

Labour candidate Michael Higgins in the lead in voting intentions for the Presidential election in Ireland

from **Corinne Deloy**

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D-7
7 days before
the poll

3.1 million Irish are being invited to appoint the successor to Mary Patricia McAleese to the Presidency of the Republic of Ireland on 27th October. The Irish will vote on the same day in two referenda – one on the remuneration of judges and the other on the possibility of the Oireachtas (Parliament) to undertake inquiries.

7 people are running for the Presidency, a record number in this election:

- Gay Mitchell, MEP (PEE, IE) is the Fine Gael candidate, the party in office;
- Michael Higgins, poet, former Arts and Culture Minister (1994-1997), is the chair of the Labour Party, a member of the ruling government coalition;
- Martin McGuinness, Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, is running for Sinn Fein (SF);
- Sean Gallagher, company head, known as one of the heroes in a TV programme broadcast by RT1, Ireland's Dragons' Den, is running as an independent;
- Mary Davis, organiser of the World Summer Olympics in 2003, appointed the following year to the State Council, is also running as an independent;
- Dana Rosemary Scallan, the unfortunate candidate in the previous presidential election on 30th October 1997 and known for having enabled Ireland to win the Eurovision song contest in 1970 with the song, All Kinds of Everything, is also running as an independent;
- David Norris, Senator of Dublin, a James Joyce specialist and known for being the first homosexual to have been elected to a public post in Ireland, is running as an independent.

Fianna Fail (FF), the main opposition party chose not to put a candidate forward.

Labour chair Michael Higgins attracted many supporters amongst the Fianna Fail electorate at the beginning of the campaign. The latter now seem to be turning their attention towards Sean Gallagher. The two men are also convincing an increasing number of the Fine Gael electorate, who are turning away from the appointed candidate, Gay Mitchell.

Former Fianna Fail member, Sean Gallagher is trying to distance himself from his old party and notably from his work in government over the last four years. "I think we should give value back to traditional, to production and services and not just to high tech industries that are unable to take on half a million people," declared the candidate.

Sinn Fein candidate, Martin McGuinness, lies third in the polls. This explains why, over the last few days that he has chosen to throw the light on the two men who are leading in the polls – Michael Higgins and Sean Gallagher – whom he accuses of being the establishment candidates. He has promised to unite the people against avariciousness and the egotism of the wealthiest and has promised to fight mass unemployment. Since Fianna Fail does not have a candidate and with one candidate on the left – Michael Higgins – whose party is in power – Sinn Fein undeniably has a role to play. Martin McGuinness should have the support of a great number of Irish who are fighting for the reunification of the island and his party's opposition to the cost of the rescue plan imposed on Dublin by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union. With regard to this, in its latest annual study published on Ireland published on 14th October, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) lauded "the significant work that has been done towards achieving budgetary balance," undertaken by the Irish authorities and noted the "satisfactory progress in reducing of the public deficit."

Farmers, people with the highest incomes, the elderly, women and Fine Gael supporters are the firmest opponents to the far-left nationalist group's candidate.

Presidential Election in Ireland 27th October 2011

On 12th October last the seven candidates took part in a TV debate on RTE. 654,000 people on average watched the programme. Many viewers complained about how Martin McGuinness was treated. Journalist Miriam O'Callaghan indeed asked the Sinn Fein leader if he knew the murderers of Patrick Kelly, killed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Ballinamore in December 1983 (his son David recently asked Martin McGuinness to reveal the truth). She also asked him about the way he reconciled his faith in God and the fact of having been involved in the murder of many people. "I have been accused of murder, it is false," declared Martin McGuinness who deplored the fact that the journalist

asked each of the candidates if they thought he was a worthy candidate in the presidential election, without asking him what he thought of his rivals.

David Norris is losing ground in the polls, after having led the race for several weeks.

According to the most recent poll by Ipsos MMRBI, published in the daily The Irish Times, Labour Party chair, Michael Higgins is in the lead in terms of voting intentions with 23% of the vote. He is followed by Sean Gallagher who is due to win 20% of the vote, Martin McGuinness 19%. Mary Davis is credited with 12%, David Norris, 11%, Gay Mitchell, 9% and Dana Rosemary Scallon, 6%.

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