

Spanish State

Podemos activist: “What we want to socialize is the possibility that we are all happy”

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Updated presentation

When the results of the internal elections in Podemos were announced in mid-February Miguel Urban had lost in Madrid by only 5 per cent (49.88% against 44.44%) to the candidate of Pablo Iglesias, Luis Alegre. However as first alternate on the list of European deputies he has now taken a seat in Brussels following the resignation of Teresa Rodriguez, also of Anticapitalistas, who won the election in Andalucia to be Podemos candidate for the regional elections on 22nd of March and thus resigned to devote herself to that campaign. The vote, in these elections, on “open lists”, and thus for individuals not only for one list, thus allowed 16 members of the Urbán list to be elected, alongside 18 for the winning list, to sit in the Citizens’ Council of the Madrid region. The individual with the highest number of votes was in fact not the candidate of Iglesias but a member of the Urbán list, the actor San Juan!

Miguel Urban has participated in Podemos from the beginning of its history, but has never clung to the official line of the party. Number seven on the Podemos list for the European elections, he says he feels uncomfortable when ranked as a critic, but it is certain that he has defended until the end a political and fundamentally organizational model different from that which Podemos adopted at its constituent assembly in October 2014 by an overwhelming majority of votes. The text included the prohibition of dual organizational membership, which prevented Miguel Urban from standing for the leadership of Podemos until this week, when the other organization in which he is active, Izquierda Anticapitalista, decided that it would no longer be a political party, but a movement under the name Anticapitalista. With this obstacle overcome, the candidate for the post of secretary general for the Community of Madrid with the list Podemos Ganar Madrid, made up of 32 members with a certain influence in the organization, faces more than three weeks of campaigning against Luis Alegre, a candidate very close to Pablo Iglesias.

Why has there been no convergence with Luis Alegre and his team?

Miguel Urban Crespo – You would have to ask them. There never is convergence if the two forces do not want it, that is obvious, but some have more responsibilities than others. We wanted it, and we have demonstrated this, as Luis Alegre recognized himself in several interviews. All our meetings have been open, whoever wanted could participate. But, in addition, we expressly invited them. We have begun to speak with them on January 4, 2015, and we have negotiated with Luis Alegre when we did not know yet that he was going to be the candidate. They came to the meeting of January 11 and told us that they were interested. In fact, it is curious because the people that we had proposed on that day then received calls from them. Not only did they come, but they noted the names that we

proposed for the list.

But they did not give you their reasons for refusing this convergence?

They have not given their reasons. They came to the meeting and then there was silence. We have launched appeals and we have shown goodwill. But, on their side there has not been this goodwill and it is they who should provide explanations. They also said they wanted to have a list with those who are in agreement with the documents that were voted for at the Si Se Puede meeting in October 2014.

Does it bother you being ranked among the critics?

No. I am critical, but not of Podemos, I am against the policies of the PP and Ignacio Gonzalez, and I believe that Luis Alegre is also.

But you have also been critical of the Podemos formation?

Rather than being critical, I am positive. One thing does not preclude the other. Rather than criticize the other model, I would say that I have proposed one which seems to me better. When it is the first which has been chosen by vote, I have accepted it, as have between 90% and 100% of Podemos members. When they say that I am critical, I would answer yes, but of the policies of the current government of the Community of Madrid, and not of Podemos; among other things because we must let them prove it in practice.

Is there a concentration of power in a specific sector of Podemos?

I believe that there is a concentration of functions which seems absurd given the quantity of persons of value that there are within Podemos. Absurd and not very healthy. If Luis Alegre is elected secretary general of Podemos Madrid, I think he will hold about eight positions within the formation.

What differentiates your project from that of Luis Alegre?

I do not know, I told you a moment ago. We will have to see what he proposes, but I do not think that there will be a lot of differences. The only thing I know from day to day is that we have done everything publicly, in a transparent way. They have been able to see our political and organizational documents. They could propose amendments and participate in the drafting of these documents. I do not know the text that they are preparing, I do not know who prepared it or how they have done it, or even if they are going to submit under the name of Claro Que Podemos, although everything indicates that this is what they are going to do. In any event, we are moving in a similar framework, a more or less common way of doing things, although perhaps we should pay more attention to some things.

Which?

Rank and file participation is fundamental for us, as is the participation of organized civil society and social movements, within the specific structure of Podemos, but without having to integrate into it. I think that is a question of respect for the social movements and therefore an element of difference. On another point, I am adventurous perhaps, but we give a lot of importance to advancing programmatic proposals for Madrid. We want to obtain a regional parliament which, after the election, works immediately to bring down Ignacio Gonzales with clear proposals and throughout the next three weeks, we are going to move in this direction.

Does your list reflect more the left within Podemos?

No, because we are all involved in Podemos. I am on the left, but I agree with the position that exists in Podemos according to which we are not interested to talk so much of left and right because that would lock us into a political space which does not correspond to the social majorities who are suffering from the crisis. By this I do not mean that we are embarking on a journey to the centre, or that the social majorities are in the centre: there are political proposals at the centre of the political debate. We want restructuring of the debt to be at the centre of the political debate because this will be the only way to get out of the crisis. Joseph Stiglitz himself has said this, a Nobel Prize Laureate for Economics who is not exactly on the left. Thomas Piketty also says this. That means that our proposals are not only realistic, but also essential to emerge from the crisis.

How does the Podemos of today differ from the organization that you wish to build?

I have been involved in the construction of an alternative organizational model which clearly establishes my position and I think that all this must pass the test of practice. The majority of people are not in agreement with the complete lists (Listas planchas, that is, lists that have as many names as there are positions to be filled). This is seen in Plaza Podemos or in the fact that many lists of Claro Podemos have not been completed, as has happened in Murcia, in Malaga and Seville. I am against complete lists with a list template already filled in because this eliminates plurality within the Citizen's Council. In Barcelona, all the lists that did not emanate from Claro Que Podemos obtained 49% of the votes, but because of the majority they had not a single seat on the Council. This seems to me to be a little schizophrenic. I think it will be necessary to revise this in the next national assembly, because it is vital to respect plurality.

Do you see chances of winning? If so, will you be presenting your candidacy in the primaries to select the Podemos candidate for the elections in the Community of Madrid?

I believe that we have every chance of winning and people see it, because here it is possible to follow the debate in a public manner. I do not want to beat Luis Alegre, but Ignacio Gonzalez, and if I am the secretary general, the first thing I will do is see how I could integrate Luis Alegre and his team to bring down Ignacio Gonzales. But I have not yet taken any decision about the regional elections.

There have been three successive PP leaders at the head of the Community of Madrid with their grandiose projects and their privatization of public health - where to begin?

The first thing we will do is talk with the civil society and the social movements which have withstood the various neo-liberal policies applied here, in order to know what emergency program is needed for the first 100 days of government. There will be a proposal to develop the program which we will present at the elections to unseat the mafia of the PP and Ignacio Gonzalez. We have a proposal regarding a citizen rescue (as against the "rescue" of the banks] and throughout the campaign we will have the opportunity to be even more concrete. We will speak of realities such as hidden privatizations and those who have been only too visible. In any event, there are the national bodies and those of the region, but I believe that we will win the elections, both in Madrid and at the level of the Spanish state, which will allow us to develop, little by little, the policies that we are proposing. We must defend what we consider as something more than public services, what we can consider as common rights, such as water.

The autonomous community must also have the competence to fight energy poverty for the people of Madrid. We can no longer count the number of people who can afford neither electricity nor heating. We must encourage more the development of a productive fabric different from that we have known it up to today, through a green economy, which creates more jobs and is more profitable from an economic point of view. We have to finish with the brutal wage differentiation that we are

experiencing in the Community of Madrid, the worst in all the country. 52% of the population of the capital earns less than 900 Euros per month. It is barbaric and we must find solutions. Sometimes, I am told that in Podemos we want to nationalize and socialize. But what we want to socialize is the possibility that we are all happy and this is not without importance. For this, it is necessary to settle a series of essential material questions.

What about the air? The pollution measurements in January in Madrid have triggered all the alarms

There are two questions here, that of the productive system and the system of transport. Madrid does not have only three million inhabitants because there are a lot more people who use the transport system of Madrid than those who live there. In reality, it is more than double. In the planning of Madrid private transportation has been promoted to the detriment of public transport. The M30 motorway is an example. We must address these issues through a reflection and a collective participation. There is a need to develop public transport, it is fundamental. See how the metro has degraded, because the municipal councillors never use it.

And how do you propose to redistribute wealth?

There are studies that show that in 150 years the income scale in Madrid has not changed, nor its geographical distribution in the city. This also applies to the entire Community of Madrid. It isn't the same thing to live in Móstoles, in Pozuelo or in Las Rozas, there are major differences. The greatest increase in income in the east of Madrid has occurred in Rivas-Vaciamadrid, one of the six cities of the Community where the per capita income is the highest. This demonstrates that the public policy that is applied, in this case that of Izquierda Unida, also has a social influence.

The public policies that Izquierda Unida has applied in the Rivas municipality so are positive?

There have been some positive elements and negative elements. Are there more positive elements than negative? Of course, if we are talking about the PP you find more negative elements than positive in its management.

It would be necessary to analyze the whole of the policies that have been applied over the last fifteen years, which is a big task. For example, I believe that the policy on public housing in Rivas was very interesting, because this is the Spanish municipality which has built the most public social housing, in absolute figures, not in relative figures. But it has also privatized the public housing enterprise which is now bankrupt, which seems to me to be bad. I believe that in Rivas there are a lot of things that can be improved, but this does not detract from that was very good.

Returning to Podemos, you are number seven on the party list for the European elections. Will you sit this year?

I do not know, it will not depend on me. I do not know if I should go to Brussels as a European member.

At the time Pablo Iglesias, Teresa Rodríguez or Pablo Echenique return, it will be your turn to sit. Has the leadership of the party said anything to you about this?

Nobody has said anything to me.

If you are offered the chance to sit in the European Parliament and you must choose: Madrid or Brussels?

I will speak first with Pablo Iglesias to see where he thinks I am the most useful. I have not thought about it yet, I will have to think about this with my comrades of my party.

Madrid is one of the key locations for Podemos, and as Iglesias pointed out on Saturday Andalusia is another. How will the early elections there affect Podemos's schedule?

First we will have to see if they finally take place or not. Anyway, Teresa Rodriguez has been saying for three months that we are ready with the best list and the best project to transform Andalusia when the time comes. We will be ready.

P.S.

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* Translation IVP. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>