

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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## French president speaks at World Leaders Forum

by Amber Tunnell



**MR. PRESIDENT** | French President Nicolas Sarkozy spoke to a packed room Monday at Columbia's World Leaders Forum. He took audience questions about education and health care, remarking, "Welcome to the club of states that don't turn their backs on the sick and the poor."

Just weeks after University President Lee Bollinger celebrated the opening of a Global Center in Paris, French President Nicolas Sarkozy made a bold speech at Columbia's World Leaders Forum Monday morning.

Sarkozy, whose visit was announced last week, spoke in French to a

packed house about rethinking market and governance models, and putting pressure on nations that may pose a threat. He was accompanied by his wife, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy.

Students braved rain and cold for the speech, some waiting outside for hours. But despite registering for the event, some students were turned away due to space limitations. Students who hadn't registered also lined up outside, hoping for an open seat.

In a rousing speech at Low Library, Sarkozy called for stricter economic regulations and a tougher front against nations that pose a threat. He also, when asked, dipped into American domestic policy in what Emmanuelle Saada, director of the Center for French and Francophone Studies, said was a "very, very ambitious political speech."

"He really used Columbia as a point of entry into the American public opinion," she said.

"In following him, one has the sense that he is more inclined than most to express his views as they are, regardless of the political consequences that might follow," University President Lee Bollinger said of Sarkozy. "I do sense that he is unafraid of controversy," he added.

While Sarkozy stressed the importance of the European-American connection, he warned the United States to be wary. "In Europe, we are your friends, your European friends. We in Europe admire you. You need not worry about that. However, in Europe, what we want is to be heard, to be listened to by the United States of America, that we should put our heads together and think together. You belong to a country that is the world's number one power. ... And you have to think about this very carefully, because what does that mean, to be the world's number one power?"

This was indicative of a pattern Saada saw in Sarkozy's speech—an eagerness to discuss Europe as a whole, rather than simply France. This, she said, shows the importance of Europe for Sarkozy, and that

the “partner for the United States is Europe” and not simply France.

Sarkozy also called for tougher economic rules and regulations. “World economic regulation can no longer stand still,” he said, adding, “A few hundred irresponsible hotheads did mad things on the stock market, with derivatives, with other people’s money. Do you think we can defend capitalism ... when there is so much injustice? I don’t think so because it is impossible to defend.”

Sarkozy added: “When the decision was taken not to bail out Lehman Brothers, we would have liked to be sounded out. ... That is solidarity.”

The president also pushed for a change in the structure of international organizations. When speaking about the United Nations, he remarked, “If we don’t change world governance, we don’t stand a chance of being able to manage tomorrow’s conflicts—for Iran, where we need to show total firmness, and that must not be allowed to get its hand of nuclear weapons, we need the support of China and Russia to have sanctions.”

“When faced with terrorism, we cannot stand divided,” he said.

An audience member asked Sarkozy about his country’s health care system, giving him an opportunity to comment on American domestic policy. “Health care is expensive. But you can’t let people simply die. ... If you come to France and something happens to you, you won’t be asked for your credit card before you’re rushed to the hospital,” he said.

“Welcome to the club of states that don’t turn their backs on the sick and the poor,” he added.

Saada called his remarks on health care in the United States “bold,” but noted, “He was reflecting a very deep feeling that French people had when witnessing the American debate this summer.”

While his comments may have been blunt, Saada said he was more

conservative in France when speaking on issues such as unemployment and regulating capitalism. “In France, he has a much tougher attitude,” she said.

Students’ reasons for wanting to attend the event varied. Alan Krill, a graduate student at SIPA, said he came to the speech because “French and U.S. relations have been rocky over the past decade.” He added that he would like to see how the countries could form a mutually beneficial alliance.

Jamie Brodsky, a student at the Business School, said, “I work in finance in New York. I wanted to get his take on the world,” specifically the global economic situation.

Student reactions to Sarkozy’s address were mixed.

“I enjoyed his calls for responsibility as the world’s number one power, as well as his desire to increase dialogue between our two countries,” Derek Turner, CC ’12 and director of communications for College Republicans, said in an email. “However, his thoughts on controlling the price of oil, increasing global governance, and drastically increasing regulation surprised me. Not only would these attempts be pointless, but they would stand a good chance of severely limiting our sovereignty and freedom as a nation.”

Patricia Klaric, CC ’13, said that Sarkozy was “clear and engaging.”

“It wasn’t a debate or anything ... he seemed to know that we didn’t know that much about situations going on in France,” she said.

“I thought his speech was a little trite, but his suggestion for a regulated global monetary system was provocative,” Adam Kuerbitz, CC ’12, said in an email. “And the three consecutive seconds I saw Carla Bruni made it worth standing in the rain for an hour to get in.”