

# Race to be Europe's first president

As leaders of the 27 EU member states prepare to choose the organisation's first president, there is growing speculation they may lean towards a chairman-style president from one of the smaller countries

**Herman van Rompuy, 62:** Belgian prime minister has emerged as strong candidate whose consensus-building skills could suit EU powerhouses Germany and France. Respected for his low profile and humble work ethic, Rompuy, a Christian Democrat, is a keen blogger and author of several books, mainly on social and political issues



**Tony Blair, 56:** Former British prime minister, has little support from left following vigorous support for former President Bush and U.S.-led war in Iraq. 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. Rejection by Dutch voters of draft EU constitution in 2005 could work against him



**Jean-Claude Juncker, 54:** Luxembourg leader is EU's longest serving PM and current head of Eurogroup of finance ministers. UK prime minister Gordon Brown unlikely to support him because of his federalist reputation

*Other contenders:*

**Paavo Tapio Lipponen:**

Former Finnish PM

**Wolfgang Schuessel:**

Former Austrian Chancellor

**Vaira Vike-Freiberga:**

Former Latvian President

**John Bruton:** Former Irish PM

**Felipe Gonzalez:** Former Spanish PM

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