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## Nicolas Sarkozy warned by German Chancellor not to unveil £150m 'bling' presidential jet

By [Allan Hall](#)

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With riots in the streets and poll ratings in the basement, French President Nicolas Sarkozy is under pressure from both home and abroad to delay delivery of a refitted jet that will cost the taxpayer £151million.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is among those who have apparently told the luxury loving Sarkozy that now might not be the best time to take charge of the aircraft that is said to be dripping with 'bling'.

German sources say she advised Sarkozy earlier this week, at a meeting where the pair cut a controversial deal aimed at protecting the euro, to 'hold back' on taking deliver of the aircraft currently undergoing a series of final test flights over the Indian Ocean and South Pacific French administered islands.



© AFP/Getty Images

**The refurbished official Airbus for President Nicolas Sarkozy cost £150million: It is seen here landing in New Caledonian after a training flight on Wednesday**



© AFP/Getty Images

**Luxury: The plane is said to feature a bed, shower and a conference room**

Mrs. Merkel, who takes her official flights aboard a choice of two aircraft, is concerned along with other European leaders that such blatant excess might only further fuel the French protests against unpopular austerity measures.

With French lawmakers voting yesterday to pass the bill raising the minimum retirement age to 62 from 60, the new presidential aircraft — an Airbus A330-200 dubbed 'Air Sarko One' - was being prepared for its flight to France.

Mr Sarkozy is said to be locked in talks with everyone from his image advisers to the treasury about the possibility of parking the plane somewhere until the fighting mood in France dies down.

Team Sarkozy seems divided. Those who think the aircraft should fly in, the tricolour of France blazoned across its tail, point out that they have already given a nod to the new age of austerity by agreeing to refurbish a 12-year-old aircraft instead of buying a new one.

But opponents see it as one more Marie Antoinette-esque gesture from a president whose bodyguards are working overtime to protect him in the wake of the convulsions his policies have caused.



**Entente cordiale: Angela Merkel pulls a face during an EU summit in Brussels. She is said to have advised President Sarkozy not to unveil the aircraft**

Leaders of the Socialist opposition are portraying its purchase as proof of his continuing distance from reality.

'We understand that the president has been very demanding about the fittings and that they are quite luxurious,' said René Dosière, a Socialist MP from recession-hit northern Picardy.

'At a moment when he is already so unpopular, I imagine this could cause him to lose more points.'

Already the costs of the plane have been budgeted to the defence ministry rather than the Elysee Palace. It can accommodate a Sarkozy entourage of 60, has a conference room seating 11, an office and a presidential bedroom suite.

'The A330 will meet the many international travel needs of the head of state — for example, those related to the next presidency by France of the G-20 and the G-8,' said Col. Francis Pollet, head of resource management of the defence ministry.



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A weekend opinion poll by Journal du Dimanche showed Sarkozy's approval rating at 29 percent, the lowest in memory for any French president.

The defence ministry insists that the plane will not be replete with luxuries, despite the presidential bedroom, private shower and fitted galley kitchen.

One of his spokesmen threatened legal action earlier this year against a plumber who said he was told to install a luxury bath - a statement later retracted as 'a joke'.

'There is very little that they can achieve on an A330 that can't be achieved on a normal business jet,' said Doug McVitie to the New York Times.

The managing director of Arran Aerospace, a consulting firm in Dinan, France, added: 'How often do they have to travel such long distances requiring a bed and a shower.'

'These aircraft are just an attempt to make a statement through ostentation.'

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