

# Vive la France!

Apologies to deputies **Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg** and **Silvana Koch-Mehrin**, for the omission of their MEP comments on the French presidency in the last issue. We were inundated with responses from parliamentarians and unfortunately the two MEPs' thoughts slipped through our final edit. Read their full comments below

**Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg** "I tried to change Europe, but Europe changed me," said Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, in his speech to the European parliament summarising the French presidency.

Although one may not like Sarkozy himself, he is currently the most effective politician in the EU. He is a high-flyer who sometimes tries to operate in the scope he is not authorised to do so (for example the Russian- Georgian war and the Gaza Strip conflict). His commitment, however, brings definite results: he convinced Russian authorities to agree a ceasefire; he contributed to the international compromise about the climate package guaranteeing "green economic growth"; he initiated an anti-crisis plan for the European economy; he persuaded the Irish to organise the Lisbon treaty referendum again; his efforts brought truce negotiations in the Gaza Strip (even during the Czech presidency).

Sarkozy claims that it is easier for Europe to have big ambitions than tiny little ones as the latter don't have the necessary power to overcome national egos. It is not bureaucracy but the lack of courage and clear strategic vision that slow down development of the EU. "We need Europe to be strong, united and ambitious. When you sweep things under the carpet you lay yourself open to future difficulties". Sarkozy has unquestionably achieved success and even his political opponents admit it.

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**Silvana Koch-Mehrin** "La présidence, c'est moi." In its best and its worst moments, the aplomb of French president Nicolas Sarkozy dominated the six month term of France's EU presidency. His crisis management enabled Europe to speak with a stronger and more decided voice in the Georgia crisis and also in the overall crisis that, since last October, embraces not only the financial but the worldwide economy. Although the top speed and the content of some of his proposals showed a rather actionistic attitude, Sarkozy in general did a good job in his driving seat. It only might have occurred that some of his co-pilots stepped out of the car with green faces.

But what happened with his agenda? Although the ministerial bureaucracy behind the frontrunner worked unsurprisingly well, many of the presidency's priorities have not been reached. Exemplarily regarding defence and security, Sarkozy had to set his sights lower. His plan to establish the EU security and defence policy as a pillar of the transatlantic security system have been pulverised. Instead, in the last days of the presidency, the French together with the European parliament managed a first reading agreement on 'public contracts in the field of defence and security', a first step for a common market in this field. Every little helps. ★