

RELEASE IN PART
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From: sbwhoep [redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, October 14, 2009 6:01 PM
To: H
Subject: FYI: Tony... Sid

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H: This is the take of the Guardian today on Berlusconi's endorsement of Tony for EU president. Don't know if you have proper venue or method to make your own comment but I'm sure it would be helpful. Will learn more from Shaun about subsequent meetings. Sid

Silvio Berlusconi backs Tony Blair for EU presidency

Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has backed old friend Tony Blair for EU presidency. Photograph: Stefano Rellandini/Reuters

Tony Blair's bid for the presidency of Europe may have been struggling to make headway, but today it hit a rock when he won the endorsement he must secretly have been dreading.

In a letter published in an Italian newspaper, Silvio Berlusconi threw his less than colossal moral authority behind his old friend's candidacy. The man who promised to put Britain "at the heart of Europe", but chose to stay out of the euro and maintain border controls, had "all his papers in order to become the first president of the European council [of ministers] under the terms of the Lisbon treaty", the Italian prime minister declared.

Signalling what could prove a fatal blow to the Blair cause, Berlusconi, whose own incursions into Europe have included comparing a German MEP to a Nazi concentration camp guard, vowed: "I and my government will make every effort to ensure that a great political heritage is not wasted." Congratulating the editor of the centre-right daily *Il Foglio* on an editorial supporting Blair, he listed his qualities as "courage, steadiness [and] prudence, always exercised without indecision".

Like all great political friendships, the one between Blair and Berlusconi was troubled by the odd frisson. But Italian and British officials alike will attest that the rapport between them was real. Someone present at one of their convivial encounters told the Guardian that Berlusconi had been quite unable to contain his admiration for the British leader.

"You know, Tony?" he blurted out. "If you were a woman, I'd ask you to marry me." According to the source, Blair replied: "You know, Silvio? If you were as rich as you are, I think I'd accept."