

Irish Political Situation

Prime Minister Charles Haughey was returned to power in March 1987, ousting the coalition government of Garret Fitzgerald. Haughey's party, Fianna Fail (Soldiers of Destiny, conservative), gained 81 of the 166 parliamentary seats, three short of a majority.

Following the election, the Progressive Democrats (a splinter group from the Fianna Fail) promised to co-operate with Haughey's minority government if it followed an economic strategy of cutting public expenditures and implemented fully the Anglo-Irish agreement concerning Northern Ireland. Prime Minister Haughey did both, despite a pre-election pledge to renegotiate the latter.

After some two years of governing, Haughey called a snap election to coincide with elections for the European Parliament, on June 15, 1989. Although he had hoped to gain a majority, his governing party was returned with a reduced minority of 77 seats. Although the main opposition party, the Fine Gael (Tribe of Ireland, slightly left of Fianna Fail), had improved its position in the election, its demand to share the leadership of any coalition government was rejected.

After lengthy negotiations, Mr. Haughey was confirmed as prime minister of a coalition government with the Progressive Democrats.

Irish politics underwent an important change during the presidential election in November 1990. The new president, Mary Robinson, the candidate of the leftist Labour and Workers' parties, has spent her career in law and politics advocating social change in many sensitive fields. Her election was seen as an expression of a desire for change among the Irish population.

Although the government currently enjoys a high rating in public opinion polls, its razor-thin majority makes for an uncertain parliamentary situation.