

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 3, Episode 10

Simon: We are here for you, *somos la leche*, so sit back...*laughter*

Music intro

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 anything to smuggle you the Spanish news, even if it means stashing it in a submarine.

Whether you like your cafe solo, cortado or Americano, we are here for you, *somos la leche*

So sit back relax and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say: “donde dije digo, digo Diego..” Is that it? Is that the phrase? *laughter* (**Veronica in background: I have no idea!**)

Today is December 4 2019 and I am here as ever with my ever faithful companion Melissa Kitson, how are you Melissa?

Melissa: Hello good, I'm good thanks

Simon: What's your news this week?

Melissa: I went to Cordoba.

Simon: Ooo, very nice, did you have a nice time?

Melissa: Yeah it was beautiful, beautiful weather lovely castles and the horses, no I didn't like the horses

Simon: No, you didn't like the horses? Why not?

Melissa: Didn't like the horses being, doing the...

Simon: Oh doing the taxi service

Melissa: Uh-huh, but other than that no lovely, lovely place to be.

Simon: Saw your in-laws?

Melissa: I did, helloooo if you're listening

Simon: So sounds like you had a nice time, that's lovely. Cordoba is a lovely place to visit.

Now I had a slightly more somber week last week. It was unfortunately, last Friday was my grandma's funeral. She died at the grand old age of 95 we had, I have to have to say we had a lovely day, it was a very fitting funeral.

And the eulogy in particular from my uncle was hilarious and summed her up very nicely. But it set me off thinking about funerals because my grandma died on November 10 but we didn't do the funeral until nearly three weeks later and it's so funny you tell a Spanish person that and they just go, "What, what? What do you mean you're not going to do...what are they doing with the body?!!" as if it was just sort of lying in the corner of a hospital somewhere going slightly stinky.

But, of course, you know, it's hot countries have the tradition of, you know, a very very quick burial, and here in Spain it's normally always the very next day in the body lies in a mortuary and, you know, all friends and family come and drop in and pay their respects and yeah just maybe it set me to thinking about how different the traditions are here.

Also I think the only...no, I've been to one sort of you know one proper Spanish funeral which was my wife's grandfather when he passed away. And so we did that you know the whole thing, it was in the M-30...what do they call it? 'Tanatorio de la M-30.'

There's two main mortuaries in Madrid and they're known by their roads *laughter* the other one's the 'Tanatorio de la M-40' which is the other beltway, which is quite strange in itself.

But the one at the M-30, I had brought my car and my father-in-law said to me, "Look, when the body leaves in the hearse and they take it to the crematorium, make sure you keep up with the hearse." And I'm like "What?" And he said, "Yeah, because seriously they go so fast, they're going to fly out of here with the hearse and you really have to try to keep up with them." I was like, "Okay!" and he wasn't wrong! They went flying down the motorway and I literally was trying to race my car to keep up with this funeral procession which was just utterly bizarre. So let that be a warning to anyone who has to go to a funeral at the M-30 tanatorio, that you need to supercharge your car before you go.

So yeah, I was thinking that would be an interesting thing for our listeners to write to us about. Whether, you know you'd be surprised by the sort of differences in terms of you know when someone passes away in Spain, the way it's dealt with and indeed in your own country if it's different from the sort of more *anglosajon* way of things.

So yeah, get in touch with us on Twitter, as I say every week, you can find me @simoninmadrid you can also use the #quepodcast or you can email englishedition@elpais.es tell us where

you're listening from, why you're listening and suggest topics for us, and please leave us a review on wherever you get your podcasts from, get the word out please!

Music interlude

Simon: We have not had a huge amount of correspondence this week but we heard from a few people. We heard from Sarah Maria Brekke who was our German correspondent a couple of weeks ago. She said, "Proud to announce my first ever mention in EL PAÍS (kind of). I'm quoted in the #quepodcast! ¡Muchas gracias! @melissakitson @simoninmadrid" - Sorry I should say you're @mnkitson aren't you, I'll give you your proper twitter handle.

We heard from our regular listener Alan Jones. He says, "On the podcast app that I use, the number of subscribers to #quepodcast has more than doubled since I started listening, earlier this year." - So that's great!

And then I also heard from Cara Wilson, now this was very nice, we went on a bit of a break, we took a week off and then for one reason or another the podcast was a bit late coming out last week and people going mental, I was getting all sorts of messages! Cara Wilson says, "It's been too long...seems an age since we last heard the dynamic duo of Simon and Melissa on #quepodcast. Another podcast coming soon? The best podcast around." - Thank you so much and I got a few messages like that which was very nice.

Then I got this message from Louis, a brit living in the Netherlands, he says, "Long time listener – love your podcast and have been recommending it to friends and colleagues – first time emailer."

He says, "When my parents lived in Spain in the 1980s, they were surprised by how Christmas seemed (relatively) minor, with the Día de los Reyes far more important, for kids at least. However, by the time I'd started working in Spain, it seemed that this particular culture war had been lost, and that most children would be opening their presents on Christmas Day. There were still a few waiting later, but I also noticed that the marketing was more around Christmas than Día de los Reyes." - I think this is sort of happening gradually over the years really isn't it. I mean look at what we just been through with Black Friday. Black Friday is suddenly here, you know, it's been around for a couple of years but oh my god, Spain, well Spain's marketeers have definitely gone absolutely mad for Black Friday. Definitely I mean, I was just talking about this, I feel very lucky that we do have Christmas and Reyes in my family because it means I can spend Christmas with my British family and then spend Kings with my Spanish family and we kind of get to sort of share ourselves around. But yeah I think the older generation is still very much into kings aren't they and Kings is the more important thing for them. I think kids just want presents, I don't think they care what day they come on. What about you? Have you been Spain for Christmas yet, Melissa?"

Melissa: Yes, I've been...I think it is interesting but I was sort of in Spain in Basque country around Christmas and their 'Olentzero' is a big thing so it's like the kind of Basque version of Santa Claus which is you know I guess you could say example of Spaniards holding out for the like, you know, red 'ho ho ho Christmas' and he's this figure of a coal maker who lives in the woods and descends to town to give presents to children. So the same sort of story but obviously a very different kind of look to the Santa.

Simon: Those charming Basques, they always have their own way of doing it and in the industrial heartland that is the Basque country it's quite amusing that it's a man that comes round for come coal to fire up your factory to make white goods for the rest of Spain. *laughter*

Right okay so, enough inane waffling, well no there's more inane wafflings to come but we'll finish with that section of inane waffling and pass onto the next one.

And so, there's only really one story that we could kick off this week and that was deputies in Congress and Senators going back to school. We have a new *legislatura* that began this week so why don't you tell us about all the fun and games we saw in the Spanish houses of parliament this week Melissa.

[Sound bite: Welcome to the 14th legislatura]

Melissa: The newly elected members of Congress and the Senate were sworn in on Tuesday in a day marked by squabbles and division.

While Spaniards are no doubt hoping that this political term will have a longer shelf life than the previous one, which lasted no more than seven months, there were already signs that things are not going to be easy.

Marta Rosique, a lawmaker for the separatist party Catalan Republican Left, was supposed to read out a list of elected members of Congress, but began by naming the individuals who were recently sentenced to prison over their role in the 2017 unilateral secession attempt. **[Sound bite of names read out]** The move drew loud boos from representatives from the far-right Vox and applause from her own party.

There was division over the voting for the Mesa del Congreso, the committee that oversees Congress. The Socialist Party of caretaker prime minister Pedro Sánchez, and the anti-austerity Unidas Podemos wanted to block Vox from getting a seat on the nine-member committee, but the conservative Popular Party, or the PP, refused to support the veto.

The body now has three delegates from the Socialist Party, three from Unidas Podemos, two from the PP, and one from Vox, which surged in the November 10 repeat election to become the third-largest force in Congress

But although Vox is now part of the committee, the right-wing bloc actually lost a seat to the left, which now controls two-thirds of the mesa. Before the vote, Vox had already made a show of force by arriving early and taking up the central seating space in Congress, which had previously been occupied by Ciudadanos.

This sparked a row between Marcos de Quinto, a former Coca-Cola executive who is now a lawmaker for Ciudadanos, and Vox deputy Luis Gestoso. Some sources say Gestoso pushed De Quinto to the floor, while others say it was the other way around. Other witnesses say there was just a lot of “pushing and shoving.”

But beyond the theatrics of Tuesday’s session, there are still questions about how long this Spanish Congress will last.

While the Socialist Party and Unidas Podemos have reached a deal for a coalition government, they still don’t have the numbers to get Sánchez sworn in at a two-round investiture vote. Before the election, Sánchez had promised that Spain would have a government by the end of the year, but negotiations with the Catalan separatist parties are moving slowly.

Simon: Yes, to put it lightly. So Pedro Sánchez, he wants to get it done, he wants to get this sorted and he wants to get back into power, if it’s going to happen.

The pressure is kind of piling up a little bit on Pablo Casado, for him to abstain and to let this government be formed. Pedro Sánchez is saying we can’t have a third election, I like the way he says ‘third election’ he obviously means third election since this year but really it would be actually the fifth in less than five years. So, he’s trying to avoid that and I think everyone in the country must want the politicians to avoid that.

So it’s still very unclear how it’s going to go. But Casado is not being moved on that point, he is saying that if that were to happen the PP would basically cease to be the opposition party.

There was also even a suggestion of a deal whereby Sánchez steps down in exchange for the PP’s abstention but Pablo Casado has rejected that saying the problem is not with Sánchez (even though he spends all his time pillorying Sánchez), but the problem is with the whole of the Socialist party.

So yeah, as it stands at the moment it doesn’t look like this is getting sorted by Christmas but who knows, maybe we’ll walk out of here like we did that time saying, “nothing’s going to happen,” then the Podemos PSOE deal was announced. So watch this space, let’s see what happens around Christmas time.

As for all the theatrics and the cabaret in congress I mean it’s just ridiculous. You know when every so often in some tin-pot country around the world or some really young democracy or ex-eastern bloc country, a fight breaks out in their house of parliament and the images get

transmitted around the world and everyone goes, “oh look at these savages,” or whatever. I mean, thank god there’s no footage of that riff-raff between the Coca-Cola Ciudadanos guy and the Vox deputy because if somebody actually did end up on the floor, I mean, just the image of that as it would be beamed around the world, it would make Spain look even sillier *laughter* than it does on occasion. But yeah, it is just unbelievable.

And Vox again doing their stunts of stealing everyone’s seats, I mean it’s incredible, it’s like the old joke about Germans putting their towels on the sun loungers when you go on holiday, it’s like, what are they playing at? They’re going to get assigned good seats now because they are the third-biggest party but all they had to do was just wait a day for Parliament to be formally opened.

We also had the deputy who looks like the Spanish writer Valle-Inclán, he apologized to all Spaniards for the fact that Spanish politicians couldn’t get their act together and form a Government and we’re back here again.

[Sound bite of apology]

You know, it’s always nice to see a politician apologizing and he’s got such gravitas that guy hasn’t he because of the way he looks, it’s hilarious.

Yeah and then we had a deputy who fell over and had to be taken out in a wheelchair, did you see that?

Melissa: Yep

Simon: So yeah I mean it was a day full of anecdotes and silly stories and this probably reflects quite nicely in how the legislature is going to progress because who knows if we’re going to get out of this without more elections but, you never know, like I just said we might get a surprise, but we won’t hold our breaths.

Right, okay, let’s turn to our second story which has to be one of my favourite stories of the whole year and it involves a submarine and a whole load of the white stuff. So, why don’t you tell us what happened Melissa?

Melissa: Ten days ago, Spanish authorities intercepted the first “narco submarine” ever caught in European waters. The submersible was captured off the coast of Pontevedra, in Spain’s northwestern Galicia region, with more than 3,000 kilograms of high-quality cocaine on board.

The drugs were worth up to €100 million and had been shipped in the submarine from Colombia. Authorities say the cocaine was meant to be dropped off in Galicia, where local drug clans have been operating for decades.

The submarine itself is thought to have been built in a secret shipyard in the jungles of Suriname or Guyana in South America.

Police arrested two crew members – both men from Ecuador – when they seized the sub. The vessel's captain, a man from Galicia, was caught a week later in Pontevedra after fleeing the scene of the crime. He was still wearing his wetsuit. A fourth suspect has also been detained for allegedly helping the operation.

Police are now trying to find out which drug clan they were working for. According to sources close to the investigation, "It's got to be a powerful one, if they can afford to spend €1.5 million on a single-use submarine."

The investigation was opened following a tip-off from the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which was then pursued by Spain's National Police, Civil Guard, and Customs Surveillance Survey.

Officers were waiting near Hío beach to witness the drugs being transferred from the sub to a pick-up boat, but no one showed up.

According to a source close to the investigation, the crew had been travelling for 20 days and spent another seven days waiting at different points for someone to collect the shipment.

When no one turned up, the crew abandoned the submarine and were caught by officers.

Since 2006, officers had been hearing about drug-laden semi-submersibles making the trip to Spain and Africa. The operation was meant to work like this: A small crew of between two and three members would be given a quick course on how to operate the submarine. They would then cross nearly 8,000 kilometers of the Atlantic Ocean to reach Galicia. The goods and crew would then move to a fishing boat or speedboat and the shipment would be offloaded to land. They would then sink the submarine and abandon it.

But no one had ever caught one until now. Police sources now think there must be more sunken narco submarines off the coast of Galicia.

Simon: Yeah so as you mentioned, I mean it's a €1.5 million submarine and they're just dumping them on the bottom of the ocean when they're done. But of course if you're carrying a €100 million cargo, it's not really much of a cost and it just shows, again, how much money is involved in drug trafficking and just how hard it is for the authorities to combat operations that are basically dealing with such huge amounts of money.

I really just wanted to talk about this story to show off about my headline last week about when they brought up the submarine, the authorities finally managed to bring up the submarine after it

has been scuppered and my headline was: 'Coke Float' which I promptly took the day off after putting that on the headline. *laughter*

But yeah, it's an extraordinary story. Lots of interesting things to consider. First of all, just how Galicia is such a focal point for drug smuggling. There was a story in the Guardian after this news came out which basically said that those drugs, that cocaine, was most likely destined for the UK.

Spain is very much a gateway point for drugs coming in from Latin America mostly of course. They've got some great TV shows now I think on the DMAX channel where they follow round the customs officers working in Barajas, working down in also around Ceuta, Melilla which is, that's not cocaine normally coming in there that's normally hachis. But these guys, man, they've really got their work cut out; there's so many drugs coming in, not just in Galicia and in the southern borders but also in the airports.

And we run stories every once in a while just of these extraordinary methods. There was even one story that we ran about a woman who had had breast implants sewn in which weren't proper breast implants they were actually made of, they were packages of cocaine basically, so the lengths that people go to just to bring drugs into the country are pretty extraordinary. And as we can see with this one, this isn't just someone coming in with a small package this is a major, major incident which was obviously going to be destined for somewhere else.

I love the fact that the guy that they caught at the weekend was still wearing his wetsuit *laughter* I really want to know why, you know, so many days after he'd managed to escape he was still running around in a wetsuit, especially because he was actually from Galicia and you'd think that he would have been able to get some sort of local support. I don't know, maybe he was still planning to swim for it or something, it's another bizarre twist in an already bizarre story.

If you're interested in this at all, there's a book isn't there, well 'Fariña' was originally a book, 'fariña' is the Galician word for flour. They make that book into a Netflix show which is called 'Fariña' in it's Spanish version but it's called 'Cocaine coast' if you're looking at Netflix in English. Some of these guys who appear in the series, well who are portrayed in the series and written about in the book, they're still around today. 'Sito' I think is the main one and he still is regularly in the news, and in and out of prison because he's allegedly still involved in the smuggling operation. It's interesting to think that up in the northwest of Spain we've just got this gateway for drugs which is just serving the rest of Europe and very interesting that it's never been properly combatted because for every haul like this that the police manage to take there are probably five that get through that we'll never know about because they make their destination.

In fact 'Fariña' was actually written by one of our colleagues I believe, isn't that right Veronica, Nacho Carretero? Yeah, so definitely worth checking out.

Sound bite

Simon: All right, so let's wrap up the 10th episode of season three
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 Madrid newsroom, under the guidance of our expert producer Verónica Figueroa, who always puts us first (after Montserrat Dominguez) 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!