Aachen treaty: Macron wants to deliver Alsace-Lorraine to Merkel!” (“Traité d’Aix-la-Chapelle: Macron veut livrer l’Alsace-Lorraine à Merkel !”), which claimed that French President Emmanuel Macron wants to “deliver” France’s Alsace-Lorraine territory to German Chancellor Angela Merkel by signing a treaty in the town of Aachen.

"Macron will realize Hitler’s dream with France subjected to Germany and cut to enlarge Germany [...] Alsace will go back under the German regime and the administrative language will be German,” the article said. (“Macron va réaliser le rêve d’Hitler avec une France soumise à l’Allemagne et découpée pour agrandir l’Allemagne [...] L’Alsace repassera sous régime allemand et la langue administrative sera l’allemand.”).

The article attributed its claims to a YouTube video by the French nationalist Bernard Monot, a former lawmaker for the French far-right party Rassemblement national, which was taken down from the platform on January 16, 2019.

The Aachen treaty "does not mention any ‘delivery’, ‘trusteeship’ or ‘German management’ of Alsace and Moselle; the last two are not even mentioned in the text,” (“Le texte ne mentionne aucune "livraison", "mise
sous tutelle" ou "gestion allemande" de l'Alsace et de la Moselle, ces deux dernières ne sont d'ailleurs même pas mentionnées dans le texte.”) according to a news release posted by the French government on its website.

The treaty, which was signed on January 22, 2019, also does not specify any requirement to speak German in Alsace or any region, as the article claimed. The treaty does encourage bilingualism and more cooperation between France and Germany, especially at the countries’ border, according to the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

In April 2019, Ripostelaique.com published a post titled “Sri Lanka: This child murdered by Muslims will not make the news ‘headlines’…” (“Sri Lanka : cet enfant assassiné par les musulmans ne fera pas la ‘Une’ des médias...”), which showed a photo of a dead boy covered by a white sheet. The site falsely claimed that the child was one of the victims of an Islamic State terrorist attack in Sri Lanka in April 2019, which killed more than 350 people and injured more than 500. “Sri Lanka buries its children and we suspect that this child massacred by a madman of Allah will not make the headlines.” (“Le Sri Lanka enterre ses enfants et on se doute que cet enfançon massacré par un dingue d’Allah ne fera pas la une des médias”), the article said.

The same photo was shared on several anti-Muslim websites spreading similar rumors, according to France 24’s fact-checking site The Observers. The child died with nine other people in a car accident between a bus and a van in Batticaloa, in the eastern part of Sri Lanka, on April 17, 2019, four days before the terrorist attacks, according to the Observers’ report as well as the Sri Lankan news organizations News 1st and Athavan News.

Because Riposte Laïque publishes false and misleading content that generally supports anti-Muslim and right-wing views, NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false content, does not gather and present information responsibly, and fails to avoid deceptive headlines.
Riposte Laïque does not publish a corrections policy, and NewsGuard could not find any corrected stories on the site. Its false stories remain uncorrected on the site.

In an emailed statement to NewsGuard, which was also posted on Ripostelaique.com on August 21, 2019, before NewsGuard’s review was published, Cassen wrote, “We fight for the survival of our civilization, and denounce the islamization of our country, which is killing it more and more every day. All what we have written in the last twelve years was confirmed, the facts prove us right,” (“Nous menons un combat pour la survie de notre civilisation, et dénonçons l’islamisation de notre pays, qui est en train de le tuer toujours davantage, tous les jours. Tout ce que nous avons écrit depuis douze ans se confirme, les faits nous donnent dramatiquement raison.”)

The email did not answer NewsGuard’s questions about specific stories on the site and Ripostelaique.com’s editorial practices, including its lack of corrections.

The site’s Who Are We page describes the website’s refusal to accept “the Islamization” of France and the “complicit silence of the left and the right, in the face of this mortal danger to our values.” (“le silence complice de la gauche et de la droite, devant ce péril mortel pour nos valeurs”). Articles on the website generally reflect this disclosed anti-Islam perspective, which is why NewsGuard has determined that the website meets NewsGuard’s standard for distinguishing news and opinion.

Ripostelaique.com discloses on its Who Are We page that it is owned by the nonprofit Riposte Laïque. However, it does not provide information about its financing or identify any donors, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for revealing ownership and relevant financing.

Cassen did not answer questions about the site’s lack of information about the nonprofit’s financing in an email to NewsGuard.
The Contact Us page provides a general email address to submit articles or contact the site. And it identifies Sebag as its publishing director.

Articles on the site include author names and link to profile pages, which include a list of the contributor’s previous articles on the site. However, the site does not generally provide contact or biographical information for its content creators.

“Apostates of Islam write on our site, risking their lives. People are forced to write under a pseudonym to protect themselves, physically and professionally,” Cassen told NewsGuard. (“Des apostats de l’islam écrivent sur notre site, au péril de leur vie. Des personnes sont obligées d’écrire sous pseudo pour se protéger, physiquement et professionnellement.”)

Ripostelaique.com was co-founded in 2007 by Brigitte Bayle, a former teacher who died in 2013, and Cassen, a retired typographer, former communist activist, and former editor of the French leftist publication Respublica.

In 2012, Cassen and author Pascal Hilout were both convicted by the Paris Criminal Court of inciting hatred for publishing two anti-Muslim editorials in 2010. The editorials were titled “Can we defeat the Islamist offensive by democratic means alone?” “And "Occupation: Prayers in the streets, the hijab, halal and mosques are of course symbols of occupation and conquest" ("Pourra-t-on vaincre l'offensive islamiste par les seuls moyens démocratiques?" et "Occupation: bien sûr que les prières dans la rue, les voiles, le halal et les mosquées sont des symboles d'occupation et de conquête").

Cassen was fined 4,000 euros and Hilout was fined 1,500 euros. At a hearing, Cassen stated, “No topic should be taboo when it comes to our freedoms and our values,” according to Agence France-Presse. (“Aucun sujet ne doit être tabou quand il en va de nos libertés et de nos valeurs.”)
Alain Jean-Mairet, president of Riposte Laïque Suisse, the website’s former owner, was convicted in 2016 of inciting hatred against Muslims with an article titled “What if Islam was the cult of sexual and moral perversion?” (“Et si l’islam était le culte de la perversion sexuelle et morale?”), and fined 5,000 euros. The Paris Criminal Court found that the text participates in a "widespread and systematized stigmatization of Muslims" (“stigmatisation généralisée et systématisée des musulmans”).

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