Beat: Politics

ANDORRA IS A SMALL PRINCIPALITY & A STRATEGIC LINK

ANDORRA MATTERS TO FRANCE

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USPA NEWS - On 19 February 2026, on the margins of the 40th annual dinner of the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF) at the Carrousel du Louvre, French foreign minister Jean Noel Barrot met his Andorran counterpart, Imma Tor Faus, in Paris. The CRIF dinner, chaired by Yonathan Arfi, has become for forty years, one of Paris's key political networking rituals: a place to see and be seen, where ministers, MPs, senators, star anchors of the French TV landscape and various lobbyists crowd into the underground halls of the Louvre for an evening of speeches and discreet conversations (Source: Youtube CRIF, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs). This article is a short analysis piece written by our disabled chief foreign correspondent, accredited for over a decade to the Presidency of the French Republic and the Prime Minister's office, based on her own political reading and the official press release of the French foreign ministry; it is neither an editorial nor an advocacy text.

FRANCE, ANDORRA AND A CRIF DINNER SIDE MEETING

On 19 February 2026, on the margins of the 40th annual dinner of the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions (CRIF) at the Carrousel du Louvre, French foreign minister Jean Noel Barrot met his Andorran counterpart, Imma Tor Faus, in Paris. The CRIF dinner, chaired by Yonathan Arfi, has become for forty years, one of Paris's key political networking rituals: a place to see and be seen, where ministers, MPs, senators, star anchors of the French TV landscape and various lobbyists crowd into the underground halls of the Louvre for an evening of speeches and discreet conversations (Source: Youtube CRIF, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

According to the Quai d'Orsay's read out, the two ministers "saluted the excellent dynamics" of the Franco Andorran relationship, rooted in intense cross border exchanges, and discussed customs cooperation, education, health, and current European and international issues. They emphasised shared values respect for international law, effective multilateralism and the Francophonie, and confirmed their convergence of views at a time when small European states are seeking to anchor themselves more firmly in EU structures.

WHAT ANDORRA IS, AND WHY IT MATTERS TO FRANCE

The Principality of Andorra is a micro state of some 80 000 inhabitants, wedged in the Pyrenees between France and Spain, whose economy rests largely on tourism, commerce and a historically advantageous tax regime. It is not a member of the European Union, the Schengen Area or the European Economic Area, but uses the euro unilaterally, is linked to the EU by a customs union for industrial goods and is currently negotiating a broader association agreement. For France, Andorra is both a neighbour and a territory of responsibility: the French president is one of the two co princes of Andorra, French citizens work and retire there, and the country's main road access to Europe runs through the Ariege and the RN20/RN22 corridors.

These cross border realities explain why the French press release insists on customs, education and health cooperation, as well as on the reopening of the RN20, currently closed after a major rockfall between L'Hospitalet pres l'Andorre and Ax les Thermes. For Andorra, every prolonged closure of this axis directly hits tourism and trade in Pas de la Casa and the surrounding French valleys; for France, it is a question of securing a strategic mountain route that connects Occitanie to a sovereign neighbour and to Spain beyond (Source: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

A SMALL PRINCIPALITY, A STRATEGIC LINK

Beyond the immediate issue of landslides and snow clearance, the Jean Noel Barrot– Imma Tor Faus meeting fits into a longer term agenda: the association agreement between Andorra and the EU that France strongly supports.

"Beyond the urgent question of reopening the RN20, the meeting between Jean Noël Barrot and Imma Tor Faus was also part of a broader effort to deepen the 'excellent dynamics' of the Franco Andorran relationship and to support the forthcoming association agreement between Andorra and the European Union."

“Both ministers welcomed what they described as the ‘excellent dynamics’ of the Franco Andorran relationship, marked by strong cross border ties and regular cooperation.” according to The press release (French Ministry of foreign affairs)

“They discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation in customs matters, education and healthcare, as well as the main current European and international issues, noting their ‘profound convergences based on shared values.” according to The press release (French Ministry of foreign affairs)

“Jean Noël Barrot reiterated France’s ‘full support’ for the Association Agreement between the European Union and the Principality of Andorra and expressed the hope that it would be signed in the near future, while assuring his counterpart of France’s ‘full mobilisation’ for the reopening of the RN20.” (Source: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs/ Press Release).

Paris backs a “mixed” agreement, combining EU and member state competences, a path that Portugal, Italy and Germany have also recently endorsed, with the ambition of finalising the framework by 2026. For France, helping Andorra anchor itself more firmly in the European legal and economic space means stabilising its northern Pyrenean border, protecting French residents and investors there, and ensuring that the principality’s fiscal transition is orderly rather than abrupt.(Source: Habiter en Andorre)

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Geographically, Andorra is a hinge between the French and Spanish sides of the Pyrenees; geopolitically, it is a laboratory where EU rules, national interests and the survival of a very small state must be reconciled. In reaffirming France’s “full support” for the association agreement and promising “total mobilisation” for the reopening of the RN20, Jean Noel Barrot is sending a double message: Paris will not neglect the daily concerns of its smallest neighbour, and it sees this principality not as a peripheral curiosity, but as a useful relay for its influence and stability at the heart of the Pyrenees. (Source: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

PRESIDENT MACRON SKIPED THE CRIF DINNER: WHILE SELLING €Bn 30 RAFALE FIGHTER JETS TO INDIA POWER
The Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions’ annual gala dinner is more than a community event: it has become a major stage of French political life, traditionally attended by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, several dozen ministers and parliamentarians, as well as high profile figures from the media and entertainment industries. In 2026, Emmanuel Macron was absent, travelling in India from 17 to 19 February for an AI summit and to push a mega contract for between 114 and 145 Rafale fighter jets, worth an estimated €30 billion, for Dassault Aviation, a reminder that France’s diplomatic calendar often oscillates between symbolic domestic events and very concrete export deals. (Source: Youtube CRIF Diner)

CRIF DINER THE SUPPER’s IMAGE IN LOUVRE YET, ACCESSIBILITY GAPS The French Prime minister Sebastien Lecornu therefore delivered the main speech, calling the evening “a very special, singular dinner” and warning that antisemitism “has returned brutally in the space of a single generation”, while promising new legal tools against antizionism “whenever it serves as the mask of the oldest antisemitism”.
From my own perspective as a disabled correspondent, the CRIF dinner also has a more prosaic history: on 6–7 May 2024, I was de facto excluded from covering the event at the Carrousel du Louvre because both lifts giving access to the underground halls broke down at the same time, during the Premiership of Gabriel Attal, at Matignon’s office . (Source: Youtube/ Le figaro CRIF Diner).

Matignon’s press team, who had accredited me as part of the Prime Minister’s pool, were embarrassed and genuinely sorry to see me stuck downstairs, while CRIF staff had previously assured them that the venue was “100% accessible” to wheelchair users and did not deploy any effort to fox this.

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