

# ¿Qué? Podcast, Season 2, Episode2: Fallout from the Spanish elections

**Many thanks to listener Ryan V. for the transcript!**

**Simon:** Hello Everyone! My name is Simon Hunter. I'm the editor of the English edition of EL PAÍS, and this is Que!?, a podcast from *EL PAÍS* that tries to explain what in the Sam Hill is happening in Spain right now in the queen's proper English. Whether you're frying on the beaches of the costas, taking refuge in the Iberian mountains, or outside of Spain and simply obsessed with all things Hispanic, we are here for you. *Confía en nosotros*. So sit back, relax, and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say "Do Spaniards kiss on the left cheek first or the right cheek first?"

As usual I'm here with my colleague from the English edition Melissa Kitson. Hello Melissa!

**Melissa:** Hello Simon!

**Simon:** How are you?

**Melissa:** I'm good, yeah.

**Simon:** I've had my coffee this morning! Can you tell?

**Melissa:** Yes!

**Simon:** Are you rested after-

**Melissa:** Oh yes. After six days in a row, I'm ready.

**Simon:** Yeah we are. We're rested after the election. Well, I particularly am because I took a load of vaca-, a load of days off as I flagged up in last week's podcast. This is episode 2 of season 2 of the "Que!?" podcast and as usual we've had some lovely responses from our beloved listeners.

Mr. Allen Jones on Twitter says "Great return. Thanks Simon. On background music on Que. I don't find it a problem. It enhances the podcast." Oh, Veronica's doing a little victory signal there. Our producer. This was something we were talking about last week, whether we liked music under the uh, under our chat, under our inane ramblings, but Mr. Allen Jones says "On TV, I get quite upset that the music on serious programs drowns out the dialogue, at least for people like me whose Spanish is not perfect." So yeah, that's pretty much what we were saying last week.

And then we got a lovely email from Josh Fischer. He says "Hi Simon. I look forward to each of the episodes of Que!?, just as I had with your short-lived Facebook live videos back when. Now -" I don't know if you've seen any of this?

**Melissa:** No.

**Simon:** if you've seen any of this - it's before your time Melissa - but there was a time when at EL PAÍS we were doing lots of Facebook Live videos and they were great fun. We were kind of doing - me and my, me old colleague Nick Lime - we were kind of doing what we do here which is, you know, chatting about the news, but we also did some pretty cool interviews. I interviewed Eddie Izzard which was great fun, and you can still see that. If you go to our *EL PAÍS* in English home page, scroll down to the bottom. There's a um, a news story that says uh, "EL PAÍS on Facebook Live" or something like that and you can find some of the best ones there. Josh continues "You asked to know who your listeners were, and asked us to write, especially from the U.S. I live in Jacksonville Florida. I'm an American non-religious Sephardic Jew."

Again! We were talking about this last week. "My mother's ancestors were expelled by Fernando and Isabelle in 1492. My mother was born in New York but spoke Ladino (15th century Spanish) at home. She learned English in school. My upbringing was very much Spanish culture as well as American, and thus all my life I thought of myself as Spanish as well as American. I always had a tremendous affinity for Spain and in my work life as a computer scientist" – he helpfully provides a link to his Wikipedia page at this point, I think um, I'll check it out – "I had several formal relationships there. The passage of the 2015 law making it practical for someone like me to obtain dual citizenship was an emotional moment for me, and I set off to fill its- *fulfill* its requirements. It was a slog and unsurprisingly many fewer than expected have accomplished it, but I loved every minute. Obviously when a group of people spends 500 years wanting to go back home, there are some pretty serious forces at work." Um, and he says "I find your explanations add awful lot and besides, you and Melissa are amusing enough to listen to just as entertainment."

Aw, thank you Josh. And now let's go to our hero, Ryan V. He's the transcript man. He's back. "Hi Simon and Melissa. Here is episode 13's transcription. I, like Simon, have two young kids so it took me a bit longer to do this one because they were both sick last week. Hope it's still useful. At least they didn't scratch my cornea." Which is a reference to my little child-related injury from last week. So thank you again Ryan V. We've been terribly remiss. Because we've been so busy we haven't actually uploaded the transcripts yet onto the pages of the podcast, but by the time you hear this podcast, we will have done that. We'll make PDFs out of them which should help all you English teachers, English learners out there. Now, we're gonna try and cram in two topics today – we're gonna do um, first of all, a follow-up to the Spanish Elections.

Melissa, what's happened in Spanish politics since we spoke last week?

**Melissa:** Yes, well, so, as you know the results of the Spanish general election are in. We know the Socialist Party won the highest number of seats. We know that the conservative Popular Party suffered a crashing defeat, and we know that even with the support of the left-wing party *Podemos*, Pedro Sánchez does not have enough votes to be reinstated as Prime Minister. So this week, the negotiations began. The first person Sánchez saw was the leader of the PP, Pablo Casado:

**Sound bite:** No hemos profundizado posibles pactos, pero sí que le he pedido que no dependa de los independentistas.

**Melissa:** They met on Monday in a large press conference room in Moncloa and spoke for an hour and a half. Now, while Casado said his party would vote against Sánchez's investiture, his tone was much softer. To agree to open up permanent communication on the independence drive in Catalonia, and also discussed the need to reach deals on pensions and gender violence, even in environmental measures. So this was you know, a huge turnaround for Casado who, until recently, had been describing Sánchez as a traitor –

**Sound bite:** Lo que esta pasando en Espana es que el presidente del gobierno es el mayor traidor, esta haciendo un felon.

**Melissa:** supporting the coup plotters. Well, it took everyone by surprise. Now, the next person Sánchez met with was the leader of Ciudadanos, Albert Rivera. They spoke for 50 minutes in a much smaller room on Tuesday morning. There was, you know, uh –

**Simon:** There was room envy there

**Melissa:** (laughs) There is. We might even have a diagram on the website soon showing the difference in spaces.

**Simon:** Along with our Catalan roofs.

**Melissa:** (laughs) Rivera also said that his party would vote against swearing in Sánchez as Prime Minister even though Casado had suggested that he would abstain.

**Sound bite:** ...Sánchez, nuestra firme posicion y voluntad de liderar una oposicion firme.

**Melissa:** So as we mentioned in last week's episode, Sánchez needs an absolute majority of 176 votes to be sworn in in the first investiture vote. If he does not have this number, he needs at least one party to abstain in the second round in order to have more "yes" votes than "no" votes. So if Rivera or Casado had agreed to abstain, Sánchez would not need the support of the Catalan separatist parties. As things stand now it's still sort of back to square one, and looking at where to get that support. So

Iglesias already said Podemos will vote for Sánchez at you know a potential investiture ceremony, but there are strings attached.

**Sound bite:** El objetivo de lo que nos presentamos de manera muy clara estas elecciones y repetimos desde el principio: participación en la construcción de un gobierno, parlamentaria estable y de izquierdas en nuestro país.

**Melissa:** Podemos doesn't want to just sort of hand over its 40 votes to the Socialist Party, it wants a place in government and a say in the make-up of the Cabinet. It's sort of interesting to point out that Sánchez has not spoken publicly since election night last week. And we also have to keep in mind that it's unlikely that any government deal will be reached before the local, regional and European elections on May 26th.

**Simon:** Mmm, now it is quite interesting that he's kind of seeing them in the order of the, you know, amount of seats that they won in the elections. I think Pablo Iglesias was a bit put out - from Podemos. He was a bit put out to be left to last. Yeah, apparently he was pretty cross about that, but I guess it does make sense to do it in that order. The animosity between Albert Rivera of Citizens, of Ciudadanos and Pedro Sánchez, that actually seems to be really quite genuine! I mean, they really, you know, Rivera seems to really hate Sánchez! But, I guess it's because they're competing for the center. Rivera said "We're not here to correct the uncorrectable" which is Pedro Sánchez! And then his number 2 - Ines Arrimadas said - She called that Sánchez was a fake prime minister. Just used the word "fake" you know, rather than "falso." Rivera is offering Sánchez some state pacts on education, depopulation, immigration, security and the fight against terrorism but, I mean, there's no way as it stands at the moment that he's gonna back him in any kind of investiture vote. Casado has done quite a funny thing. He's called on Rivera, he's called on Ciudadanos to abstain in the vote so, you know, to avoid - in his words - a government in Spain that depends on a pact with the Independentistas which is the, you know, the pro-Catalan independence groups.

**Casado:** Tenemos que evitar las contraprestaciones a los partidos que han demostrado que prefieren los intereses de sus propias comunidades autónomas. Es decir, los nacionalistas.

**Simon:** But I don't think that Rivera is up for that at the moment at all. The feeling is that - among the opposition - it's kind of a done deal with *Podemos* that, you know, they're gonna, they're gonna, you know, the Socialists are going to have the support of Podemos in whatever form that takes. Interestingly, Pablo Iglesias, he's obviously taken a leaf, he's obviously taken a lesson from the Brexit negotiations and he's saying that we're going to go into dialogue with Sánchez without any red lines. Maybe *Podemos* and Pablo Iglesias are a bit humbled by the election result. It wasn't great for them, you know, they did lose a lot of seats. So um, you know and I think that there's probably a feeling among everyone that, you know, we need a bit of stability in the Spanish political

scene. Certainly Brussels is looking for a bit of stability from Spain in these turbulent times for Europe. So, 26- May the 26th is the regional, municipal and European elections. All are taking place in the same day in Spain so we'll get a much clearer idea of what's going on after May the 26th.

Alright so then...Now we're going to tread very carefully over here with this one. A story related to Catalonia. Melissa, take it away!

**Melissa:** Ok, alright. So, on Sunday –

**Simon:** Good luck everyone.

**Melissa:** (laughs) On Sunday an international tribute was held to mark the anniversary of the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria in May, 1945. As part of the event, the Catalan regional government organized a tribute to the Spanish victims who died at the Nazi concentration camp. It was meant to be, as you would expect, a solemn occasion but controversy broke out after Gemma Domènech, the director of democratic memory at the Catalan Justice Department, used the tribute to seek support for the jailed separatist leaders who are being tried by the Supreme Court for their involvement in the 2017 independence drive. During her speech, Domènech referred to the leaders as political prisoners.

**\*Sound bite\***

Saying it was sad for democracy that rulers like Raül Romeva were still in jail. Acting Spanish justice minister Doris Delgado was present for the tribute but left in the middle of Domènech's speech. A few Spanish students who had traveled to the Nazi camp with their school also walked out. Many were upset that the tribute had been politicized, the argument being that it was not appropriate to defend the Catalan independence movement at a tribute to the thousands of exiled Spaniards who had died at these Nazi camps. Making matters worse, the Catalan official wore a yellow ribbon on the lapel of her jacket. So this is a symbol which represents support for the jailed separatist leaders, but was particularly jarring in this context because, you know, prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps had to sew on yellow stars as reason for their imprisonment, and yellow was the color used to identify Jewish prisoners, so this has caused a huge scandal and the Catalan government has tried to defend itself, but people are still very angry.

**Simon:** We have talked about Catalonia in the past and, as we know, it's a minefield and I've said you know, I'm just going to try and keep it you know, as neutral on the topic as I possibly can as I literally just haven't got the time to argue with people on the internet about Catalonia. We've also kind of neglected in the past couple of weeks the ongoing Supreme Court trial of those pro-independence leaders who were involved in the events of 2017. I'd like to – if you're interested in what's going on in the trial, we just haven't got the resources to cover it – but Matthew Bennet is an English journalist who's

down in Murcia and he's doing a fantastic job. He's doing live tweets all through the day, every day of the trial. I urge you to go check out his work because it's really, really good. Um, so what I thought we could do is look at some of the Facebook comments from our readers on this story because I think they're really interesting.

Ron L Stein said "It is not the time or the place and no the situation of the Catalans is not nor has ever been the same. What a sad moment."

Darlene Hensen said "Disgraceful. Shame on them to use it for their political platform, not deserving even to be there."

Someone else I haven't got the name of said "I guess the separatists are counting on being recognized by Iran or North Korea in the event of a second DUI" - which is a declaration of independence - "Because getting Israeli recognition after Artadi's gaff is a long shot." That was a reference to a tweet that went out basically invoking Anne Frank in relation to the whole Catalan issue. "Proof the Catalan separatist political elite are unprepared and I would even go so far as to say unworthy of playing on the global scale".

And then of course. He couldn't miss the opportunity, our fervent pro-Catalan independence reader, John W. McCissock, who I have mentioned in a previous podcast. I don't think he listens to the podcast because he certainly didn't respond. But John never misses an opportunity to plug the pro-independence line. He said: "If the article is a true account of what was said, I think the justice minister behaved incorrectly in the face of reasonable statements from the Catalan official." So, you know, I've even been slammed for saying this but you know we, we did say in a previous podcast there are two narratives about the Catalan issue. You know, I can't even say that without people attacking me. But I think that John, John's kind of reaction definitely reflects the other side of the other narrative. So Tony K then responded to John – people do tend to respond to John a lot on Facebook, on our, under our stories – Tony said "Awful behavior. Awful manners. The separatists including yourself and your comments, and blind support regarding the issue, are sinking into even more sinister, deeper depths of despair"

Yeah, so really interesting. Some very lively debate as always on issues related to Catalonia. I thought I'd read a few paragraphs from the EL PAÍS editorial on the issue. You know, EL PAÍS is a newspaper... "EL PAÍS con la constitución" as the famous headline read during the coup attempt in 1981 so EL PAÍS is a support- is basically on the side of maintaining the unity of Spain and has been very critical in some cases of the actions of the pro-independence leaders. So here are a couple of paragraphs: "Domènech took advantage of an international commemoration within the camp to talk about the nine Catalan politicians who are being judged in the Supreme Court with all of the legal guarantees of the state and for offenses that have nothing to do with their defense of independence for Catalonia, something that is perfectly legal in Spain.

Domènech's words are intolerable but much more serious is the lack of a quick and categorical condemnation from anyone in the Catalan regional government. The victims deserve the complete respect of democrats who enjoy the freedom that cost millions of lives to achieve and that all of us now enjoy, a respect that the regional government presided over by Quim Torra appears unable to offer."

So there you go, there's the view of the newspaper on that incident, and I'm not going to say another word (laughs). Staying way on the fence.

Alright so, let's wrap it up there. That was season 2, episode 2. My name is Simon Hunter.

**Melissa:** I'm Melissa Kitson.

**Simon:** And this was "Que!?" – a podcast that tries to explain what happens in Spain to those of us who sometimes get a little bit lost in translation. This is an EL PAÍS production. It was recorded right here in a rather warm and humid EL PAÍS newsroom. And you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app. You can also request us via Alexa, Siri or your Google Assistant. We'll be back next week with a brand new host of issues. Thank you for listening. Adios!

**Melissa:** Ciao!