

Mixed view on France's EU presidency

by UPI

BRUSSELS -- France's tenure as president of the European Union beginning July 1 is being viewed as a Paris's return to the center stage of European politics. "The French presidency will be highly ambitious. Budget reform, agriculture, trade, energy security, climate change, immigration, defense -- you name it, as long as there's something to be done, the French will do it," said one Brussels-based ambassador in Monday's Financial Times. The overall perspective is mixed, however, as some EU countries see French President Nicolas Sarkozy as restless and unorthodox, as his criticism of the independence of the European Central Bank and his stance on a "Mediterranean Union" uniting southern Europe angered Germany and other northern states. Sarkozy's views on economic protectionism and Muslim immigration are met with disdain as well among other countries. EU officials, however, said they welcome the new ideas from the French president. "Sarkozy has brought a new French enthusiasm for Europe. He's formulating initiatives. It's very important. There are certain points that one can and must discuss but overall the attitude is positive," one senior official told the Financial Times. Portugal holds the EU presidency until the end of June.

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