

Setback for Tony Blair's ambition to be president of Europe

Former prime minister, who is believed to be considering bidding for the post, faces stiffening opposition from Sweden and Spain

By [Ian Traynor](#)

Global Research, July 01, 2009

The Guardian 1 July 2009

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

[Tony Blair](#)'s ambition to become Europe's first president have been set back by stiffening opposition from Sweden and Spain, the two countries chairing the EU for the next year.

Senior officials in Stockholm, which assumed the six-month rotating presidency of the EU today, said they feared a President Blair would be a divisive figure, triggering friction between small and large European countries, and added that José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Spanish prime minister, was even more strongly opposed to Blair securing the post and usurping Madrid's running of the union next year.

The decision to appoint a new sitting European president, for a maximum of five years, is to be taken before the end of the year if Ireland votes yes in October in a referendum on the Lisbon treaty streamlining the way the EU is run and also creating the new post.

Fredrik Reinfeldt, the Swedish prime minister, made clear his aversion to Blair securing the plum post, without mentioning the former prime minister by name.

"The small countries don't want a strong leader because they fear he will be run by the big [EU] countries," said Reinfeldt.

European governments had to decide whether the post ought to be turned into "a strong leader for Europe" or whether the president's role should be limited to chairing EU summits and "not putting the [European] commission president in the shadow," said the Swedish prime minister.

It was clear he preferred the latter role, a lower profile and less influential function that would probably be less attractive to Blair.

The former prime minister is believed to be strongly considering bidding for the post. Former close aides have indicated they could be moving to Brussels. But no announcement of a candidacy is expected until after the Irish referendum.

When Blair's name first surfaced for the position last year, it quickly became clear that he had the support of France's president, Nicolas Sarkozy, but was opposed by Berlin, where the chancellor, Angela Merkel, is said to prefer a more limited role for the president and a weaker figure.

That situation may no longer obtain. Sarkozy is said to have gone cool on Blair and could support Felipe González, the former Spanish prime minister, while Merkel's opposition seems to have diminished despite the fact that Blair is widely mistrusted in Germany for his role in the Iraq war and because he failed to use his 10 years in Downing Street to put Britain "at the heart of Europe".

Privately, senior Swedish officials questioned the merits of a Blair presidency. Running the EU for the next year, the Swedish and Spanish governments enjoy agenda-setting powers that could complicate a Blair bid.

The Briton's main assets, however, are name and brand recognition, international contacts, and the absence, so far, of any serious rival for the post.

Last year, the Germans were said to be backing either Jean-Claude Juncker, the veteran prime minister of Luxembourg, or Wolfgang Schäussel, the former Austrian chancellor. Both are no longer mentioned as credible contenders.

Rather than names, the Swedes want to concentrate on settling the job description and defining the role and powers for the new post.

The job of European president, held for a maximum of two terms of 30 months, is established by the Lisbon treaty, along with the new post of European foreign policy chief, who is also to be a vice-president of the European commission.

The president is to be appointed by European heads of state or government, but the role and powers have yet to be agreed, except that the person should be a former president or prime minister.

British diplomats say that the first president will shape the role, while the Swedes say the job description should precede the appointment.

The original source of this article is The Guardian
Copyright © [Ian Traynor](#), The Guardian, 2009

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Ian Traynor](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long as the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted

material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca