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Spanish state

“Only a government led by Unidas Podemos can fight the Troika”

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[IMG/jpg/Miguel.jpg]

Miguel Urbán (Madrid, 1980) received *El Diario* in the MEP’s office he has opened in Madrid a few hours before the final outcome of the presidential elections in Austria was announced. Urbán analysed the reasons that led Hofer’s FPÑ– party to win around 50% of the vote in the heart of Europe. Speaking about the general elections of June 26, he believes that the union of Podemos and IU (which he calls “Unidas Podemos”), with other parties and with the Catalan, Galician and Valencian confluences, is the only alternative to the “single ballot” of the PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos”. Also he spoke on the future of Podemos after the elections.

The candidate of the extreme right has come very close to being elected president in Austria

It is something unprecedented in Europe. It would have been the first far right head of state since the 1930s, which led us to very dark stages of our history. It is like Gramsci said, the old is dying and the new is not yet born, and in this chiaroscuro monsters are born. And we are seeing monsters in Europe. The FPÑ– is in the same European parliamentary group as the Front National, the Northern League, the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders and other xenophobes and racists. In one of the presidential debates in Austria a Muslim citizen asked Norbert Hofer how he should vote; and the candidate recommended that he should not vote, that it was not convenient. It is very illustrative.

How can the extreme right aspire to the presidency in a country such as Austria, with all the connotations that has, in the Europe of the twenty-first century?

There are Austrian and European elements. In Austria there was a process of de-Nazification as in Germany although not very intense. Already in 1949 the predecessor party of the FPÑ– headed by ex-leaders of the Austrian SS won 11% of the vote. Another factor is the crisis of the traditional parties and especially of the social democratic parties, that is the crisis of the European project as we have known it up to now. That political space that social democrats have abandoned by moving to social liberalism, accepting policies of austerity and attacks on civil rights are being occupied by an amalgam of forces from the margins of the system.

And how can it be that the space abandoned by social democracy is occupied by the extreme right?

The electoral program of the FPÑ– is not positioned against the welfare state. It defends it for Austrians. And they confront the popular classes, historically voters for social democracy, with newcomers who are a little worse off.

Are there any other alternative parties that can reach these popular classes?

The polarization that we have seen in Austria means that for the first time neither socialists nor conservatives are in the second round. Unfortunately in most countries the space is occupied by the extreme right thanks to a Europe that has invested in cuts and inequality and has for years practiced a policy of xenophobic borders. It has been the perfect breeding ground. But where there have been processes of social response in the street to the crisis and the cuts the extreme right has not had political space. And progressive options of change in favour of the social majority occupy that space. That is why in Portugal or in Spain there are not extreme right parties with representation.

In Greece there is, for example.

The far right in Greece has risen by barely a point since the 1990s. The triumph of the extreme right in Europe is to have penetrated public policies. If Marine Le Pen was asked about her greatest achievement she would say Manuel Valls without any doubt, because the PS has assumed much of the logic of Le Penism. In France the only political alternative to Le Pen is called Nuit Debout. They are the only ones that do not try to turn their discourse to the extreme right and they are posing a different alternative. Le Pen knows this and is attacking them more than François Hollande.

In Hungary, the Jobbik party, which organizes raids against immigrants and border control patrols, can exceed 20%, Denmark has adopted a law that allows expropriation of the jewellery of refugees with the support of the Social Democrats, in Norway the Christian Democrats govern with the support of the party of Anders Breivik.

The European institutions are still tying exit from the crisis to austerity policies. This Monday we knew that Mariano Rajoy committed in a letter to undertake further cuts if he is back in government after the elections. Can Spain withstand other 8 billion euros in cuts?

The Eurogroup spoke of 10 billion a month ago, we do not know what to expect. The problem is that people cannot endure further cuts. They are always asking for efforts from the popular classes and never speaking of investing more. Because all of them have their money in Panama.

What government in Spain will say “no” to the troika?

A government headed by Podemos and IU, by Unidas Podemos is today the only one that can say no the troika. We must have a government that goes to Brussels not to negotiate that its friend Cañete [\[1\]](#) become Commissioner but that we do not have 9 billion euros in cuts. We must insert the theme of the EU in the electoral campaign, it has very little weight in the national debates.

Is this something that only happens in Spain?

I went to Italy to be in Lampedusa and Sicily visiting detention centres and I was able to go Naples to accompany the mayor in his electoral campaign and Europe is very present in the public debate. In Greece, Portugal, countries of our environment, too. We don't talk about it. Not raising TTIP is an error and Podemos and IU are going to try and raise it. The people have to vote knowing that to choose the PP, PSOE or Ciudadanos is to vote in favour of TTIP or CETA [free trade agreement with Canada] and that we will have further cuts. Ciudadanos, PSOE and the PP could make a joint logo and present themselves. I thought that they would after the agreement between PSOE and Ciudadanos [laughs]. Just look at Grupo Prisa, which says that PP and Podemos radicalize and that PSOE and Ciudadanos reach agreements. There is a sector of the oligarchy in this country that is very comfortable with a new more neo-liberal right which agrees with a Socialist Party that has ceased to be so, at least in its leadership. It would have been interesting if members of the PSOE had been asked what their preferred agreement was.

There was a referendum and agreement with Ciudadanos was approved.

It was all that was on the table; two options were not put. But beyond that I would like to know what the Socialist Party activists think about the TTIP, about 9 billion euros more cuts and with whom they believe they can cope better with this, with Podemos or with Ciudadanos. In fact, only in the ECB do I hear good things about Ciudadanos, it's incredible.

We spoke before of the polarization in Europe and in Spain we are going into a similar campaign. Podemos

is sending this message: us or the PP. Do you think this campaign will work?

The Ciudadanos-PSOE agreement was a deferred grand coalition because right now with what was happening with the PP it is very complex to reach an agreement with Rajoy. But although there are three ballots they represent the same economic prescriptions in Europe and Spain. Another thing is that the social base of the PSOE does not represent this. Podemos cannot be understood without a historical rupture of the electorate and the bases of the PSOE.

Is the union with IU an electoral strategy or does it go beyond that?

Today it is an electoral strategy and I would like it to be more than an electoral strategy. But this will be after June 26. Before the last election there was already a great effort, expressed in the confluences which already involved IU in Galicia and Catalonia. Before the second round of elections the alarm that was provoked by the Ciudadanos-PSOE agreement shows what some have been saying - that the leadership of the PSOE does not govern for their base but for a minority. This has been clear. What government is going to resist another letter like that which the ECB [European Central Bank] sent to Zapatero in 2010?

Does the prime minister have to be a supporter of Podemos?

The prime minister should be from Podemos, if not there is no guarantee of endurance. And even then there is no guarantee without two central elements. The first is pressure from below, popular power. There has to be collective responsibility so nobody buckles and accepts the blackmail of the powerful and the EU. The second, not be alone. We cannot go alone into this battle.

And with whom will you go into this battle?

The Portuguese Government has already called the bluff of the Eurogroup by reducing the cuts demanded. Let us hope that we do not go alone with government but with popular movements like Nuit Debout and others that may arise and that pose a different alternative. It is the idea of Plan B that we are promoting, so that people see that there could be a European response to the blackmail of the institutions. Disobedience to the treaties of the EU as we know it is the only way to build a different Europe, of peoples and of solidarity. That is why on May 28 in almost all the capitals of Europe we are going to demand a roof, dignity, work and the non-payment of illegitimate debt.

You said that the goal of Podemos must be to create “popular power”. What for?

To resist the troika and to be able to carry out the programme. Pablo [Iglesias] has always said - although you achieve power not you cannot always implement your programme. To avoid this we must try to make power not only something a prime minister has, but rather something the people have. And that the responsibilities are not just those of one person with a ponytail, however wonderful - that is not fair or reasonable for him or for everyone else. That was one of the elements that 15M highlighted.

Returning to the question raised before, over and above the electoral process we are interested in the campaign having a process of synergy of the people of Podemos with those of the confluence, with IU, Compromís and others and with a lot of people that will be appealed to so as to make a campaign that is going to be historic. And that is not ending on June 27, so that people cease to be spectators and become actors. There has to be a convergence after June 26.

But an organic convergence?

No, you have to create spaces of meeting of construction of this popular power that go beyond the party structures. It is the best formula so that when Unidas Podemos wins the elections it can be a part of the program.

The step toward a popular movement would mean reforming the structures of Podemos, which were established in Vistalegre as a machinery for electoral battle with an agile leadership compared to a more horizontal process. Are you heading to a Vistalegre II, that “mythological animal” in the words of Álvaro Errejón?

We should have the most appropriate organization to build popular power and not to win elections. For me there is no contradiction, and I believe that the best way to win elections is to build popular power and it was what we proposed with Pablo Echenique in the document “Summing up Podemos”. Vistalegre died when Echenique became secretary of the Organization. We are now at an impasse.

And what model do you propose?

What I see is that the document “Summing up Podemos” also had problems. There is no perfect system until it is put into practice. We have to be flexible enough to change what does not work. Sometimes we have highly complex models and the bigger an organization is the more simple the organizational model should be. There is a need to promote participation, the model has to serve to empower and not to take away power from the rank and file. Vistalegre tried to convert a popular movement into a party and now the challenge is to stop being a party and be more of a movement.

Errejón and Iglesias have also spoken about Podemos becoming a popular movement. What are the differences?

Now the whole world is saying we were right. We spoke of territorial decentralization and now there is talk of territorial decentralization; we said that the closed lists were a bad idea and to some extent they have been removed; we said that winner takes all was not logical and we are going to have more proportional lists; now the whole world speaks of taking care of the local circles. I am not going to fight for things that we agree on. There will have to be an opening to other factors such as the currents of opinion that exist in Podemos and it is logical that they can express themselves not as a struggle over posts but as political differences under a common umbrella.

Should there also be assemblies at the level of the autonomous regions?

The debate is whether they will be before or after. In Catalonia they have a management committee and could do it before, as Cantabria, La Rioja, Galicia or the Basque Country have done.

And in Madrid?

In Madrid we do not have a management committee, in part because of the PGM (Podemos Ganar Madrid) list.

There has been a vision and wisdom because the important thing was to look out and not turn inwards. It is logical that there should be a citizen’s assembly in Madrid to settle what the best organization is.

In what terms?

I would like to have a debate on ideas. What we want to do for Madrid. What we want to build in Madrid. How we want to organize in Madrid. We have spoken of some resigning and others not, but what are the political differences? Mine was the only candidacy with a project for Madrid. I would like the others to have one.

Will you head a list again?

The people will decide. It is not a personal decision but a collective one because when you run a lot of people get involved. And a lot of people must decide. We will see what the situation is but I have always been willing to work for Madrid. Normally Madrid is confused with the state and this is very pernicious because there is never a project for Madrid. I personally believe that is a challenge.

This interview was conducted by Aitor Riveiro and was published on May 24, 2016.

[Eldiaro](#)

[1] Miguel Arias Cañete is a politician of the centre-right Partido Popular. He served as Minister for Agriculture, Food and Environment in the Spanish Government from 2011 until 2014 and headed his Party List in the European Parliamentary elections.

He became EU Commissioner for Energy and Climate Action on 1 November 2014.