

# Financial Times

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## Sarkozy opposes bidders for Le Monde

By Ben Hall in Paris

The race to recapitalise Le Monde took a new turn yesterday when it emerged that Nicolas Sarkozy had intervened against the business frontrunners to take over France's cash-strapped newspaper of record.

The French president summoned Eric Fottorino, editor of the left-leaning daily, this week to make clear his opposition to a takeover by Matthieu Pigasse, a Lazard banker, Pierre Bergé, the former business partner of Yves Saint Laurent, and Xavier Niel, the telecoms billionaire.

Mr Fottorino told colleagues the president had threatened to withhold state financing to restructure Le Monde's printworks if the title was sold to the trio, two of whom are close to rivals of the president.

The trio have said they are ready to invest up to €100m in Le Monde, which could run out of cash by July if it fails to find a buyer, the only outline offer on the table so far.

Mr Fottorino played down Mr Sarkozy's intervention, saying Le Monde had always attracted political interest. "That is not going to change."

According to Le Point magazine, Mr Sarkozy took issue with Mr Niel becoming part-owner of the prestigious title, describing him as a "peep show man". Mr Niel, one of France's richest men, started his career investing in soft pornography services on Minitel, France's forerunner to the internet.

The president's interference is bound to raise concerns about creeping political control over the media. Le Figaro, Les Echos, and Le Journal du Dimanche newspapers are owned by friends of the president. Mr Sarkozy also recently changed the law to allow him to name the head of public television.