

Michael D. Higgins takes over from Mary Patricia McAleese as President of the Republic of Ireland

from **Corinne Deloy**

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RESULTS

Michael Higgins (Labour Party) won the presidential election that took place on 27th October in Ireland winning 39.6% of the vote (first choice votes). He came out ahead of independent Sean Gallagher who won 28.5% of the vote. Michael Higgins won in 18 of the country's 26 counties and Sean Gallagher won in 7 of them: Cork North West, Cork South West, Tipperary North, Laois/Offaly, Roscommon/South Leitrim, Carvan/Monaghan and Donegal South West.

Sinn Fein (SF) candidate, Martin McGuinness, Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, came third with 13.7% of the vote. He won in the county of Donegal North East. In fourth position came MEP Gay Mitchell, the ruling party, Fine Gael's candidate (FG) with 6.4% of the vote, followed by Dublin's Senator David Norris, (independent), who won 6.2% of the vote; then came the other independent candidates Dana Rosemary Scallon and Mary Davis, who each won 2.9% and 2.7% of the vote respectively.

Turnout rose to 56.10%.

"I want to be the President for all of the people in the Republic, and for all of those who did not vote, for those who I shall encourage to have confidence in the institutions again," declared Michael Higgins who announced that he would resign from his post as Chair of the Labour Party- Fine Gael's present partner in the government coalition led by Prime Minister Enda Kenny.

"The electorate has privileged experimentation," stresses Elaine Byrne, Political Science Professor at Trinity College, Dublin. "Michael D. (Michael Higgins's nickname) is well loved and respected well beyond the Labour Party," she added. "Michael Higgins will have my entire support in his work as President of the Republic. His campaign motto confirmed that he would be everyone's president, of whom we could be proud, and I think he will do this," declared Sean Gallagher when the results were announced.

The major favourite, just days before the presidential election, the latter was accused by Sinn Fein candidate Martin McGuinness, during a TV debate on 24th October last, of having accepted 5,000€ from a businessman who has been convicted of smuggling, in order to fund Fianna Fail, of which Sean Gallagher once said he had "temporarily been a member". The independent candidate categorically denied these accusations but

the polemic undeniably led to a loss of votes. "I shall not be distracted by manoeuvres such as political assassination on the part of Martin McGuinness or any other Sinn Fein member," he said. According to a poll undertaken by the channel RTE, 55% of the electorate declared they had changed their voting intentions in the wake of this controversy.

"Michael Higgins will be a good President," stressed Martin McGuinness who said he was "delighted with his own result." "Tens of thousands of ordinary Irishmen and women identified with my patriotic message and my commitment," he said. "We have reduced the gulf between the north and south," said Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams. "This presidential campaign has enabled the far left nationalist party to smooth over its image of being a terrorist organisation to position itself as a true opposition party."

Fine Gael's candidate Gay Mitchell undoubtedly made the mistake of focussing his attacks on Martin McGuinness.

Aged 70 Michael Higgins is originally from Limerick. A sociology graduate, he taught this subject as well as political science at the University of Galway and at the University of Southern Illinois. Formerly a member of Fianna Fail, he then joined the Labour Party. Elected MP in 1981 he lost his seat the following year before retur-

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ning to the Dail Eireann, the lower chamber of the Oireachtas (parliament), in 1987. He chose not to stand again in 2011. Michael Higgins was mayor of Galway in 1982-1983 and in 1991-1992 and Arts, Culture and Gaelic Minister (a language which the new President of the Republic speaks) between 1993 and 1997 in the government led by John Bruton (FG). In 2003, he succeeded Proinsias De Rossa as chair of the Labour Party. Finally, the successor to Mary Patricia McAleese is also a famous poet.

On 11th November next Michael Higgins will become the ninth resident at the Aras an Uachtairain (the name of the residency of the heads of the Irish state). He

has promised to respect the neutral nature of the post. He will be sworn in as President of the Republic in St Patrick's Hall at the castle of Dublin. He will make the following declaration in Gaelic: "In the presence of Almighty God I, Michael Higgins, do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will maintain the Constitution of Ireland and uphold its laws, that I will fulfil my duties faithfully and conscientiously in accordance with the Constitution and the law, and that I will dedicate my abilities to the service and welfare of the people of Ireland. May God direct and sustain me.» (Article 12.8 of the Bunreacht na hEireann, i.e. 1937 Constitution).

Results of the Presidential Election 27th October 2011 in Ireland

Turnout: 56.10%

Candidates	No. of votes won (first choice votes)	% of votes won (first choice votes)
Michael Higgins (Labour Party, (Lab))	701 101	39.6
Sean Gallagher (independent)	504 964	28.5
Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein (SF))	243 030	13.7
Gay Mitchell (Fine Gael, FG)	113 321	6.4
David Norris (independent)	109 469	6.2
Dana Rosemary Scallion (independent)	51 220	2.9
Mary Davis (independent)	48 657	2.7

Source : Internet Site of the TV channel RTE (<http://www.rte.ie/news/presidentialelection/results.html>)

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