

RELEASE IN PART  
B6

**From:** sbwhoeop [redacted]  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 10:31 AM  
**To:** H; Doug Band  
**Subject:** fyi: latest on Blair candidacy. Sid

B6

## EU leaders to debate Blair presidency on summit sidelines

Climate talks overshadowed by divisive subject of Tony Blair's candidacy to be Europe's first president

European government chiefs gather in Brussels this evening for a summit likely to be the first occasion to broach the divisive subject of Tony Blair's candidacy to be Europe's first president.

The topic is not formally on the agenda of a meeting that will be dominated by wrangling over climate change funding and how to get the Czech president, Vaclav Klaus, to add the final signature to the reformist Lisbon treaty. But senior diplomats predicted there would be intense private discussion on the fringes of the summit over the question: who will get the plum job of first sitting president of the European council, the pre-eminent EU forum that brings leaders together for summits at least four times a year.

David Miliband, the foreign secretary, said today that Blair would give Europe a "strong voice" on the global stage, but his comments were seized on by his Conservative shadow, William Hague, who said the debate over the presidency proved that the UK should have held a referendum on the Lisbon treaty.

Officially, the job does not exist until Klaus finalises Czech ratification of the treaty, expected within weeks. While Blair personally has kept quiet about his ambitions, the British government is campaigning increasingly assertively on the former prime minister's behalf.

"We will be making the case for a strong, internationally known figure who can open doors in [foreign] capitals," said an official. "There is only one candidate."

That was not a reference to Jean-Claude Juncker, the veteran Luxembourg prime minister and European fixer, who is the only contender so far to have openly declared his candidacy. He emerged this week as the anti-Blair.

Juncker looks certain to fail in his bid for the top job. But he may well succeed in destroying Blair's chances, being viewed as a stalking horse who will vanish to make way for a third unknown contender.

While the Blair debate rages on the sidelines of the summit, the big priority for the Swedish government chairing the meeting is to try to break a deadlock on EU funding of climate change programmes in the developing world ahead of the Copenhagen conference in December.

Berlin and Warsaw are the keys to a deal, but the prospects for a breakthrough look dim. Fredrik Reinfeldt, the Swedish prime minister, warned that Europe's credibility on global warming was at stake.

In recent weeks European governments have locked horns over the financing package and have been unable to reach agreement. The aim is to come up with pledges of an EU fund of up to €15bn (£13.4bn) a year by 2020 for transfers to the developing countries to combat global warming. The overall package is central to a Copenhagen deal.

But with the other big players, especially the US, which is reluctant to commit to a figure, Germany believes Europe should not show its hand until the Copenhagen negotiations. The European commission and others such as the UK and the Scandinavians believe agreeing on a figure in advance would strengthen Europe's global leadership role on climate change and send a strong signal to other potential signatories.

The Poles and other eastern Europeans are unhappy at being asked to stump up for developing countries such as Brazil, which is wealthier than the poorer EU members. The Poles are refusing to agree a package and figures for Copenhagen unless it is first decided how the bill will be split among the EU's 27 governments. In the midst of a financial crisis, the eastern Europeans say they cannot afford the climate change fund.

Angela Merkel, sworn in yesterday for a second term as German chancellor, will be pivotal to any climate change financing deal and her answer to the Blair question may also be decisive. So far, she has been hedging her bets.

While Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, is known to support Blair with reservations, there are no German candidates for the two big new jobs being created under Lisbon – the European president and a European foreign minister or high representative for foreign and security policy.

In Paris last night the French and German leaders discussed the posts, although there was little information on whether they reached a pact. Sarkozy said the two leaders agreed on "almost everything".

Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg – all said to nurse ambitions to secure the presidential post themselves – have come out publicly against Blair on the grounds that he would neglect the interests of smaller EU member states – 19 out of the total 27.

Adding his voice to the argument, Demitris Christofias, the president of Cyprus, said a council president "from a small country would be more objective and more consensual. The European Union is a family of compromises."

The Dutch centre-right prime minister and possible contender, Jan-Peter Balkenende, has come under pressure this week to renounce European presidential ambitions since his move to Brussels could trigger early elections and the fall of his government.

Christofias emphasised that tonight the priority would be to get the Klaus blocking of the Lisbon treaty lifted rather than focusing on who gets what under Lisbon.

Senior diplomats agreed it was too early to discuss names. If Klaus signs the treaty soon, a special summit would be convened next month to decide on the president and foreign minister, also leaving the European commission chief, Jose Manuel Barroso, to put together a new team.