

*Ex-French President Sarkozy
loses appeal against graft
conviction*



Paris court upholds sentence but spares Sarkozy prison time as the still influential leader fights other criminal cases.

Paris, May 17 (RHC)-- Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy has lost his appeal against a 2021 corruption and influence-peddling conviction. On Wednesday, the Paris Court of Appeals upheld a three-year prison sentence against Sarkozy, but it ruled that two years would be suspended and Sarkozy would wear an electronic bracelet instead of going to jail for the remaining year.

The court also said the conservative politician remains banned from public office for three years. His lawyers said they would appeal the decision before the Court of Cassation, France's highest appeals court.

"Nicolas Sarkozy is innocent," lawyer Jacqueline Laffont told reporters. "We will take this all the way. We are just at the beginning of the process."

In March 2021, Sarkozy became France's first post-war president to be sentenced to prison when a court found he and his former lawyer, Thierry Herzog, had formed a "corruption pact" with Judge Gilbert Azibert to obtain and share information about an investigation. His predecessor, Jacques Chirac, was also convicted in a criminal trial for corruption but received a two-year suspended sentence in 2011.

Sarkozy was exposed after investigators wiretapped his two official phone lines and discovered that he also had a third unofficial phone, taken out in 2014 under the name of Paul Bismuth, which he used to contact Herzog. Sarkozy contested the accusation and immediately appealed, saying he had "never corrupted anybody". However, his conversations with Herzog were played out during the appeal trial.

This month, financial prosecutors in a separate case requested that Sarkozy face trial on corruption charges and illegal financing of an election campaign related to alleged Libyan funding of his 2007 presidential bid. Prosecutors said Sarkozy and 12 other people allegedly sought millions of euros from the government of then-Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi for the French leader's ultimately successful campaign.

Sarkozy will also be retried on appeal in the so-called Bygmalion case, which also concerns campaign financing and saw him initially sentenced to one year in prison. The prosecution accused his team of spending nearly double the legal limit for his 2012 re-election campaign by using false billing from a public relations firm, Bygmalion.

Despite his ongoing legal issues, Sarkozy, 68, who was president from 2007 to 2012, still holds considerable influence and popularity among the right and has the ear of current President Emmanuel Macron.

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