



Tony Blair unfit for EU Presidency

Recommendation to
the European Council

by André Nilsen

Change has finally come to America. Europe, on the other hand, is about to take a great leap backward. While the US has just elected Barack Obama as its president, the EU is considering harking back to the days of George Bush by appointing his closest ally Tony Blair as its very first president.

One is a Nobel Peace Laureate. The other is best known for starting wars, facilitating torture, and curbing civil liberties. And of course, for being one of the main political architects behind the very neoliberal financial capitalism that over the last two years has come crashing down on the world, for taxpayers to clean up.

MAIN POINTS

The European Council should not make Tony Blair its first permanent President but instead choose a low-profile, consensual, trusted, multilateralist, centrist, progressive, diplomatic, Europeanist, forward-looking, and public-spirited woman or man among the many excellent other candidates.

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A NEW CHAPTER

The EU has just been given a Constitution. After a protracted and acrimonious birth, the Lisbon Treaty was finally ratified by the recession-hit Irish electorate on 2 October 2009 and signed by the die-hard Czech president on 3 November 2009, clearing the way for its entry into force on 1 December 2009.

The new top-level position of President of the European Council is a major innovation. As the chair of the summit of heads of state and government, the office is of great importance to the future of Europe. As the EU with the Constitution de facto becomes a Republic, the EU President will in practice be Europe's head of state.

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

Tony Blair has to any common-sense person's astonishment and dismay and to the British people's shock and horror emerged as the frontrunner candidate for this new post of EU President. This proposal is unrivalled in its absurdity. The EU President must embody, protect, and advance the core European beliefs, values, and interests. Tony Blair however

would discredit, damage, and destroy the very foundations of European unity.

1. CHAIRMAN, NOT CHIEF

The EU President should be a low profile personality. In terms of the nature of the office, the EU's consensual culture, decentralized governance, and nationally rooted legitimacy call for a weak president akin to the German model and would jar with a strong president in the mould of the French model. A small member state leader is perhaps most likely to fit the bill but this is not necessarily so. Angela Merkel is a good example of a low profile personality who is a big member state leader and she could be a great future president.

Tony Blair, however, is a high profile personality. He is big headed, strong willed, and celebrity driven. Indeed his reported demands that Europe's highest public office be shaped to his personal tastes testifies to a remarkable egocentrism, arrogance, and hubris.

2. BRIDGER, NOT DIVIDER

The EU President should be a consensual politician. With regards to the main players, cultivating shared ideas, building common ground, and crafting broad coalitions among the big four as well as between the big and the small member states – while simultaneously cooperating with the Commission and the Parliament – requires a behind-the-scenes negotiator with integrity, trust, sensitivity, and patience.

Tony Blair, however, is an adversarial politician. Not only did he happily split Europe over the Iraq war, he is the all time champion in the distinctly British game of hardball politics, where spin is in the air, blood is on the floor, compromise is for losers, and the winner takes all.

3. CITIZEN, NOT CRUSADER

The EU President should be a trusted representative. With regards to citizens, democratic legitimacy relies on a solid connection between politicians and voters. Bruxelles institutions however often appear distant, opaque, and impenetrable for ordinary people, an important

reason why several referenda on European issues have failed and voter turnout in European elections is declining. The president can only play the critical role of boosting the democratic reputation of the EU and gaining the legitimizing trust of citizens if she or he reflects their concerns and inspires their confidence.

Tony Blair, however, is a discredited zealot. After a decade of autocratic rule imposing unpopular policies that have made people more vulnerable, less secure, and increasingly disenfranchised, he is tarnished at home and resented abroad. A man who is more out of step with and opposed to the interests of citizens is hard to find.

4. MULTILATERALIST, NOT UNILATERALIST

The EU President should be a global partner. With regards to the world, the EU as a force for good in support of the UN requires a president with an unyielding respect for international law, an instinctive defence of multilateral institutions, a credible commitment to international cooperation, an openminded attitude to alternative viewpoints, a proactive embrace of a multipolar world, and a balanced outlook on global developments.



Tony Blair, however, is an Anglo-American imperialist. In sharp contrast to what the EU needs, he offers a spineless proclivity to bend law to suit power, an instinctive desire for unilateral action, a hegemonic approach of divide-and-rule, a missionary inclination to impose his beliefs, an intrinsic resistance to rising powers, and a predisposed orientation to global issues, all glossed over with empty rhetoric on intercultural tolerance.

5 . C E N T R I S T , N O T N E O L I B E R A L

The EU President should be an economic moderate. In social and economic policy, Europe's people want to protect industry against finance and the welfare state against global capitalism.

Tony Blair, however, is a City banker. Currently earning vast sums working for JPMorgan Chase and Zurich Financial Services, his core political project has consistently been to introduce markets everywhere – until everything, including human beings, is reduced to simply just another asset, whose value is nothing but its rate of return – with all markets woven together in a great chain culminating in the global capital market, boosting privatized returns through socialized risk as

the financial elite skims the cream while hardworking middle class taxpayers pick up the tab. Child poverty and industrial decline are but two of the devastating effects at national level, at global scale we are still picking up the broken pieces of the financial crisis and the economic recession.

6 . P R O G R E S S I V E , N O T N E O C O N

The EU President should be a defender of justice. In justice policy, human civilization is based on universal values expressed in human rights, civil liberties, rule of law, and international law. Against the backdrop of Europe's history, with enlightened ideas time and again collapsing in internal bloodshed and external imperialism, it is vital that the president is committed to standing up for justice even in the most adverse and testing circumstances.

Tony Blair, however, is a modern Machiavelli. A fervent acolyte in the war on terror, he swept aside human rights by assisting the outsourcing of torture through extraordinary rendition and Guantanamo Bay, tore apart civil liberties by creating an authoritarian state with control orders, restrictions on protest, and ex-

treme surveillance, side stepped rule of law by abolishing checks and balances through emergency powers and information restrictions, and grossly violated international law by committing the international crime of aggression through the illegal war against Iraq.

7. DIPLOMAT, NOT WARLORD

The EU President should be a peaceful conflict manager. In foreign, security, and defence policy, the president should be a credible spokesperson and fair mediator, prioritizing civilian strategies and tools.

Tony Blair, however, is a triggerhappy battlefield combatant. He is a distrusted spindoctor and biased partisan, preferring military strategies and tools. It comes as no surprise that he has failed to make any significant progress in the Middle East.

8. EUROPEAN, NOT NATIONALIST

The EU President should be a supporter of integration. Considering the overall project, the president must nurture a broad vision of not just economic unifica-

tion but also social cohesion and political integration.

Tony Blair, however, is a brake on integration. Opting out of Schengen and the Euro, clinging on to the rebate, watering down the Constitution, and inviting in Turkey, his narrow vision embraces market expansion but rejects social solidarity and political unity.

9. FUTURE, NOT PAST

The EU President should be a woman or a man for the future. Looking at the big picture, the president must be able to start from a blank canvas with a vision for tomorrow.

Tony Blair, however, is a man of the past. A man with more troubled political baggage is hard to imagine. He will forever remain mired in the controversies of his time as prime minister. His only motivation to seek the job is a desperate last ditch attempt to redeem his legacy. Gordon Brown's only motivation to nominate him for the job meanwhile is a disgraceful plot to destabilize the next government after the upcoming election which is widely expected to be won by the Conservatives. European leaders appointing Tony Blair as EU President would be a



slap in the face of the Tories, derailing what are already fraught relations.

10. SERVANT, NOT MERCHANT

The EU President should be dedicated to the public interest. In terms of the integrity of the incumbent, any conflict of interest, whether real or perceived, would not be tolerable in Europe's highest public office.

Tony Blair, however, is stained by his business interests. After leaving 10 Downing Street, he has built up what the Financial Times describes as 'Blair Inc', consisting of Tony Blair Associates and a network of companies Windrush Ventures Ltd, Windrush Ventures No 1, Windrush Ventures No 2, Windrush Ventures No 3, Firerush Ventures Ltd, Firerush Ventures No 1, Firerush Ventures No 2, and Firerush Ventures No 3. Alongside comes a £4.6m book advance from Random House, a \$1m sign on fee plus \$100,000 per speech from Washington Speakers Bureau, and the seven-figure work for JPMorgan Chase and Zurich Financial Services. Headquartered in one of the world's most expensive office spaces in Grosvenor Square in Mayfair, the vast, byzantine, secretive, ethically

thorny, and politically problematic business empire has led to 'an uncomfortable proximity between official duties, fundraising efforts and his growing commercial interests'. An envoy for the UN, the US, the EU, and Russia in the Middle East, for example, he 'sometimes takes the opportunity to introduce his own business venture'.

EXCELLENT ALTERNATIVES

The good news is there is no shortage of European leaders who would make a vastly better EU President than Tony Blair.

Great names include (in alphabetical order) Martti Ahtisaari, Giuliano Amato, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Felipe González, Tarja Halonen, Jean-Claude Juncker, Paa-vo Lipponen, Angela Merkel, Chris Patten, Göran Persson, Romano Prodi, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, Mary Robinson, Javier Solana, Herman Van Rompuy, Guy Verhofstadt, and Margot Wallström.

When Barack Obama looks in the eyes of his European counterpart, he should not have to see the spirit of George Bush, he should instead see the soul of a fellow humanist.

Information

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