

## **GENERAL ELECTIONS (II): POSITIONS, STRATEGIES AND DILLEMAS BEFORE THE INVESTITURE OF THE NEW PRESIDENT**

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The situation is much more complex than the view offered by the media: superficial or rather biased towards the right-wing Popular Party (PP). The fact that the PP has the widest parliamentary minority and is the only party that has increased the number of votes and seats with respect to the last elections generally leads to the conclusion that a Government led by the PP is the natural consequence of the results and the only option.

However, this is not a normal post-election situation. It is the second act of the difficult process of building a new period in Spanish politics, now starting to articulate around a multiparty system. The dissatisfaction amongst the citizenship and the strong emergence of new parties have not only been generated by the economic crisis and the austerity measures adopted. The main reason has been the scandalous list of corruption cases hitting a high number of PP representatives and even the party itself.

It is true that social, economic and territorial matters define the normality of the political competition in our party system and create different and partial competition spheres. However, other matters such as corruption, prevarication, incapability to face these problems or conspiracy generated in the public administrations affect the core of our representative system. They are the reason why the other parties and a clear majority of the citizenship radically oppose the PP.

One out of three voters voted the PP in the last elections, and two out of three have positioned themselves as clearly against this party. The different parties' arguments revolve around two major axes. The main one is corruption and the perversion of democracy and isolates the PP from the rest of the parties. This point makes it almost impossible for the PP to find partners who support the investiture of the new President and who choose to form government with them. The second axis is more diverse and complex and deals with the "normal" issues of competition. It defines some important antagonisms and poses difficulties to alternative investiture agreements.

The investiture of the candidate of the PP only with the votes of the party (137) would only be possible if PSOE (85) abstained since, even if all other parties voted against the investiture, their votes (128) would be less than those of PP. The abstention of Ciudadanos looks more plausible and it would make the investiture of the candidate of the PP even clearer. Given the different stands of the parties during the electoral campaign: what concessions should the PP make to their "facilitators" so that they act against their initial stands? What internal and electoral consequences would this have for Ciudadanos and PSOE?

A pact PP-Ciudadanos would add up to 169 seats and need the abstention of at least 13 members of the Parliament to be able to proclaim the investiture. Together with their

measures for the regeneration of the Spanish political life, Ciudadanos questioned the role of Rajoy, and even made sure they would never support him, in order to reach an agreement with the PP. Things have changed after Rajoy emerged victorious from the last elections, but in any case he will need to offer some compensation to convince Rivera's electorate (particularly after many of his voters abandoned Ciudadanos in favor of the PP in the last elections). Would Ciudadanos be satisfied with the Presidency of the Congress, the electoral reform, recovery measures and clear and immediate gestures against corruption? As said, in addition to this agreement 13 members of the Parliament should abstain, and it does not seem realistic that the nationalist parties (with the exception of Coalición Canaria) either vote in favor or abstain. Would the PSOE "lend" them the necessary abstentions?

A grand coalition PP-PSOE, which may also count on the support of Ciudadanos, is the only agreement that would ensure an absolute majority. It is the PP's favorite option as they are mainly interested in playing a conciliatory role and they are aware of the fact that PSOE, as has repeatedly confirmed, would not want to be involved in a government under the dominance of PP.

If the investiture of the PP failed, an agreement PSOE-Unidos Podemos with Sánchez as the new President (which Unidos Podemos is willing to accept) would add up to 156 seats, with 137 votes of the PP and almost certainly 32 of Ciudadanos against this proposal (the latter, unless not satisfied with the proposals made by the PP). The PSOE would also need the vote in favor of 14 out of the 25 members of the nationalist parties (there exist several combinations) and the abstention of the rest of them. Will the PSOE take the lead?

The PSOE is the core of this process and will need to face this situation in the midst of internal fights and divisions. A priori no option on the table would generate consensus within the PSOE: neither facilitating the investiture of the PP by abstaining nor reaching an alternative agreement (necessarily with the involvement of Unidos Podemos and the approval of the nationalist parties). Consulting the members of the party in this situation could worsen their confusion and lack of confidence in the organization. After the fierce attacks against Podemos during the electoral campaign the decision would not seem to go in this direction. However, the members' left-wing orientation and the leading role played by PSOE over Unidos Podemos still leave the door open to this possibility.

The interests of the dominant media (those close to the PSOE included) would applaud the "responsibility" of the facilitating option. On the contrary, the alternative solution would generate harsh reactions. Several members of the Parliament would surely boycott the investiture session, backed and praised by the dominant media. While the facilitating option would have medium and long-term consequences for PSOE, those of the alternative option would take place in the short term.

The PP will progressively show readiness to negotiate specific aspects. This will be applauded by the dominant media, including those that are closer to the PSOE, who will present the right-wing party as a negotiating and reforming party willing to generate a climate of opinion that allows the PSOE to present an "honorable" abstention.

It is however obvious that the PP will be more or less willing to negotiate according to the pressure they feel. That is: if an alternative is not possible, the pressure is almost inexistent (except if third elections were required) and the willingness to negotiate will increase. In any case, both the PP and the media aligned with the party understand the investiture of Rajoy as the natural consequence of the election results. On the other hand, the opinions of PSOE and the media aligned with them are not so coherent, as they claim, at the same time, the radical opposition to the PP and the abstention to facilitate the formation of a government led by the PP. With regard to the first position, at least during the first phase, it would exert pressure on the PP, who would have to look for an agreement with Ciudadanos. This would indirectly help the Socialist Party recover their negotiating power (now that they are somewhat devalued given the loss of votes in favor of the PP).

If this happened, it would not be sufficient anyway. As an agreement with the Basque PNV is unlikely, the PSOE should decide if the formation of a government led by the PP should be facilitated, be it based on an agreement with Ciudadanos or not. But, in front of this complex situation, why should the PSOE allow the PP to implement measures that are contrary to their ideas, instead of trying to form an alternative majority and implement themselves policies allegedly to the benefit of the great majority of the citizens?

The election of the Bureau of Congress on 19 July may show us a first direction. Even if no majorities are formed yet, the election of the President of the Congress (and that of the Senate), by simple majority in the second vote, will stimulate the agreements, even if this is only to avoid unpleasant surprises. This means in theory that if no agreement is reached, the PP candidate would be elected President of the Congress in the second vote. And, if each party votes for their candidate, the four big parties will get a Vice-Presidency and a Secretariat. But is there proof of that?

If no agreements are reached, the PP has the possibility to divide their votes in a way to obtain two Vice-Presidencies and two Secretariats, as the number of votes are enough to place two of the candidates amongst the four most voted in each of the voting sessions. This would leave Ciudadanos out of the Bureau. If the other parties remained, also PSOE and Podemos would be able to divide their votes and get two representatives into the Bureau, also to the detriment of Ciudadanos.

Ciudadanos is, according to this, the party with more incentives to reach an agreement that guarantees their presence in the Bureau. However, uncertainty is palpable in all parties. The dominant strategy is the search for agreements bringing security to an uncertain presence. This puts all parties face to face: some will win, some others will lose. These agreements might also concern the formation of the Bureau of Congress, whose election system offers more incentives to the agreements than the Congress' system. The PSOE has currently enough incentives to try to reach an agreement with Ciudadanos and Unidos Podemos (and they also have their own incentives). Leaving the PP as a minority in the Bureaus would mean having the Presidency and putting pressure on the PP as a test tube for a more ambitious agreement.