

# Race on for Europe's top job

The countdown to choose the first president of the European Council has begun with front-runner Tony Blair's chances on the wane. Almost 20 leaders are said to oppose Blair, with most looking for a consensus-building summit chairman rather than a high-profile president

**Tony Blair, 56:** British prime minister from 1997 to 2007. Big-hitter is on first-name terms with many world leaders but has little support from the left, following his vigorous support for former President Bush and the U.S.-led war in Iraq. Leaders from Belgium, Hungary, Luxembourg and Spain oppose Blair's appointment. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is his strongest backer



**Jan Peter Balkenende, 53:** Dutch Prime Minister who heads coalition government has proven record in brokering compromises. Christian Democrat currently enjoys support of Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel



**Paavo Lipponen, 68:** Finland's former Social Democrat prime minister (1995-2003) is potential consensus candidate who could block Blair. Opposed by Poland and Estonia over backing of Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany



**Felipe González, 67:** Spain's former prime minister (1982-96) has been chairing panel of "wise men" assessing EU's longterm future. Candidacy hampered by fact that another Iberian, Jose Manuel Barroso, already holds a top post

**Other contenders – must be sitting or former head of government**

**Jean-Claude Juncker:** Prime minister of Luxembourg – candidacy is bid to blow Blair out of race

**François Fillon:** French PM  
**Herman Van Rompuy:** Belgian PM  
**Martti Ahtisaari:** Former Finnish president

**Mary Robinson:** Former Irish president