

French President Sarkozy makes anti-immigrant appeal to neo-fascist vote

By Antoine Lerougetel and Olivier Laurent
16 March 2012

At his presidential election rally Sunday, French President Nicolas Sarkozy pledged to oblige the European Union to end the free circulation of people in the Schengen area and strengthen the area's borders, known as “Fortress Europe”, against immigration from outside the EU.

Claiming that Europe was “in danger of dislocation,” Sarkozy said: “There must be a common discipline in the controls at the frontiers. ... If I were to see that over the next 12 months there is no serious progress on this, then France would suspend its participation in the Schengen agreements until negotiations are concluded.”

Sarkozy’s provocative statements at the rally included an attack on “multiculturalism”, and calls for referendums to toughen conditions for naturalisation and residence rights for immigrants. He also proposed forcing the unemployed to take the first job offered to them after compulsory training.

Sarkozy is deepening his strategy of winning votes from neo-fascist National Front (FN) candidate Marine Le Pen by adopting the neo-fascists’ program, as the entire ruling elite in France and in Europe takes on an ever more openly fascist character.

This follows Sarkozy’s statement in a March 6 appearance on France2 television, that France has “too many foreigners”. He proposed slashing the already relatively small number of foreigners that come to France each year: “Over a five-year term, we must cut in half the number of people who come here, passing from 180,000 to around 100,000.”

He signalled that he aimed to make it harder for immigrants to bring their families to France, including immigrants married to French people. Another administrative measure applied since May 2011 imposes an outright ban on foreign students working in

France once they have completed their degrees.

These comments exemplify how the ruling class in France collectively uses the FN to set the tone of political debate, allowing Sarkozy and Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande to endorse ultra-right, anti-immigrant measures. Last month Hollande called for a “solution” to the presence of Roma in France by interning them in camps. (See: “French Socialist Party presidential candidate calls for interning the Roma”).

Sarkozy is seeking to exploit popular anger with the reactionary, pro-business EU, which functions as a tool of rival European imperialist powers to ruin the working class, to push the political climate drastically to the right.

Launched at a meeting in the Luxembourg village of Schengen in 1985, the Schengen agreement suppresses passport and immigration controls between 25 signatory European nations, but has laid the basis for reactionary attacks on immigrants’ rights—particularly of immigrants from Eastern Europe and outside the EU. As Europe’s borders are increasingly militarised to block immigration, some 1,500 people drowned while crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe, according to UN figures.

Médiapart quoted the Migreurop immigrant rights group: “Schengen, conceived to facilitate circulation, in reality erects a thousand imperceptible frontiers designed to differentiate between internal movements according to status (European citizen, resident foreigner, visitor; etc.) ... Controls in the frontier zones or the whole country remain a necessity due to this bogus freedom of movement: far from disappearing, police collaboration between member states is becoming a major EU objective.”

Sarkozy’s calls to rewrite the Schengen accords are

part of a broader move throughout Europe to toughen anti-immigrant legislation to promote far-right sentiment. A European commission is due to report on modifications to Schengen in May and the commission on reciprocal conditions between the EU and its trading partners this month.

The Schengen accords have already repeatedly been unilaterally suspended for brief periods of time—most notably last April. France closed its border with Italy then, as thousands of French-speaking Tunisian refugees in Italy sought to join France's 600,000-strong Tunisian community. (See also: France re-establishes border controls with Italy amid dispute over African migrants”).

Sarkozy's declaration is tied to the Fiscal Pact, which he helped write with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and was signed by 25 of the 27 EU member states on March 2. It requires European governments to impose deep budget cuts, placing the burden of repaying state debts to the banks on the working class.

As this pact increasingly undermines the economies of Greece and large parts of southern Europe, plans for re-establishing border controls within Europe take on an added significance. They would turn European states into prisons, where workers and youth in countries like Greece, Spain and Ireland seeking to leave their home countries to escape from unemployment and poverty would be barred from doing so—much as their counterparts in North Africa already are.

Sarkozy has been able to pursue these policies largely because the French bourgeois and petty-bourgeois “left” have supported his campaign to vilify immigrants and foreigners. Jean-Christophe Cambadélis of the PS praised Sarkozy's stance for showing “that treaties can be renegotiated”, a reference to Hollande's proposals to “renegotiate” the European Fiscal Pact.

It also exposes petty-bourgeois “left” groups—like the Revolutionary Communist League, the forerunner of the New Anti-Capitalist Party—that called in 2002 for a vote for right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac to defeat FN candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen and block the supposed danger of a neo-fascist takeover of France.

Having supported the coming to power of the right and largely backed its ever-deeper attacks on immigrants and democratic rights, they are complicit in

the entire political establishment's adoption of neo-fascist measures.

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