

# ¿Qué? Podcast, Season 3, Episode 1: New elections and Brexit

**Simon:** Now among this err \*gibberish\*

**Melissa:** There we go \*laughter\*

**Simon:** Hello everyone! My name is Simon Hunter, I'm the editor of the English Edition of EL PAÍS, and this is "¿Qué?" A podcast from El País that will do its best to break down the deadlocked gridlock that is the Spanish news.

Whether you're interested in Spain's 2015 general election, Spain's 2016 general election, Spain's April 2019 general election or Spain's November 2019 general election, we are here for you, you've got our vote.

So sit back, relax, and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say...

"Another General Election? Really?!"

**Simon:** I am here as usual with my esteemed colleague Melissa Kitson, hello Melissa!

**Melissa:** Hello!

**Simon:** So nice to see you in front of a microphone! How are you?

**Melissa:** I'm good, yes!

**Simon:** Have you missed it?

**Melissa:** Yes ...have I? I have missed it, I think.

**Simon:** You said the other day you feel you're a bit out of practice in front of the microphone, doing the radio.

**Melissa:** \*groan\* Yeah, I'm a little bit wobbly but, look, back on the horse.

**Simon:** Can we expect some good outtakes from you today? \*laughs\*

**Melissa:** No doubt.

**Sound bite:** So we're off the the offices of EL PAÍS in Madrid and it's Melissa this morning. Morning Melissa!

**Melissa on sound bite:** Morning Bill! Yeah so as you said this story has been going on for a while

**Simon:** Well, so this is episode one of season three of the "¿Qué!?" podcast - who would have thought that we would get this far?!

It is great to be back, there's certainly been a lot going on over the summer. I always say this, but do you remember the days when summer was a quiet time for news, an officially 'silly season'? We've had the worst ever listeria outbreak in Spain, we've had forest fires, flash floods, a "cold drop" - which we might talk about at some other point, the "gota fria" - the king's brother in law was let out of jail to go and do some social work. You did a story while I was on holiday about a 'monkey chimera' which \*laughter\* I still don't know what that was about but it did very well. We had Neymar popping up in 'Money Heist' after being cleared of a rape allegation which was a very strange story.

But one of our most read stories, over this hiatus that we've had from the podcast, was about a bullfighter being gored in the anus! And that's actually an old story which, for some reason, went viral in the United States over the summer so, not quite sure what the interest in that particular story was.

Now, obviously, normally we'd read out all of our lovely tweets and emails and things but it's been a bit quiet on the correspondence front, not surprisingly, as we've been off the air since we went to interview the outgoing British Ambassador in July which was great fun. Check that out if you didn't hear that little bonus episode.

Elaine Jones emailed recently to ask, "when, oh when, will the podcast be back on?" So, here we are Elaine, it's lovely to hear from you. Let's encourage our friends of the show Chris Thompson, Ryan V, Alan Jones, Señora Wright - and apologies if I've forgotten anyone - but do get in touch, let us know how you are. And a big shout out to my friend in Barcelona, who goes by the 'nome de plume'- Left Wing Face, who I believe, she listens to the show while she's pottering around doing her shopping in Barcelona, in the crime ridden streets of Barcelona. So thanks for listening Sally and

also thanks for your tweets, they are very highly entertaining these days given everything that's going on in the UK.

Although there has been this drought of correspondence, one of the common themes of the emails I've been getting - as editor of the English edition - is requests from students in the UK to help them with their homework, which is slightly bizarre. All I can say is, we seem to have a following among A-level and university students in other countries, so hello to all of you listening. I'm glad that you find the podcast, and also the English edition, so helpful but, please stop emailing me with requests for help with essays and the like - that's not really my job and you really should be doing that yourselves.

I do recommend that you go and buy a book by Tobias Buck, the former FT correspondent here in Spain called *After the Fall*. I'm reading it at the moment and it really is fantastic, a nice galavant through the recent history of Spain and its politics. But please do get in touch, use the hashtag #quepodcast on twitter, I'm on twitter @simoninmadrid or you can email [EnglishEdition@elpais.es](mailto:EnglishEdition@elpais.es). Let us know where you're listening, why you're listening and suggest topics for us.

And also help us to settle this long term conundrum we've had at the English edition - whether we should be writing in British or American English. We used to be a print edition that went out in the global edition of the New York Times, and as such we always used American English. We've carried on doing that since we're only online and we do actually have more readers in the States than anywhere else, but it does seem to annoy people. We often get these comments on Facebook when we use 'fall' instead of 'autumn' and these kind of things so I'm a bit divided on the issue so maybe you could all chip in and tell us what you think.

Wow this is perhaps the longest introduction to the podcast \*laughter\*. You can tell that Veronica's not here! Veronica never lets us go more than 20 minutes. We are ably assisted this week by José, hello José!

**José:** What's up, its' me here again

**Simon:** Let us have a longer podcast this week!

**José:** We'll see

**Simon:** Let's get, without any further ado... Melissa is champing at the bit \*laughter\*! So, what are we going to talk about this week Melissa? Where are we going to start?

**Melissa:** Well, I mean the big news really over the summer, aside from the ‘monkey chimera’, is the election!

**Simon:** Wait, wait, no!?! But this was the big news when we left!

**Melissa:** I know

**Simon:** How could it be!?

**Melissa:** I know

**Simon:** What’s going on?

**Melissa:** Well, the political deadlock that we’ve been talking about in so many other podcasts, that has been dogging Spain, since the inconclusive results of the April 28 general election, has culminated in what every political party was hoping to avoid – new elections.

Spain is now preparing for another general election on November 10 – it is the fourth election in as many years. So, what happened?

To understand the situation, we have to go back to the April 28 polls, where the Socialist party won the highest number of seats but fell short of an absolute majority.

### **Sound bite from April 28 election**

The inconclusive result meant that Pedro Sánchez would need the support of other parties in order to be sworn back into office as prime minister.

The most obvious choice for an alliance was Unidas Podemos, the left-wing coalition between Podemos and United Left, which is led by Pablo Iglesias.

### **Sound bite of Pablo Iglesias**

In July ahead of the first investiture vote, Iglesias offered to support Sánchez in exchange for Cabinet positions in the government as part of a coalition between the two parties.

## **Sound bite**

After a lot of negotiating, Sánchez rejected the coalition proposal but offered Iglesias a deputy prime minister spot, as well as Health, Housing and Equality ministries. But Iglesias wanted more. He argued that those ministries had no real power and demanded control of the Labor Ministry. Then at the last minute, he said, “well, how about I get control of the €6 billion allocated to active employment policies.

Now, Sánchez did not accept those terms and Podemos voted against him. So he lost in the first round and then the second round of voting in the investiture ceremony. If Unidas Podemos’ 40 deputies had voted “yes”, Sánchez would have been sworn in as prime minister and Spain would have a new government now.

So, after the failed investiture vote, the Socialists ruled out completely the idea of a coalition government with Unidas Podemos, arguing that there was just too much distrust between the two parties. Instead, Sánchez offered to negotiate positions in non-ministerial agencies. Iglesias came back with the idea of a “trial coalition” until mid-2020, after which the Socialists could end the relationship. But this was rejected by Sánchez.

So finally, when it came time for parties to meet with Spain’s King Felipe and discuss their positions, Sánchez had still not secured the support necessary to be sworn in as prime minister. With no governing deal on the table, the royal household released an official statement saying the king would not be presenting a candidate.

Which brings us to the November 10 election.

## **Sound bite**

Now, the blame game has begun over who is responsible for the situation. Some blame Iglesias for refusing Sánchez’s offer, some blame Sánchez for not accepting a coalition with Unidas Podemos, even the center-right Ciudadanos (or Citizens) has also been blamed for not agreeing to abstain. And the Popular Party has also faced the same criticism given that the Socialist Party abstained in 2016 to swear in former PM Mariano Rajoy.

So, voters tend to punish the political leader whom they see as responsible for the General Election by either voting for a different party or abstaining, so this blame game is likely to intensify as the November election approaches.

**Simon:** They just couldn't get it together could they! It's unbelievable, and people are very, very cross about the fact that we're going to have to go back to the polls. Not only is it the fourth General Election in four years in Spain, which is just unbelievable, but it's actually the fifth election in Spain this year, between the European elections, the two General Elections, and then local and regional elections we had earlier in the year.

So, I mean, it's an incredibly risky strategy for them both because, as you say Melissa, there's the blame game going into the vote and anger about the fact that we're in this situation, they just couldn't do a deal. But actually having said that, the animosity...you know, everyone always says, you know, "we used to have the two party system in Spain, Spain's not got a history of coalition governments," in fact we've never had a coalition government in Spain since the return to democracy. It's not just the fact there's not this tradition of doing a governing deal like this but you kind of need to throw in the animosity between the four main political leaders, there seems to be absolutely no love lost between Sánchez, Pablo Casado of the PP, Albert Rivera of Ciudadanos, and of course Pablo Iglesias of Podemos.

Sánchez, from the reporting that came out earlier this week from EL PAÍS, seems to think that there will be some kind of a repeat of what happened in 2016 - what happened then was that Rajoy was the most-voted candidate for the PP in 2015 and then when they ran another election in 2016 he actually ended up picking up more support at the next election, he ended up making it into government. Again, that was the inconclusive election but he made it into government thanks to the support of the Ciudadanos and the abstention of the Socialists. So Sánchez seems to be thinking that might happen.

Apparently the Socialists are also hoping that the PP will abstain in any future investiture vote, which I don't know if that's going to happen. I mean, Pablo Casado he made this great statement, a very grand statement, that the Popular Party would stand aside if the most voted party was in a situation where it could form a government but didn't have a majority and then when it was his turn to actually do that, of course he didn't. He completely did a complete turn around on that, so would he do it now? I don't know, I don't think things have changed sufficiently.

And also of course there the huge risk of a low voter turnout. Everyone traditionally says that the voters on the left can be very easily demotivated in Spain to go out and vote so that could be a big problem. But then maybe it might work, maybe Sánchez's gamble is

going to work and I think what they're hoping to do is to eat into the support for Citizens, or Ciudadanos.

Ciudadanos has been a very troubled party this year. They've done deals with Vox, in local and regional governments but with keeping them at arm's length, they didn't want to appear in any photos with them, they publicly condemn what far-right Vox stands for but at the same time seem happy to get into bed with them when it comes to getting into power.

There's also been some fairly high-profile gaffes including the former Coca-Cola executive that they signed up - Marcos de Quinto - someone needed to take control of his twitter because he just had something of a meltdown on twitter and was being very rude to members of the public, and very quickly had to change his style.

As for the left, as for Podemos...God...we've got another party coming in - Iñigo Errejón is going to run with his Más Madrid party.

### **Sound bite of Iñigo Errejón**

Iñigo Errejón was one of the founders of Podemos but he left the party given differences with leader Pablo Iglesias. The party basically split into supporters of Iglesias and supporters of Errejón - he went off to run in the regional elections in Madrid and now is going to make the jump to national politics. What is that going to do for the support for the left, is it just going to splinter, potentially, the support even more? Maybe voters will look at this and say "Oh enough of this, let's just vote for the Socialists or go back to my Popular Party" or whatever it is and maybe the more traditional two party votes will turn out at the November 10 elections.

In the meantime, Sánchez seems to be having a very fine old time as the caretaker Prime Minister, he was at the UN this week he was flying around the country during the bad weather and, again, I think you could say that's very much a strategy just for people to get used to him. He's a very statesman-like man, he's an impressive man, as a politician, certainly a lot more impressive than Marino Rajoy was. So, it's a kind of a bit of a high-stakes gamble, especially when you consider - look at this poll that was carried out by 40dB for EL PAÍS which was in the news earlier this week - 90% of Spaniards are disappointed, angered or worried because of the repeat election and the political paralysis. And not to mention, this is a great statistic as well, in just a week 370,000 people requested that they not be sent a "propaganda", flyers and information

from the political parties ahead of these elections. I think there's definitely a bit of fatigue setting in amongst the Spanish electorate.

So, yes, of course, no doubt we will be coming back to this - probably next week - maybe we should give it a rest next week, come back in a couple of weeks, and see what's happening.

### **Music interlude**

**Simon:** Now, onto our second topic this week which again is one of our perennial issues that we deal with here at the “¿Qué?” Podcast and that is Brexit. What was the story that we published earlier this week, Melissa?

**Melissa:** Yes, Brexit! So, back in March, the Spanish government passed a law by royal decree that guaranteed the rights of Britons in Spain in the case of a hard-Brexit. The legislation covered nearly all of the facets of daily life for citizens, including the recognition of university degrees and driving licenses, as well as healthcare coverage and work permits. It also guaranteed, with some limitations, the continuance of the activity of British companies operating in Spain.

In other words, it aimed to ensure that it would be business as usual for Britons living in Spain, regardless of whether the UK crashed out of the EU without a deal.

But the Spanish government is now warning that Britons in Spain will only benefit from these generous conditions if Spaniards living in the UK receive the same rights.

British authorities have responded that they have guaranteed these rights under the general scheme for all European Union citizens. This plan includes the right to work, to use the healthcare system, to have access to education, to receive benefits such as pensions and to spend time outside of the UK.

But there are two categories to the scheme –“settled status,” for those who have lived in the country for five years or more that has very generous conditions, and the so-called “pre-settled status,” which has fewer rights.

And this has raised concern with the Spanish government, which has said that if there is no equivalent deal for Spaniards, the Spanish framework for Britons will decline.



To iron out these differences, Spanish and British authorities are set to meet in the first week of October, just a few weeks off the current Brexit deadline.

The future of almost half a million people – more than 360,000 Britons in Spain and 180,000 Spaniards in the UK – depends on whether these issues can be resolved.

**Simon:** Now, if anyone ever were to doubt my commitment to my job I would like to point out that I got up at six o'clock in the morning on Monday to translate this story because it was an exclusive from El País and, as you will not be surprised to hear, it went massively viral, because this really is just the worst fear confirmed of British migrants in Spain - the fact that our rights could be at risk based on reciprocity in the UK for Spaniards.

In a way, it is a bit of a non-story because the European Union has basically been saying all the way along that there must be reciprocity when it comes to rights. I think probably, Brits in Spain have probably been feeling quite in a state of calm because the Spanish government has been doing so much, like you mentioned Melissa, they passed that Royal Decree that would protect rights in the case of a no-deal Brexit and also there is the argument that Brits in Spain often trot out which is just - well there's just too many of us here - nothing's going to happen to us because there's just too many of us here and it would be bad for the Spanish economy and so on.

But, I think really what this perhaps flags up is the potential tug of war that there will be between the UK and all of the EU countries on this point because, as you said Melissa, Spain is saying, "Well we want reciprocity" and the UK's saying, "Well you already have it, look here's our system and Spain's saying, "Well no, this isn't good enough." So there's the potential for a conflict there between the UK and all of the countries when it comes to rights of migrants living there because what for one country is reciprocity might not be sufficient for the other.

So this has sparked, like I said, this story went massively viral, it also sparked huge amounts of debate on our Facebook page with some really interesting comments. John Rawlins said "While the Spanish are offering simple and generous coverage for all British residents living in Spain, the British are offering a complicated two-tier system administered by the Home Office. In the last decade, the Home Office has become notoriously xenophobic as well as unresponsive to applicants who are unable to afford specialist immigration lawyers." I mean there have, of course, been all of these horror stories about people not being able to apply for settled status, you can only do it at the moment on an android phone, people can't do it on iPhones. People who have lived and

worked and forged fantastic careers are being rejected in the UK, and also of course this off the back of the Windrush scandal so, not surprisingly, people are incredibly concerned because look at what's happened to so many people from the Windrush generation, that after decades of living in the UK just suddenly found that their immigration status was being questioned.

Mick Montero (**in spanish accent**) - "Mick Montero" is that half Brit, I don't know \*laughter\* - Mick Montero (**in english accent**), he says "It's a scare story! Britain was the first to guarantee EU the same rights as they have had before. Wish people would stop this rubbish. Instead of listening to gossip go on Gov.uk or the Spanish website and get proper information." Oh well thank you Mick, he wasn't a great fan of our story but, I mean, I do agree that is good advice to go onto Gov.uk where you can find all the updated information about Brexit and of course, just as a little public service announcement to echo what the outgoing ambassador, Simon Manley, was saying to us back in July which is that, if you're living in Spain and you're not officially registered, that you really need to go and do so before a potential Brexit.

And then we'll just end on this comment from Gregory Cappellari who said, "If the British are forced to leave the property market and building market will collapse here in southern Spain." \*laughter\* So there's a man who's very sure of the influence of the British community in parts of the country.

So, let's see what happens, it's all kicking off. Yesterday we had the Supreme Court ruling about the exhumation of Franco which I'm sure we'll come back to at some point. At the same time, the Supreme Court was reading out its judgement in the UK about the prorogation of parliament. I was typing the thing about Franco and looking round and watching the TV at the same time, it was mad yesterday. So, what interesting times we are living in.

### **Music interlude**

**Simon:** Alright so let's wrap it up here. That was the first episode of season three and my name is Simon Hunter

**Melissa:** I'm Melissa Kitson

**Simon:** And this was "¿Qué?" 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 under the expert guidance of our stand-in producer Juan José Morales, and you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app.

You can also request it 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!