

26th January 2011

Dear Enda,

I was surprised and disappointed to read the media report of your comments about my proposal for a series of substantive debates during the general election. My proposal was developed directly in light of your previous statement *"It doesn't matter to me whether the leaders' debate is between two, three, or four people, or where it takes place"* and your stated willingness to have a campaign which shows that the parties are committed to changing Irish political culture.

Were your proposal for a single five way debate to be accepted it would mark a dramatic worsening of the situation. In the case of us as the leaders of the two largest Dáil parties we would go from speaking for roughly 40 minutes in a head-to-head debate to having less than half that time to answer questions or challenge others. How could such a debate even begin to deal with the issues facing our country with the seriousness they deserve?

We are the three largest Dáil parties and you yourself have said that you believe that this election is fundamentally based on a debate between us. During a four week campaign there is more than enough time for us to campaign amongst the people and engage in a detailed series of debates.

As you know Eamon has already responded positively to my proposal. This morning TG4 issued an invitation to us to debate in Galway at 10am on February 16th. Whether or not you attend, I intend being there at that time. Should you insist on refusing to more debates and more substantive debates than is possible in a 5-way format, I will propose to Eamon that we proceed to arrange a series of debates between ourselves. No doubt the broadcasters will be able to arrange some format for you and the other party leaders to receive balance.

As you know Sky News have tabled a detailed proposal for a 5-way debate. I am willing to discuss adding this to my proposal for two three-way debates, a series of one-to-one debates and a debate in Irish. However, I will not compromise on the basic principle that it is our duty to engage each other in a meaningful debate about the issues facing our country.

We need real debates where the people can judge whether we can think on our feet, not scripted sound byte debates where there is so little time for each participant. And I believe that the people deserve one on one debates between the other party leaders,

including a debate between the leaders of Fine Gael and Labour. Since you and Eamon say you wish to govern together, even though you have so many fundamental policy differences, it is critical that the Irish people have the opportunity to see those differences debated before the election.

I hope you will think some more about how these debates could help to change Irish politics. The people deserve real debates, not scripted sound byte recitals.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Micheál Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the first name.

Micheál Martin