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RESULTS

General Elections in Ireland, 25th February 2011

Fianna Fail is wiped out in the Irish General Elections which were won by Fine Gael that failed however to achieve an Absolute Majority.

Ireland experienced a true political earthquake in the snap election that took place on 25th February. Of course this had been expected and the real issues at stake were to see whether the main opposition party, Fine Gael (FG) would succeed in winning the absolute majority in the chamber of representatives and also to witness the extent of outgoing Fianna Fail's defeat. It goes without saying that the electorate voted massively against the restrictions placed on the Celtic Republic by the country's rescue plan as they gave their votes to the parties which had opposed it i.e. Fine Gael, Labour Party (Lab) and Sinn Fein (SF).

Ruling Fianna Fail therefore suffered total defeat. Outgoing Taoiseach Brian Cowen's (Prime Minister in Gaelic) Party won 17.4% of the vote and 20 seats (-57 in comparison with the general election of 24th May 2007), i.e. its lowest score ever. Micheal Martin, who took over from outgoing Prime Minister Brian Cowen mid-February as leader of Fianna Fail believed that his party's results in the general election were "disappointing". Believed by many of the Irish to be responsible for the socio-economic crisis which has affected the country severely ("the time has come to rid ourselves of the crooks who have pushed our country to bankruptcy," read the front page of the Irish Daily Star), Fianna Fail was indeed the victim of an extremely harsh sanction vote. The party which dominated political life since the country's independence in 1922 and which has governed Ireland for 55 of the last 74 years suffered its worst losses in Dublin: former Finance Minister Brian Lenihan (FF) was the only one of 13 candidates to have been elected there (Dublin-West).

The main opposition party, Fine Gael, led by Enda Kenny was the winner of this election. FG won 36.1% of the vote. With 76 seats (+25) it failed to achieve an absolute majority (the Dail Eireann, the

lower chamber in parliament, comprises 166 seats) and will have to agree with one or several partners in order to govern the country. Fine Gael is due to join forces with the Eamon Gilmore's Labour Party with which it has already governed on several occasions. The latter came second and achieved the highest score in its history: 19.4% of the vote and 37 seats (+17).

Enda Kenny's Fine Gael may also choose to form a coalition with the independents. The latter which comprised 179 in all out of a record 566 candidates (i.e. 31.62%) won 12.6% of the vote. Fine Gael's Finance spokesperson (and probably the next Finance Minister), Michael Noonan, did however say that he wants to see a "stable government i.e. which did not have to count on the vote of the independent MPs every time". Fine Gael members and Labour disagree on several points. For example the former are in favour of reducing public spending whilst the second would prefer to raise taxes.

The far left nationalist party, Sinn Fein, won 9.9% of the vote and 14 seats (+10), the highest result in its history but below the score Gerry Adams, its leader had hoped for – he resigned from his post as MP in the British Parliament for these general elections.

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The Green Party, a member of the outgoing government coalition was severely humiliated in this election winning only 1.8% of the vote. It has therefore lost its 6 seats in the Dail Eireann. Ecologist leader and former Environment Minister, John Gormley did not manage to win his seat in the constituency of South East Dublin.

Turn out rose to 70.0% i.e. above that recorded on 24th May 2007 (+ 2.7 points).

"This country has given my party massive support so that it can provide a strong, stable government," declared Enda Kenny when the results were announced. In a speech on the national TV channel RTE he immediately demanded the opening of negotiations in view of reducing the severity of the international aid plan and a reduction in the interest rate of 5.8% which he deems as 'punitive'. "I shall look into all of the options. I do not want things hanging. I shall decide very quickly," he stressed. Enda Kenny wants to reduce the cost of the EU loan by reducing the interest rate, also by purchasing a share of the sovereign debt and by restructuring the banking debt that is not guaranteed by Dublin. He intends to limit contributions to banking losses not guaranteed by the State to bondholders alone. "I am looking for cooperation and support across all of Europe," he said.

The IMF and the EU are obliging Ireland to make 15 billion€ of savings (almost 10% of the GDP) in four years, 2/3 of which are to be achieved via social spending cuts (around 2.8 billion€) and 1/3 in tax increases. We should remember that the country has already been suffering austerity for the last four years. Civil servants salaries and social aid have decreased and economists are forecasting weak growth for the country in 2011. A new tax (of between 2% and 10% depending on income) has just been introduced but fiscal revenues are declining. The reduction of the public deficit (at present at 32% of the GDP) to 3% in 2014 which is the rescue plan's main goal seems to be an almost impossible objective to reach in so little time. Moreover the discontent of most of the Irish is fed by the feeling that the bankers – whom they consider to be mainly responsible for the economic crisis, are emerging from this undamaged and behave in all impunity.

Aged almost 60, Enda Kenny is from Castlebar (West Ireland). He studied at Saint-Patrick's in Dublin then at the National University of Ireland in Galway – initially he was a teacher. He was elected Mayor of Mayo in 1975 for Fine Gael after the accidental death of his father, Henry, who was also a member of the same party. In 1986 he became Education and Labour Minister. From 1994 to 1997 he was Tourism and Trade Minister. Enda Kenny, who is the eldest MP in the Irish Parliament, took over as leader of Fine Gael in 2002.

The new strong man of Ireland who sees himself as "just the coordinator of a team which comprises the most competent people" has a heavy task ahead in "getting Ireland back to work" echoing the Fine Gael slogan used in the election on 25th February (Let's get Ireland working). "Everyone will suffer. Everyone will have to go without," he declared. Notably he will have to give confidence back to Irish youth who are emigrating - fleeing the country en masse. Enda Kenny will be elected Prime Minister by the 166 members of the Dail Eireann on 9th March next.

General Election Results of 25th February 2011 in Ireland

Turn out: 70.1%

Political Parties	No of first choice votes won	% of first choice votes won	No of seats won
Fine Gael (FG)	801 725	36.1	76
Labour Party (Lab)	431 849	19.4	37
Fianna Fail (FF)	387 408	17.4	20
Sinn Fein (SF)	220 685	9.9	14
Green Party (GP)	41 040	1.8	0
Socialist Party (SP)	26 770	1.2	2
People Before Profit (PBP)	21 551	1	2
Workers Party (WP)	3 056	0.1	0
South Kerry Independent Alliance (SKIA)	2 102	0.2	0
Christian Solidarity Party (CSP)	4 939	0.1	0
Independents	279 492	12.6	15

Source: internet site of TV channel RTE (<http://www.rte.ie/news/election2011/results/index.html>)

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