

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 2, Episode 4

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 break down the nitty gritty of the most WTF Spanish news stories. Whether you're frying on the beaches of the Costas, taking refuge in the cool Iberian mountains, or outside of Spain and simply obsessed with all things Hispanic, we are here for you. "Estáis en las mejores manos." So sit back, relax, and let us break down all those Spanish stories that have you saying: "Just how do they train Spanish children to stay up after midnight?"

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

Melissa: Hello Simon!

Simon: How are you?

Melissa: Good! I'm good.

Simon: Have you overcome your disappointment of your failed weekend trip to Italy?

Melissa: Yes! I rocked up to the airport with an expired passport and that means you can't, funnily enough, catch a plane. But at least, you know, it was only a two day, three day little journey but, I'm sorry to my sister Hermione, sorry I-

Simon: Are we doing village hall announcements? "I'm Sorry to my sister." Now that's um – I'm sorry as well. I was very disappointed on your behalf. This is episode 4 of season 2. Veronica is not here this week. José is here this week. I feel a little strange! I feel a little exposed and nervous. I'm not used to talking in front of someone that's not Melissa and Veronica but we should do our best. I'm going to take my jacket off cause it's- You know, we were talking about the summery last week but oh my god, summery weather has gone- given way to hay-fevery weather in Madrid at the moment. Everyone is suffering. I'm full of anti-histamines and I can't sleep so energy levels are a little bit low but we should try our best!

So, as I annoyingly said last week – I'm going to repeat it this week – please rate our podcast and leave a comment whether you like it or not and share it on social media and get the word out. You can email us at EnglishEdition@elpais.es or you can tweet me @simoninmadrid using the hashtag #QuePodcast.

We got a tweet from "El Caballer" last week- in the last week. It says "Recently discovered your podcast. Great stuff. Perhaps the chattiness could be reined in." Well, what you need to understand "El Caballer"

is that I am married to a Spanish woman and my particular Spanish woman doesn't often let me get a word in so this is like a luxury for me every week to be able to come in here and chat away without being interrupted. Hello Rosa! Another village hall announcement. "El Caballer" says: "I'm good with the chattiness as long as the news side predominates, 75% or more." Thank you very much for that "El Caballer"

Then we had a message from Jakob Russelfint "@simoninmadrid thanks for the podcast. I've listened to all the episodes and will promptly recommend it to my high school Spanish colleagues here in Denmark. Muchas gracias. Mange tak" which I guess is thank you in Danish which is very nice. Thank you very much.

And Ryan V. Our good friend Ryan V. Thank you again Ryan for doing the transcript. He says "Question for you that doesn't necessarily need to be answered in the podcast. Anytime I go on elmundo.es" – oh boo! Hiss! Our competitor - "Or elpais.es, the headlines and majority of major news stories are about politics. Are Spanish people obsessed with politics or is it because it's a relatively safe and laid back country so there's no 'if it bleeds it leads' sensationalism to fill up the space?"

It's a really interesting question Ryan. I'd say it's both those things. I think Spanish people are obsessed with politics. It's a young – relatively young – democracy. Franco died in 1975. And also, yeah, there's certainly not "if it bleeds it leads" sensationalism because Spain is a fairly non-violent country and we don't have to deal with too many stories of that type. Having said that, when we do have stories like that they are huge and they normally cross borders.

Speaking of politics, that brings us to our- now, we normally record on a Tuesday, but we were uh, scrabbling around for stories yesterday and thought let's wait for Wednesday and hope something comes up and my God! Did something come up for us. This is perhaps the most "Que?!" story we've ever covered and from the most unexpected source. So, Melissa, take it away.

Melissa: On Tuesday, Spanish Congress held its first session since the April 28th general election. And what a colorful session it was.

So Congress has never before been so fractured. The power dynamics of the lower house have completely changed. The Spanish Socialist Party now has the highest number of seats, not the Popular Party. The far-right group Vox is in Congress for the first time. And making things even more interesting, there are four Catalan separatist leaders who are being held in custody for their role in the 2017 separatist drive, who have also been elected as deputies.

Sound bite: Los diputados que están en prisión son diputados porque la ciudadanía ha votado para que sean diputados, y deberían poder representar a los ciudadanos que los han votado con libertad.

Sound Bite: Yo siempre he dicho que esta prisión provisional no tiene sentido. Estas personas deberían estar en libertad.

Melissa: And just, you know, to throw things more into the mix, two Vox deputies are lawyers, and they're actually representing the far-right party in their private prosecution against the separatist leaders. In other words, you have the separatists on trial and the lawyers prosecuting them in the same space, in Congress.

So understandably, this very complex background led to a number of tense scenes on Tuesday, particularly over the oaths used by deputies to be sworn into office. Traditionally, newly-elected deputies are asked to swear allegiance to the Spanish Constitution. The standard response is “yes, I promise” or “yes, I swear.”

Sound Bite

Melissa: But this session, political parties came up with their own twists on the oaths. So Vox leader Santiago Abascal: “for Spain, I do swear.” Members of Podemos swore “for democracy and social rights,”

Sound Bite

Melissa: And the deputy for green group “Equo”, took their oath “for democracy, for social rights, and for the entire planet.”

Simon: Representing the entire planet from Spain’s Congress. Well done.

Melissa: But the most controversial oaths came from the separatist leaders. Some swore “to the Catalan republic” rather than Spain, while the leader of the Catalan Republican Left, Oriol Junqueras, swore as “a political prisoner and for legal imperative.”

Sound Bite

Melissa: Now this did not go down well with Spain’s right-wing parties in congress. The right-wing opposition are angry that the separatist politicians are even allowed to become members of Congress.

The leader of Ciudadanos (Citizens), Albert Rivera, said earlier: “We believe that individuals who face criminal proceedings, who tried to stage a coup and liquidate national sovereignty, cannot sit in parliament and earn a public salary.”

Albert Rivera: Yo creo que es indigno para el pueblo Español que los que han intentado un golpe de estado se sienten en un escaño y cobran dinero público de todos los españoles.

Melissa: So the issue of the Catalan separatists is going to be an issue about whether they’re suspended or not. And in a separate kind of aside, the session also saw Socialist deputy Meritxell Batet elected as speaker of the lower house with a simple majority of 175 votes.

Mertixell Batet: Ninguno de nosotros individualmente, ni ninguno de nuestros partidos por si solo, representa en exclusiva a España.

Melissa: In her acceptance speech, she said: “Each one of us is part of the people, but we are not *the* people.”

Mertixell Batet: Somos del pueblo, pero ninguno somos el pueblo.

Melissa: Now, her appointment is a reflection of how women in this particular Congress have gained much greater representation. The new Congress has the highest number of female deputies in the country’s history. Of the 350 deputies in Congress, 166 or 47.4% are women. This makes Spanish parliament the EU leader in gender parity, and the fifth in the world according to figures [from UN Women](#).

But while it may be the most gender-balanced Congress, as I mentioned before, it is also the most fractured, and there are serious questions about how all the conflicting interests within Congress will influence the new political term.

Simon: It was a bizarre day. There was - there- We're not going to be able to cover everything weird that went on but the first thing I'd like to talk about is the stunt, 'cause you can only describe it as such, that Vox pulled off. They turned up at 7:30 in the morning and bagged the seats behind where the prime minister was going to sit. Normally the seats are assigned in Congress once the government is actually formed but opening day it's a bit of a free-for-all and everyone can sit where they like basically. So Vox decided that, you know, steal a little bit of the limelight. They were gonna sit in the row behind where the prime minister was gonna sit. And the socialists realized what was going on and, alerted to this, a Socialist deputy basically arrived at 8 o'clock and while, - I mean this is -, I can't believe I'm even describing what happened in the story, while Javier Ortega Smith – this is one of the lawyers you were mentioning previously in the podcast – while he stood up and out of his seat, this Socialist deputy went and you know sat in his seat and he stayed there for seven hours. He was there for the seven hours, for the whole day. You know, stuck between these deputies for Vox. He basically said, you know, there was a point where they were gonna have to get up and vote, and he – according to the Socialist deputy – he said to them “Well look, you know, when I get up to vote, if you steal my seat, I'll just do the same when you get up to vote.” So, a very mature start to this session of Congress.

And of course that did give way to some pretty stunning photos. For example, you had a very significant handshake between Oriol Junqueras, who's the leader of the Catalan Republican Left, who, you mentioned Melissa, who's one of the men being tried for his role in the independence drive. He went over, he shook hands with Pedro Sánchez, he said to Pedro Sánchez “We need to talk” or “We should talk” and Pedro Sánchez said “No te preocupes” - “Don't you worry” and you know, people, the same people who have been bashing Sánchez for having had any kind of negotiations or talks with the Catalan separatists were back on it yesterday, saying oh this just shows how, you know, Sánchez is going to capitulate to the Catalan independence leaders. I think that's maybe reading a little too much into the sentence “No te preocupes.”

There was also a great photo; One of the deputies decided to wear a t-shirt with the famous “Gaysper” emoji. The LGBT emoji ghost, which became famous after Vox tweeted out that photo of – what is that character?

Melissa: Aragorn

Simon: Yeah, from Lord of the Rings – basically facing off to all of Vox's enemies which include, for example, EL PAÍS, the Cadena Ser radio network, and Gaysper the gay ghost, and the photographer's managed to capture that guy walking right past Santiago Abascal which was very funny. Then Vox decided – I mean, I get the impression that Vox is just a bit frustrated that they didn't quite do so well at the elections as maybe they were expecting to do. They got 24 deputies in a house of 350 deputies. They're not gonna really have much influence in – well, they're not going to have any influence in the formation of a government which they were probably hoping that they were going to, so they decided, first of all with the stunt which our friend Bill from Talk Radio Europe this morning described as the Germans, the equivalent of the Germans putting their towels down on the sun loungers first thing in the morning so whenever the Catalan separatist leaders were doing their swearing in – their version of swearing in – they were banging on their tables and banging on the desk and making a noise to voice

their displeasure. They were a bit less ostentatious when it came to doing their own swearing in. Vox in Andalusia, when they won seats in the regional elections in Andalusia, they did so with bible- holding bibles and small crucifixes, and this time around they just um, were fairly low-key. They swore to Spain.

We then had “Valle-Inclán” becoming a trending topic, because there’s a thing in formation in Congress as parliament is convened as it was yesterday, they have a “mesa de edad”, right? Which is literally like the committee of age, and it’s basically, the people who run the sort of, the swearing in ceremony is composed of the oldest deputy in the Congress, and the two youngest, and the oldest acts as the president and the two youngest act as his secretaries. And this chap, Augustín Zamarrón, who has run three times as a deputy in elections, never expected to win, but actually won a seat. And he turns out to be the oldest deputy in the congress. Also a dead ringer for the Spanish writer Valle-Inclán. So Valle-Inclán has this, you know, long white beard and these glasses and just does look like someone from another time. Spoke like someone from another time as well, and immediately became the hero of the session yesterday.

Sound Bite

Simon: But, I mean, on the more serious side, the five- well it’s four deputies – four pro-independence leaders who are deputies in Congress, one senator. They are likely to be suspended probably this week, maybe by the time this podcast has gone out they will be suspended. That would mean potentially, those seats could remain empty which would make it easier for Sánchez to get his simple majority to be voted back in as prime minister. Not likely to happen from what sources from the Catalan parties are saying. They might replace them with other deputies. But also we’ll see. You know, it’s a very astute play on the part of the independence parties to field these politicians as candidates, as deputies. Let’s see what happens. The elections are this weekend, so by the time we come back next week we will have the municipal, regional and European election results. The situation will be a little bit clearer and we’ll probably have a better idea of how, if he is going to manage it, Pedro Sánchez is going to form a government.

Alright so, this is another very “Que!?” story. In fact I’ve just posted this story on the Reddit subreddit, Not The Onion which is where sometimes our stories end up when they look like they’re actually spoof stories and not actually real. So why don’t you tell us, Melissa, what just happened in Asturias.

Melissa: Four women on a squash team were given leg wax and a vibrator as a prize for winning a tournament, a squash tournament. Now, understandably the team were outraged by this prize, and they have made a formal complaint with the sports federation.

One of the players Elisabet Sadó, said she felt “surprise and indignation” and added that this kind of attitude is “the foundation for all structural sexism.”

So, needless to say, the winners in the male category of the same tournament did not get a beauty pack.

Simon: Or a sex toy.

Melissa: Or a sex toy! But the Oviedo Squash Club, which organized the championship, thought it was appropriate to give the female athletes leg wax, a vibrator and an electric callus remover.

The club has since apologized for the gifts and admitted they “were inappropriate and should never have been given out.” The club explained that sponsors sometimes provide prizes but in this case nobody checked whether these particular prizes would be appropriate.

This incident, obviously is, you know, a localized problem. You know, you may chuckle and go “Oh, that's, that's outrageous, but it also shines a light on the bigger problem of sexism in Spanish sport. Female squash players, like many other female athletes, face lower salaries, have fewer promotions and typically train in more run-down facilities than those enjoyed by their male counterparts.

Simon: yeah, there's a badminton player – a Spanish badminton player – who is amazing – a female badminton player – and she is constantly suffering from this kind of problem. I mean, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt and say Ok, so, yup, they got these prizes from the sponsors, they were donated by the sponsors so they were just, you know, just someone thoughtless was giving them, you know, gave them as a prize but it is incredibly insensitive and unaware thing to do, especially the way that we, you know, the current climate. In our story, you know, there's actually a photo of the trophies next to, next to the actual prizes and it just does look ridiculous and just so offensive. There have been resignations. Two club managers and a federation leader have resigned. Hopefully, this serves to ensure nothing like this will happen again in the future, and there is actually talk about future legislation that's going to see that the same prizes are handed out to female players as are going to male players.

Alright, well those were our two stories for the week. 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 the EL PAÍS newsroom with a very strange man with a beard. You can listen to it on your favorite podcast app. You can also request it via Alexa, Siri or your Google Assistant. We'll back next week with a brand new host of issues. Thank you for listening. Adios!

Melissa: Ciao!