

Editorial

Xenophobia: Casting Out the Un-French

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France has no equivalent to the 14th Amendment, but the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, who likes to be known as Sarko the American, also is fanning dangerous anti-immigrant passions for short-term political gain.

Last week, he proposed stripping foreign-born French citizens of their citizenship if they are convicted of threatening the life of a police officer or other serious crimes. Lest any voter miss the point that such a law would be particularly aimed at Muslim immigrants, Mr. Sarkozy's interior minister, in charge of the police force, helpfully added polygamy and female circumcision to the list of offenses that could bring loss of citizenship.

Days earlier, Mr. Sarkozy promised to destroy the camps of the Roma and send them back to where they came from, mainly Romania and Bulgaria. Both countries are members of the European Union. Hundreds of thousands of their residents, in France legally, now risk being swept up and expelled in police raids.

And Mr. Sarkozy proposes denying automatic French citizenship to people born in France if their parents are foreign and they have a record of juvenile delinquency.

All of this in a country that has long proudly upheld the principle that all French citizens — native-born or naturalized — are entitled to equal treatment under the law. That applies to Mr. Sarkozy's Hungarian-born father and Italian-born wife, both naturalized French citizens, and should apply to everyone else.

But immigrant-bashing is popular among nonimmigrant French voters and Mr. Sarkozy has never been shy about doing it. He built his 2007 presidential campaign around his tough record (and inflammatory words) as interior minister. Earlier this year, he ran a divisive campaign to define French national identity because he wanted to fend off the far right anti-immigrant National Front in regional elections. It didn't work.

Now, with his political fortunes at a new low and the National Front resurgent under younger leadership, he has gone further, worrying traditional conservatives who still believe in the rights of man and the equality of all French citizens. They are right to be concerned, and he is recklessly wrong to ignore their cautionary advice.

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P.S.

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http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/06/opinion/06fri2.html?ref=nicolas_sarkozy