

Obama: Society is fractured; unification will not happen overnight

Exclusive interview with TVE

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USPA NEWS - Spanish Televisión (TVE) broadcast this Saturday in prime time an interview of its correspondent in Washington, Cristina Olea, with former US President Barack Obama, in which the former president reviews the latest events in the United States, talks about the new president, Joe Biden, and makes self-criticism of his eight years in office. Despite this, Obama assured that the new Democratic Administration expects continuity in its policies, and was very critical of Donald Trump.

Regarding the new president, Joe Biden, Obama expects "continuity" of his policies, including the relationship with Europe, although "trying to adapt them to the new times." In his opinion, the "good news" is that the Biden team believes "in the rule of law, in multilateral institutions and cooperation, in science, in facts and in Human Rights," so it believes it is possible resume "strong transatlantic cooperation with Europe."

"I think the new president, my old vice president and friend, Joe Biden, has set a good tone with his willingness to unify the country. But I don't think it will happen overnight, because it is society that is fractured and there is a similar fracture in Europe and in the rest of the world. There are two stories struggling to prevail: those who believe in a progressive order in which everyone is treated equally, with dignity and respect, and in an economy that offers opportunity to everyone, and believe that women have the right same rights and roles as men, on the one hand; and on the other, those who look to the past, appeal to tribe, and ethnicity, and religious intolerance, and see the world as a struggle between "us" and "them", and often yearn for a strong leader traditional, be it a Putin, an Erdogan, a Duterte or a Trump, to reinstate the old hierarchies, and that define their country as the nation of a few, not everyone. It is a debate that will continue."

The rise of populism, the controversial mandate of Donald Trump, the importance of his family environment or his confidence in the future and young people were some of the issues that Obama spoke about, who just published 'A Promised Land', the first volume of his memories.

He showed his confidence in young people, who "unanimously appreciate diversity" and among whom he sees as "less likely" to have sexist or racist attitudes. "I believe that they are the ones who will lead the world in the right direction," said the former president of the United States. "Right-wing populism has seen a boom because people do not feel financially secure," he said, also referring to the assault on the Capitol: "I could never have imagined what happened," he said. Obama believes that in the United States and in the rest of the world "right-wing populism has seen a boom, in part, because people do not feel financially secure, and also because he feels, culturally, that he is losing his status."

A historical divide

Obama affirmed that in the United States "always" there has been a conflict that goes back to the founding of the country, "between those who believe that American identity is based on heritage, race and patriarchy, and those who defend a vision more inclusive." Regarding the assault on Capitol, Obama stated that "I could never have imagined what happened, in part because of the contrast in the way the security services handled it, and his performance in the face of the Black Lives Matter protests. It never occurred to me that they could be so ill-prepared."

"But we have seen feelings of underlying anger, not only here in the United States, but also in the rest of the world. Right-wing populism has boomed, partly because people don't feel financially secure, and also because they feel, culturally, that they are losing their status, that the composition of the population is changing," he explained.

Regarding Donald Trump, he accused the former Republican president of "propagating the most insane conspiracy theories" but, he warned, "he was not alone." Obama warned that "the extreme right of the Republican Party has gained more and more prominence and the more moderate forces that used to exist in it have been defeated." The consequence of this radicalization in politics is that "democracy becomes fragile", a risk to which "the most advanced democracies" are not immune.

"It's something that was already happening, even before he came on stage. For a democracy to work, it is necessary that, both on the left and on the right, people agree. You can have disagreements about policies, but you have to start from a common understanding about how representation, elections, legislation, information work. One of the things that has happened in the United States is that the media has changed. Before, both the left and the right saw the same media. Today, these media are completely differentiated,"^[2] he pointed out.

In this situation, Obama warned, "democracy becomes fragile. These are problems that we see all over the world and I think that what the events of the last few years and months have taught us is that even the richest countries, the most advanced democracies, are not immune to these problems. It's the kind of problems that we see in Russia, and Turkey, and the Philippines, and Myanmar, but it turns out that they are also problems in the United States, in Spain, in Hungary, in Germany."

The failure of social division

Obama was proud of some of his achievements, such as the Affordable Health Care Act, the Paris Agreement or the nuclear agreement with Iran. But he also recognized his failures, especially the social fracture that showed at the end of his second term. "Even today, there are times when I wonder if he couldn't have done things differently... but it wasn't because he didn't try!," he said. Although, he affirmed, the unit "only occurs when everyone is interested" and he considers that the objective of the Republicans was the division "because it benefited them politically."

Regarding the management of the Coronavirus pandemic by the Trump Cabinet, he assured that it has been "frustrating" but he believes that it has awakened progressive forces and the involvement of citizens." When citizens are not informed and not involved, he said, "the void is filled with demagoguery and often degenerates into incompetence, lack of transparency and corruption."

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