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Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies





BORIS VEZJAK

THE RELAXED IDEOLOGY OF THE SLOVENES

ON THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE
PHILOSOPHEME “RELAXEDNESS”

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I would like to express my gratitude to Aldo Milohnič of the Peace Institute without whom this book would not have seen the light of day. The book has also been impatiently expected by my wife Milena and son Gašper, who had to cope with my occasional absorption in thought, caprice and ill-humor, alienated staring at the television screen, and obsessive reading of newspapers and literature. To those who would perhaps maliciously establish, based on newly identified and to me alien subtones, that I found relaxation in writing this book, I'd like to reveal one detail of my health condition: owing to my prostate problems and the pain caused by sitting, I could concentrate on writing only with difficulty. So I should also say that I'm grateful that my prostate allowed me to conclude this text. And last but not least, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša also deserves my gratitude for his fascinating project of a relaxed Slovenia which made possible the writing of this book.

BORIS VEZJAK,
KRČEVINA PRI VURBERGU, SEPTEMBER 2006



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I'd like to draw attention to the problem of translation of the basic concept analyzed in this book, i.e. "*sproščenost*." The problem arises from its dual nature: its meaning in the political context and its original philosophical meaning as used by Martin Heidegger. The two are intertwined. In the majority of English texts, Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit* is translated as 'releasement.' The Slovenian translation for *Gelassenheit* is 'sproščenost,' which, in contrast to its English counterpart, is a commonplace term. Therefore, even though 'releasement' would be a more faithful translation of *Gelassenheit*, it would also be wholly inappropriate in this case. The reason is quite simple: releasement is an unfamiliar English term that would never have been used in a sweeping political campaign or in a slogan because, in contrast to *sproščenost*, it does not have the necessary relaxed ring to it that is essential in such contexts. Apart from that, the English verb "to release" does not function properly in existing English translations either, so we could not hope that it would fit into all the contexts in which the Slovenian verb *sprostiti* was used. Also, as the author of this book pointed out, political actors in Slovenia did not have Heidegger in mind when they used this concept and they attributed to it various and heterogeneous meanings. For this reason, in this translation '*sproščenost*' is alternately translated as "relaxedness," "relaxation," "relaxed mood/spirit/atmosphere," "freedom," and even as "releasement" in the section examining its philosophical origin.

OLGA VUKOVIĆ



INTRODUCTION

The recognition that the table has to be laid or crops in the field harvested and the weed pulled before a new seed can be sown is at this moment certainly an unambiguous sign in the Slovenian sky.

Janez Janša, Prime Minister

The notions of emotional release or freedom, release of energy and relaxation have been unavoidable companions of political life in Slovenia ever since a fresh breeze swept the country in 2004. In 1998 the sociologist Frane Adam metaphorically asked: “Where are you, the breezes of **relaxation**?”¹ Adam’s conclusion at the time, addressed to expert circles rather than to the general public, was that in Slovenia “the **relaxed** state of mind is non-existent; what we have here is rather bigotry, emotional suppression and pretense.” Six years on, the winds of relaxation have finally filled our lungs, and we can fully enjoy its benefits. It took six long years before the national elections put things in order, as Prime Minister Janez Janša said. In the meantime, relaxation became the buzzword of the day and later of the new political and social era. This invisible and fluid concept hung in the air, so to say, throughout 2004, the year of the last parliamentary elections, pointing to a new course for the new Slovenia looming on the horizon. The winds of relaxation have finally arrived, inspiring Janez Janša to exclaim prophetically: “One feels it. The winds of change is something that affects you, fills you and guides you.”

What exactly is the meaning of this all-embracing relaxation as used in the political context to support demands for change, for a new political profile and, no less importantly, for a new life profile for every individual? Unfortunately, we were never given an explanation. And the fact that we were not is an integral part of its phenomenology. This book looks into the ideological basis of the announced change, insofar as it drew on the concept of relaxation. Indeed, it would have been a major surprise if

¹ An interview with Frane Adam, “Kje ste, sapice sproščenosti?” (Where Are You the Breezes of Relaxation), *Delo*, December 24, 1998. In this interview Adam says: “There is very little, almost no dialogue, polemics or engagement on the part of experts, no team work. Academic culture has by now become barely perceptible.”

the march of the new government had not been supported by an alternative ideological framework. The new grand narrative, one about relaxation, has become the ruling ideology and the ideology of the ruling power.² During the pre-election period, replete with the “new jargon” of the right-wing, not only the wider public and civil society, but also the political left-wing helplessly identified populism as the hallmark of the political opposition, manifested in various forms of intolerance, xenophobia, anti-intellectualism and anti-feminism. Understandably, during the run-up to the elections it strove to present a human face, resorting to stereotypes about native land, tradition, myths, and concern for the “small man.” An ideology can best be gleaned from discursive practices, so sometimes the analysis of speech itself may come in useful. The October 2004 parliamentary elections in Slovenia, which coincided in time and were in sync with a change in wider political orientation, produced a unique and singularly presented slogan, on whose mobilization potential obviously counted at least some of the right-wing ideologists. According to Andrej Capuder, later the Slovenian ambassador to Italy, the results were soon obvious: every day of the Janša government is a day gained for democracy, as he proudly stated in 2005.

Relaxation became an integral part of the government’s political discourse during the run-up to the elections, and it has remained so to date, although the diagnostic quality of this concept has never been explicated. The governing structures have been presenting it as part of their political program and even as one of their content goals. It was a handy tool in creating politics. Yet the political has always been a work of fiction into which politics digs an event and then attaches to it the crowd that supposedly makes history.³ That is where the difficulty with that kind of event lies: an awkward feature of relaxation is that it defies accurate definition, especially so if it is appraised according to the weight and importance attributed to it by its advocates occasionally intermingling with everyday use. In addition to the expected rhetorical devices such as national myths, discourse on the Slovenian national substance, and logical nonsense such as “intolerance towards independence” or “xenophobia towards Slovenianness,” relaxation emerged as the central, or one could say the principal signifier of the changes promised in the run-up to

² To borrow from Močnik: the ruling ideology is the ideology which is materialized in an institutional network, the ideology of the ruling structures is an “ether of self-understanding” of the political class. Cf. Močnik 1995, 128.

³ Badiou 2004, 11.

the elections. Slovenia needs to relax, argued politicians, and changes are needed to make such relaxation possible.⁴

The nature of this relaxation project, which is the question onto which this book will try to shed some light, has never been clarified. Is it a special *forma mentis* that will miraculously transform the Slovenes? Is it something more than just an electoral boost or slogan?⁵ In this book I will try to show that the importance attached to it and its articulations suggest that we should reach beyond these interpretations. The notion of relaxation also implies change in content and concepts, and accordingly, the story did not end with the elections.

The vision offered in the political program relied on the assumption that the term was self-explanatory. Yet this seemingly well-established concept still begs definition. It was introduced in 1999 in a notorious issue of *Nova revija* entitled “Relaxed Slovenia – Settlement in the Name of the Future” (1999), in which the intellectuals gathered around *Nova revija*⁶ attempted to settle the issue of the monopoly over the fields of finance, media and the economy, but primarily the ideological monopoly, allegedly held by the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) and the communist “clique”. The collection of essays published by *Nova revija* became a kind of manifesto for the circle associated with the “Slovenian Spring.”⁷ Other important initiatives were public appeals entitled “The Hour of European Truth for Slovenia” and “Something Has to Be Done.” Rhetoric about the relaxation of Slovenia reached its peak when the above-mentioned intellectual circle, supported by three political parties (the Slovenian Democratic Party, Nova Slovenija or the NSi party, and the Slovenian People’s Party), organized a social gathering (or “the meeting of truth” as their opponents saw it) just one week before the elections. It was held under the slogan “Towards a Relaxed Slovenia” and took place on

⁴ On the other hand, the success of this signifier draws on its undeterminable meaning, the amalgam of “too many” and “too few” meanings.

⁵ Viewed from the perspective of advertising, the impression of the billboards is much the same: “The same as those faces that are anything but **relaxed**, and that are not even a party on the candidates list, and they still offer to us – would you believe it – a **relaxed** Slovenia.” Cf. Jure Apih, “Predvolilni marketing” (Pre-Electoral Marketing), *Delo*, September 27, 2004.

⁶ *Nova revija* is a publishing house and a magazine that significantly influenced the considerations about Slovenia’s future and contributed to the process of gaining independence. It was the center of intellectuals who had direct influence on political developments and on the drawing up of the Slovenian Constitution.

⁷ The syntagm, Slovenian Spring, denotes the developments in the spring of 1990 when the parties united within the DEMOS coalition won the first democratic election in the country. The name is also used to denote their successor, the right-wing parties.

September 25, 2004 in Ljubljana. Before this gathering, the organizers held three successive sessions, in Ljubljana, Maribor and Koper, at which they spoke about the traps of corruption and “vulgar” liberalism in an attempt to convince the public of the necessity for political transformation in Slovenia. Following the electoral victory, the concept was adopted by governmental bodies, ministries and Parliament, and it has been repeatedly revived throughout 2005 and 2006 by the still active members of the civil initiative *Zbor za republiko* (Assembly for the Republic, hereafter the Assembly).

In explaining this political phenomenon, I will examine three possible interpretations: (1) relaxedness is an ideological and election slogan, which in 2004 paved the way for the first ever victory of the right-wing; (2) relaxedness is a relatively unmediated political appeal and one of the forms of cultural awakening by which right-oriented intellectuals diagnosed the state of the “Slovenian national system” and which they employed to describe social, psychological, economic, political and other events; (3) relaxedness is originally a philosophical concept uncritically adopted by the right-wing intellectuals gathered around *Nova revija* who, disregarding Heidegger’s original idea, arbitrarily adapted it to meet their needs at the time, that is, mobilization of people and explanation of the situation of society, culture, media, economy and the like.⁸

I will argue that it is not possible to draw a clear-cut dividing line separating these three readings of the function of relaxation (ideology, awakening, philosophical concept), and that various uses of this term suggest not any specific articulation, but rather the opposite. I will further problematize implicitly the context that was created around the concept of relaxedness, one that could be conducive to possible negative shifts, that is, long-desired political and other changes towards less permissive and less democratic values, political exclusivism and even the release of “energy” (sic) that would make room for conflictual, intolerant, discriminatory and other similar forms of social violence, separation and segregation. Has this concept helped us to experience true democracy, as its advocates maintain, or has it actually dismantled democracy, so that we will again be forced to argue for and reflect on taken-for-granted standards, taking a lesson *ab ovo*? The answers will be indirect, because an evaluation of this type is not my intention, although at times I could not abstain from criticism.

⁸ I have already drawn attention to some of these readings in my article for the *Večer* daily. Cf. Boris Vezjak, “Zrelaksirana Slovenija” (Relaxed Slovenia), *Večer*, February 12, 2005.

Some may find this book boring. The term “relaxation” (and its various derivatives) has been used too many times even if for documentary reasons, and on top of that, it is shown in **boldface** whenever intended as a quotation. The following may be cold comfort, but think of how the ordinary people of Slovenia or the author of this book must have felt listening to endless, inexplicable repetitions of this expression.

This book is not motivated by an ultimate theoretical ambition, because of space restrictions among other things (and this is not just a handy disclaimer), but it does hope to provide a good theoretical basis for anyone who might want to carry forward the analysis beyond ideological discourse. Similarly, it does not aim to be a chronicle of a specific period, so most of the time the events mentioned are not placed in an accurate political or historical context, and the reader will not encounter any exhaustive overview of the political era. I have not had at hand any source dealing with this phenomenon, apart from several sporadic observations of my own that appeared in newspapers and other publications. Indeed, it seems incredible that such a central concept in our modern history has not yet been the subject of any debate, let alone meticulous, expert, or academic debate.



RELAXATION AS AN IDEOLOGEM AND A SLOGAN

The trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be.
Paul Valery

*The members of all these States, with the exception of the one
which has knowledge, may be set aside as being not Statesmen but partisans,
– upholders of the most monstrous idols, and themselves idols; and, being
the greatest imitators and magicians, they are also the greatest of
Sophists.*
Plato

To put into one sentence what has already been suggested: relaxation is an unusual, yet important and decisive ideological basis employed by Slovenian nationalists and intellectuals in expressing their support for the right wing in the run up to the 2004 parliamentary elections, and actualization of this principle is still underway.⁹ An ideological discourse continues to be ideological inasmuch as it does not express its ideological premise openly. So, through spontaneous usage and thanks to an incentive by right-wing intellectuals who adopted the concept of relaxedness for political purposes disguised as cultural awakening, it began its march as a diagnosis of the spirit of the times, or of the situation of the “Slovenian national system,” as Peter Jambreč put it. In this sense, relaxation as an ideologem promises and indicates social, psychological, economic, political and other changes and wants to be the basis of the program leading to these changes. Its history and pre-history can be traced to the circle gathered around *Nova revija*, where this concept was first concocted and later turned into a political slogan actualized by *Nova revija* and the Assembly for the Republic. We shall now look into how this ideological slogan first emerged, how the intellectual and political space became homogenized around it during the run-up to the parliamentary elections held on October 3, 2004, and which new ideological guidelines

⁹ As we shall see later, this was probably meant as a basis for the attempted political turning of the tide at the 2000 parliamentary elections, that is to say, the seizure of power by the dethroned Demos coalition, which, however, failed.



about Slovenianness, Slovenian “substance” and a “golden age” were promoted along with the relaxation project.

THE SAMUEL HUNTINGTON OF A RELAXED SLOVENIA

Ideologies have their originators, their promoters and forecasters of national fortunes, or their Huntingtons. “The Samuel Huntington of a relaxed Slovenia” was a description, presumably correct, used by a journalist to describe Peter Jambrek, the ideological father of the Assembly for the Republic and of the relaxation program for Slovenia.¹⁰ In giving the interview, he was caught in the midst of another thought, simultaneous and not so far apart, concerning the position of Slovenia within Europe and in the global context. Like Huntington, Jambrek, too, was concerned with the issue of civilizations, and not only the clash of civilizations but borderlines dividing civilizations as well.¹¹ The comparison was not entirely accidental. Jambrek admitted that Huntington, who occupied the neighboring office during his years at Harvard in the 1970s, had inspired him, since Slovenia sits close to the crossroads of Western, Orthodox Christian and Muslim civilizations, so its security should not be taken for granted. In Jambrek’s words, our republic is the rampart of the “eastern border of western civilization” of which it sees itself as a part.¹²

Yet if we want to understand the need to diagnose the state of the Slovenian mind and, in Jambrek’s words, “the position of the Slovenian national system”, it is necessary to look into the anamnesis of the condition that gave birth to the redeeming concept of relaxation. In presenting the political program six months before the 2004 elections, Jambrek started from a recognition of the crisis suffered by the “Slovenian substance”:

“The most important and the most critical feature of this year’s position of the Slovenian nation and the state has become the basic, open and problematic question of the national, meaning Slovenian, substance of the Republic of Slovenia.”¹³

¹⁰ See the portrait of Peter Jambrek by Vanessa Čokl in the daily *Večer* entitled “Samuel Huntington sproščene Slovenije” (The Samuel Huntington of a Relaxed Slovenia), *Večer*, March 14, 2005.

¹¹ As he conceded, that was the ostensible reason for his profuse quoting of the US professor and upgrading of his concepts in his inaugural speech addressing the Assembly for the Republic, on June 23, 2004.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Peter Jambrek, “Nekaj predlogov za obnovo slovenskega nacionalnega programa” (A Few Proposals for the Renewal of the Slovenian National Program). A treatise at the public discussion convened by the Assembly on June 23, 2004. Available at



As one of the leading intellectuals of the circle gathered around *Nova revija* and the ideological leader of the Assembly, a civil initiative for the political turning of the tide in 2004, Jambrek is undoubtedly the most important agent and disseminator of 'relaxation discourse.'¹⁴ Since the concept was most frequently articulated by Jambrek, for our analytical purposes his statements about the presumably acute state of Slovenian society have a high indicative value. For him, the relaxation course is a healing therapy, as he suggested by comparing the Slovenian social system with the ouroboros, a serpent eating its own tail. Slovenia has allegedly found itself in this unenviable situation, so it needs therapy. In the above-mentioned inaugural speech, Jambrek thus described this historical situation:

"During the 1970s and the 1980s, the social system in Slovenia acquired – to put it allegorically – the image of the ouroboros, which is an ancient emblem depicting a serpent biting its own tail. The ouroboros stands for a power that forever destroys and renews itself. The coiled serpent's body that eternally returns to its own circular embrace personifies the self-destructive system. This year is not ouroboros-like in character, but distinguished by the quality of the crisis: the old Greek verb *krino* means to 'separate,' 'judge,' 'determine.' The crisis, therefore, is a process that ends with death or catharsis – and at best with a certain purification which, thanks to the immune system, trains the organism to adopt a higher form and manner of functioning. There are

www.zborzarepubliko.com/prispevki/jambrek.pdf. The same treatise was published in the collection entitled *Slovinci v lastni državi enakih možnosti (Slovenes in their own Country of Equal Opportunities)*, comprising essays by the speakers at the meeting of the Assembly. Cf. Peter Jambrek, "Sproščenost naroda za samoodločbo in za mednarodno odprtost" (Relaxedness of the Nation for Self-Declaration and for International Openness), in: *Slovinci v lastni državi enakih možnosti 2004*, 19-43. As regards the text, it is not clear whether Jambrek uses "slovenskost" (Slovenianness) as a special attribute of the substance that distinguishes this substance of the Republic of Slovenia from other, non-Slovenian substances, which unavoidably leads to the question of its genuineness, "correct Slovenianess," or perhaps "Slovenian" stands for a non-essential attribute of the substance.

¹⁴ It should be mentioned that the Assembly entirely disappeared during 2006. Some of its members openly admitted that it had dissolved and that its existence no longer made sense. Its apolitical nature was again put to the test during the local elections in 2006. In May 2006, the circle around *Nova revija* founded the Assembly for Ljubljana, obviously a copy of the previous Assembly, to provide non-political support to the "right" candidate for the mayor of Ljubljana beyond political interests. Their candidate was the right-wing oriented and politically affiliated France Arhar. The president of the Assembly is Stane Granda, who is also the chairman of the RTV Slovenia Council. To put it differently, the chairman of the RTV Council, which should ensure the independence of the media outlet, proposed a candidate nominated by the right-wing parties. This is, *post festum*, still another clear proof that the motive behind the Assembly for the Republic and the Assembly for Ljubljana was a wish of the *Nova revija* circle to connect with the right-wing, so-called Spring parties, meaning that it was a purely political motive.



signs that justify our hope that the present crisis will be resolved through the healing of the Slovenian national system.”¹⁵

The Slovenian national system, or the Slovenian “substance,” found itself in a crisis which in this case is a disease, but it also offers the option of choice. The term “substance” is not used accidentally, as this type of ontologization had already been introduced into political discourse by Tine Hribar.¹⁶ What is new here is the symbolic image of a self-consuming serpent, which, surprisingly, does not indicate the “recurrence of the same thing”, or the Nietzschean closed and unresolvable eternal return, but on the contrary, the finitude and death. There are, however, signs pointing to healing. For Jambrek, transcending of the ouroboros-like state can be achieved through relaxation, and it is possible to conclude that he sees his program and himself as both having a therapeutic role. In Jambrek, reminiscence is clear and defineable. When explaining his diagnosis of the state of affairs, he referred to his late friend Rudi Šeligo, who in Jambrek’s words “invented” the title of the collection “Sproščena Slovenija” (Relaxed Slovenia), quoting his words from a text in which he spoke about the utopia of the 1980s:

“We said and believed that an independent, sovereign Slovenia would, through cleansing and rejuvenation, enable people to **relax** through emotional release and become liberated from ideological chains. Between today’s reality ... and utopia there is a space for the possible. Not just a space; these are vast interspaces that belong to politics that has will, and if it has the will to be more than it is, namely a battlefield for power...”¹⁷

Slovenes can overcome the crisis caused by emotional suppression and confinement only through processes of cleansing and rejuvenation. Jambrek then went on to remind the public of the joint proposal for reaching national consensus on the final resolution of the diagnosed crisis of institutions and governmental bodies, and of the Slovenian state as a whole,¹⁸ adding that “although it is not yet too late to reach such a consensus and **relax**, it is high time we did so”.¹⁹ Similar to what had been done during the Slovenian Spring, we should now proceed to the final

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hribar is one of the most prominent Slovene philosophers and intellectuals, whose texts have significantly influenced and co-shaped political events in Slovenia. At the last parliamentary elections, he openly supported the right-wing parties and PM Janša, along with his colleagues from the *Nova revija* circle.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.



stage when “Slovenia, **relaxed**, will conclude an agreement with Europe as its partner on an equal footing.”²⁰

The Assembly’s call to release suppressed feelings, which drew on *Nova revija*’s legacy and its program goals, reads as a call for an imaginary liberation from ideological bonds and opening up towards Europe.²¹ Jambrek saw it as the logical continuation of efforts towards the “Slovenian national program”, and as the last, concluding phase of the decades-long struggle for an independent Slovenia. He also listed the phases of this process. The first phase began in 1990 when *Nova revija* published a collection of essays entitled “Samostojna Slovenija” (Independent Slovenia). In his opinion, this coherent text represented a condensation of effort and a call for the continuation of the “national-liberation process of the 1980s,” which represented a logical sequel to the “Contributions to the Slovenian National Program” published in 1987. The collection opened with a program statement followed by the “Declara-

²⁰ Jambrek also mentioned that the “national interest” he supports has been labeled as illegitimate, xenophobic and nationalistic. “If the incumbent government does not seek balance, but on the contrary, sees the national interest of Slovenes as illegitimate, if taking this interest into account has been assessed, a priori, as xenophobic, nationalistic, chauvinistic, intolerant, non-European, or even racist and Fascist, then this government is having difficulties, because it does not understand and does not take into account the fundamental principle of democracy on which the Republic of Slovenia is based.” (Ibid.). Has, then, the concept of relaxation already enabled the conduct that Jambrek recognizes as such and that is used as a (subsequent) legitimization of all acts of the right-wing described as xenophobic, nationalistic, intolerant etc.?

²¹ Jambrek repeated his thesis about the suppression of emotions in mid 2005 during a broadcast on RTV Slovenia dedicated to the current state of affairs within the right and the left wings in Slovenia on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the first democratic elections. In this broadcast, this term was used and articulated at least ten times, primarily by Jambrek and France Bučar. To the explicit question what the government should do, he first referred once again to the late Rudi Šeligo, who spoke about “the relaxation of Slovenia”, and then added: “In my view the task, the mission, the commitment and the responsibility of the just elected government is to carry on the vision of the **relaxation** of Slovenia.” Cf. “Slovenija med levico in desnico” (Slovenia between the Left and the Right Wing), RTV Slovenija, April 13, 2005. Jambrek repeated previous standpoints. Emotions in Slovenia had been suppressed for centuries, and more than ten years of the LDS government tally with this state of affairs: “We can deliberate on this issue, on the suppression of emotions in Slovenia for centuries, from the time of Austria-Hungary, through the communist era and up to the present day ... I perceive the Slovenian system as constrained in various key areas, and in my opinion the task of this government is to **release** these systemic blocks, that inertia, conservatism of institutions, among employees, conservatism of all kinds, which could **release** those potentials that reside within every Slovene and which cannot find expression because of blockages, centuries or decades long.” (Ibid.) As an illustration, he then gave the example of local communities – municipalities which in his words had partially come back to life and “carry great potential for **relaxation**.”

tion on Slovenia's Self-Determination," signed by five Slovenian political parties, members of the united opposition coalition (DEMOS).

The next phase was presented in the collection of texts entitled "Slovenici in prihodnost" (Slovenes and the Future), published in 1993. It contained an editorial with the characteristic title "Considerations about the Status of the Slovenes after Gaining Independence." The majority of essays therein analyze the situation of the Slovenes within their own state, as well as the situation determined by the initial, most painful period of "transition." Most important, however, for understanding the events of 2004 is the collection entitled "Sproščena Slovenija" (Relaxed Slovenia), published in 1999. It "presents the critical analysis of the transition in Slovenia from the first free parliamentary elections in April 1990 to the pre-election period in the autumn of 2000."²² The collection brings to a close the "settlement in the name of the future," listing open questions and program goals. Jambreč drew attention to certain conclusions therein, among these "that Slovenia of today is on a course to become a parasitic state, similar to all past governments which for centuries ruled over us for the benefit of foreigners," that "the current question is whether this state has become an instrument in the service of a small circle of politically and financially privileged people without conscience and without a vision," and that "the continuity and the restoration of the old regime in a new disguise is not compatible with the European understanding of pristine democracy backed up by an active state ruled by law and respect for human rights."²³ Such a state of affairs required from the signatories that they "work towards reaching a new consensus on the final resolution of the current crisis of institutions, governmental bodies and the state as a whole, and towards a new concentration of the political will based on such a consensus."²⁴

Speaking in June 2004, only a few months before the elections, Jambreč saw the situation thus:

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ In this collection of essays Jambreč estimated that the time following the gaining of independence was the time for "temporary **relaxation**" (page 11). That time is not the divine time of full realization, since "the plebiscite decision was taken and the Constitution adopted around Christmas in 1990 and 1991. The parables of dreams coming true and God's gift therefore enforce themselves. So much for the symbolic meaning of allegory." (Ibid.) Jambreč's assessment supported by God's will again arises from his assessment of the constrained intellectual and economic image of Slovenia, so the "challenge of the present time is an all-embracing **release** of creative initiative and energy." (p. 24). Cf. Peter Jambreč, "Čigava je slovenska država?" (Whose is the State of Slovenia?), in: *Sproščena Slovenija* (Relaxed Slovenia) 1999.

“The recent period has been characterized by ossification, democratic unresponsiveness and bureaucratic alienation of the governmental parties. This incapacity of the ruling political structures to reflect on and represent the living interests of the electorate gives rise to, and is reflected in, independent manifestations of people’s will expressed outside the established structures of the government and in various forms, particularly as initiatives and referendums, and as new political organizations and unions.”²⁵

It is therefore not surprising that the program written by the *Nova revija* intellectuals led to the emergence of the “Assembly”, which was joined by Janez Janša, the then leader of the opposition parties and of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), and more notably, by Dimitrij Rupel, at that time the Foreign Minister of the LDS-led government. His political shift to join the *Nova revija* circle and his open sympathizing with the then opposition leader Janez Janša was a symbolic indication foreshadowing a split between the two political sides, which became evident at the subsequent parliamentary elections. Jambrek’s revival of the long-standing *Nova revija* dream about a continuation of the “national program” (whatever that means) tallied with the views of a number of Slovenian intellectuals who perceived the opportunity for a national awakening, and was tuned to Janša’s pre-election slogans pointing to corruption, clientelism and the dangers presumably brought upon Slovenia by the LDS-led government. Accordingly, at a time when Slovenia’s prospects were better than ever (i.e. it had joined NATO and the EU, demonstrated solid economic growth and was in all respects well placed within the European political and economic space), the Assembly suddenly recognized the danger threatening Slovenia’s national “substance” and played the card of concern for the future of the republic.²⁶ Their speeches were designed to reflect this ostensible concern. The first public discussion took place on June 23, 2004 in Ljubljana, with the highlight being Dimitrij Rupel’s political change of heart. The invitation to the discussion signed by the first signatory Dimitrij Rupel and 25 other initiators was entitled “People, Nation, State – Slovenian National Interest after Joining the EU.” The Assembly was said to be an open political structure for an open society, not a forum of individuals striving to preserve past gains or secure advantages for a specific political course. The invitation also mentioned that the Assembly could develop into a victorious coalition of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ In his speech delivered to the Assembly for the Republic, Janša drew attention to the discrepancy between the “spontaneous feelings of individuals” and “the nation’s center of values.” He repeated the syntagm “the nation’s center of values” several times, but it would be risky to guess what he meant by this. Cf. Janez Janša, “Na poti k Sloveniji enakih možnosti” (Towards a Slovenia of Equal Opportunities), in: *Slovinci v lastni državi enakih možnosti* 2004, 138.

state-formative and democratic parties.²⁷ The second public discussion entitled “Nation in a Nation-State: Towards a Slovenia of Equal Opportunities” was held in Maribor in July 2004, and the same issue was the subject of a public discussion held in August, 2004 in Koper.

PRE-ELECTION ARTICULATIONS OF “RELAXEDNESS”

During the months preceding the elections, the term “relaxation,” whose various meanings were mainly parented by the Assembly, came to be profusely used in the political context, probably much more frequently than in its usual, non-political and non-philosophical contexts, such as in the guidelines for physical exercises, yoga exercises or tai chi. Apart from Jambrek, the other public figures most responsible for the introduction of the concept of relaxedness into the world-views and politics were definitely Spomenka Hribar²⁸ and Dimitrij Rupel. The latter’s persistent factionalism, flirtation with the right wing and finally his flight to the Assembly led PM Anton Rop to angrily “promise” him that he would

²⁷ In addition to the first signatory, the Foreign Minister, Dimitrij Rupel, other signatories included the Public Prosecutor and the Slovenian representative in Eurojust, Barbara Brezigar; the then vice-chairman of the expert council of the SDS and a former judge of the Constitutional Court, Peter Jambrek; the then editor of *Nova revija*, Niko Grafenauer; the leader of the SDS, Janez Janša; the leader of the NSi, Andrej Bajuk; the writer and essayist, Drago Jančar; a professor of philosophy and a member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Tine Hribar; the chairman of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Boštjan Žekš; a professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and the head of the Center for Theoretical Sociology, Frane Adam; the essayist Viktor Blažič; a lawyer and the chairman of the Josip Jurčič Fund, Drago Demšar; former judges of the Constitutional Court, Tone Jerovšek and Lovro Šturm; secretary with the Interior Ministry, Gregor Virant; Slovenian ambassador to NATO, Matjaž Šinkovec; a member of the secretariat of the Episcopal Conference of Slovenia and the director of the Episcopal Grammar School in Maribor, Ivan Štuhec; the poet Dane Zajc; an editor with the Mladinska knjiga publisher and a signatory of the initiative *Something Has To Be Done*, Aleksander Zorn; a member of the managing board of the Slovenska matica, Ivo Urbančič; the economist Ljubo Sirc; the organizer of Barbara Brezigar’s presidential election campaign and a signatory of the initiative *Something Has To Be Done*, Vasko Simoniti; the vice-chairman of the Slovenian Pan-European Movement, Andrej Rahten; the philosopher Dean Komel; assistant professors at the Department for Theoretical Sociology of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Matej Makarovič and Saša Slavec. Later on the list of signatories lengthened with the joining of others, for example, Miro Petek, at that time a journalist for the *Večer* daily and later an SDS MP, and Vlado Žabot, the chairman of the Slovene Writers’ Association.

²⁸ Spomenka Hribar is a sociologist who, together with her husband Tine Hribar, participated in shaping the democratic environment in Slovenia through her political engagement and essays. Particularly worth mentioning is her advocacy of reconciliation among Slovenes and her efforts towards establishing cemeteries for the post-war victims of the revolution.

be removed from the position of foreign minister. Speaking for *Delo*, Rupel criticized the conduct of his party (LDS). “Liberal parties are not only center parties, but they encourage **relaxed** economic life, individual initiative, market economy, and particularly open society.”²⁹ Rupel used the same ideologem several times in this interview.

“After Drnovšek quit as the leader of the party, I made several attempts to ensure that we preserved a **relaxed** attitude towards other parties.... I endeavored to achieve a more **relaxed** mood between ourselves and the people’s party, and also between us and Janša ... This was actually the consequence of the extremely **relaxed**, constructive and cooperative atmosphere within the party when we were an opposition party. ... I entertain the hope that the Assembly for the Republic will be a platform that will enable the flow of information and a **relaxed** debate... There is no room for **relaxed** communication. That was one of the reasons that led to the emergence of the Assembly.”³⁰

Obviously, in Rupel’s interpretation this term, or the concept, means a relaxed economy, a mode of societal openness, a special aspect of communication among parties or people, an atmosphere within political parties, and an open debate. These interpretations are heterogeneous and stand apart from one another. Linguist Mikhail Epstein defines three types of words in regular language: descriptive, evaluative and descriptive-evaluative. If I say “criminal agreement” and place stress on “agreement”, the attribute “criminal” here has a descriptive function, because the evaluation can be made only on the basis of a broader context. However, if the stress is on “criminal”, then factual meaning has been attributed to the descriptive word. In certain cases, lexical meaning comprises both descriptive and evaluative elements, which are inseparable. The same holds true for “relaxedness:” it is necessary to strive for historical relaxedness (description), for relaxed communication and a relaxed attitude towards the past (description), and last but not least, for “relaxed relaxedness”, relaxedness *per se*. According to Epstein, ideologems are words whose lexical meaning is an inseparable combination of descriptive and evaluative meanings, so it depends on the context and their relation to other words.³¹

²⁹ Cf. an interview with Dimitrij Rupel conducted by Dejan Pušenjak entitled “Zdaj bom začel postavljati resna vprašanja” (Time for Serious Questions), published in *Delo*’s Saturday Supplement, July 3, 2004.

³⁰ Ibid. If the Assembly For The Republic was truly a space of relaxed communication, then its younger counterpart and progeny was the “Partnership For Development”, no longer a marriage of civil society and political parties, but already a purely political party platform. It is not possible to escape the impression that this partnership emerged in the wake of the first project’s success.

³¹ Epstein 1991, 88.

In an interview only a fortnight later, in July 2004, Spomenka Hribar adopted this obviously popular terminology and extended it. While Rupel used this signifier seven times in the above-mentioned interview, she mentioned it six times. “In my opinion, the most meritorious liberators and fighters for independence should retire as soon as possible. It would be the cheapest option for the state (because they wouldn’t make “mistakes”), and it would also be good for the general mood, and the **relaxed** manner of the people.”³² The connotations are similar: “We talk here about a **relaxed** attitude towards the past, one that takes account of both sides. And tries to understand both sides, in the first place. History is not just what happened in the past; it is also our attitude towards the past.” Or:

“The past persists around us and will be a trauma as long as we do not get done with it with all due respect and establish a **relaxed** and clear moral attitude towards it... . . . That we should always, with every new political option governing the country, start from scratch rather than enhance life and interpersonal relationships towards increasing openness, **relaxedness**. As long as the attitude towards the past is not **relaxed** (free of hostile feelings/hatred), there will be no **relaxed** future... In fact clericalism is a **non-relaxed**, non-free attitude.”³³

Spomenka Hribar obviously expanded the meaning of the ideologem, making it even more loose: in addition to the above mentioned aspects, she refers to a moral attitude, a genuine or reconciliatory attitude towards the past and to clerical “rabidity”. The list of meanings is further enriched by the two uses of the term that define relaxedness as an aspect of openness towards Europe and commitment to the future, as well as tolerance, modesty and state-formativeness.³⁴ That is why Rupel seems to have interpreted his announced removal from the position of foreign minister as a non-relaxed gesture, in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy, and as an act of revenge for his wish to establish “merely” a dialogue with Janez Janša. Rupel’s obvious political filtration with the right wing placed the then PM Tone Rop in a predicament: the Foreign Minister and a member of his party, the LDS, pretending that he had endeavored

³² Cf. an interview with Spomenka Hribar by Dejan Pušenjak “Osvoboditelji in osamosvojitelji, v pokoj!” (Liberators and Fighters for Independence, Retire!), *Delo’s Saturday Supplement*, July 17, 2004.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ In April 2005, Spomenka Hribar was a participant in a studio debate on national television. It is interesting that in responding to Jambrek’s conceptual points of departure regarding relaxation and a relaxed Slovenia, she used only the syntagm “**freedom** of spirit.” “Slovenija med levico in desnico” (Slovenia between the Left and the Right Wings), RTV Slovenija, April 13, 2005.

to establish dialogue with everyone, was clearly giving the nod to criticism of the government of which he was a member. At that time, Rupel thus complained in an interview with the *Mladina* weekly:

“I wish we shifted away a bit from the past and really moved towards a more **relaxed** future characteristic of other European states. I attach myself to the kind of Slovenian politics that is state-formative, meaning wise, moderate and tolerant, that wants to create a space for **relaxed** conversation – dialogue, and, above all, wants its economy to be correspondingly **relaxed**.”³⁵

The inflationary use of this term indicates that it has been successfully mobilized, but the heterogeneity of its implied meanings reveals the superficiality and immaturity of the concept rather than anything else. “Relaxedness” obviously pertains to the following heterogeneous areas and attitudes: a relaxed manner of expression and communication, a relaxed atmosphere within education and the economy, within foreign policy (as we shall see later in the text), relaxed behavior and a relaxed stance as a reconciliatory attitude.³⁶ The ubiquity of this signifier, functioning as a kind of *passe partout*, almost created the impression that nobody knew what that dispersive and heterogeneous concept meant, but everyone behaved as if its meaning were self-evident. However, in order to delve into its meanings, we have to examine its numerous and heterogeneous uses, that is to say, the only aspect of this concept that is available to us. Despite the diversity of its meanings, or because of it, “relaxation” became the election slogan as well as the central slogan of the rally organized by the Assembly. The rally was a logical sequel to the above-mentioned collections of essays and the establishment of the Assembly. We shall now dwell for a while upon this rally held under the slogan “Towards a Relaxed Slovenia” at the Kongresni Square in Ljubljana on September 25, 2004, one week before the elections.

³⁵ Jani Sever, “Intervju z Dimitrijem Ruplom” (An Interview with Dimitrij Rupel), *Mladina*, July 5, 2004.

³⁶ Viktor Balažič, speaking for *Delo*, stated that he saw the Assembly for the Republic as an opportunity, or a space, for a dialogue about general social issues and the situation in which we have found ourselves; the circle may hold critical debates, and if there is such an opportunity, offer alternative visions of how this country should develop and how it should evolve, where we are heading and what Slovenia should become now when it has become part of Europe, as well as what place it has inside Europe. Balažič also expected discussion about the mood in the country, which is not as relaxed as it could be, and proof was the recent low turnout of voters. Relaxedness, therefore, is also reflected in voters not participating in the elections. Cf. Mateja Babič, “Zbor – odprt prostor za dialog” (The Assembly as an Open Space for Dialogue), *Delo*, June 23, 2004.

THE RALLY

At this point we should remind the readers of the historical importance of the year 2004, one during which Slovenia joined the EU, on May 1st. As Mitja Velikonja pointed out, the “mantras of new Eurocentric discourse” gained currency and became normalized at every level of social reality. Prattling about European whatever became an unavoidable component of everyday language.³⁷ On joining the EU, everything that was bad, backwards, outdated and ‘out’ remained with the Balkans, the East, and buried in the socialist past. The EU, on the other hand, promised precisely the opposite: a successful flight from the Balkan cauldron and communist totalitarianism. The discourse on relaxation fits into this concept: instead of focusing on the promised unity/community, the proponents of changes attempted to concentrate attention on the promised relaxation. Relaxation was associated with some new era that presumably started with accession to the EU. The obsessive *hexis*, typical of the discourse used by accession supporters trying to win over the public, was transferred and spilled over to include the anticipation of yet another, epoch-making social change.

A week or so before the elections there was a bustle of activity. First, the leading representatives of the Assembly presented the collection of contributions written for the three public gatherings of the Assembly that took place in June, July and August in Ljubljana, Maribor and Koper, respectively.³⁸ Some authors – Janez Janša, Andrej Bajuk, Dimitrij Rupel, Janko Kos, Dean Komel, Lovro Šturm – recapitulated the content of their papers and broached the subject of the rally planned for the coming Saturday under the slogan “Towards a Relaxed Slovenia.”³⁹ They introduced it with much caution:

“According to the organizers, it is in the first place a kind of a large folk gathering where there will be no lack of entertainment and, among other things, seven speakers, including the leaders of the three Spring Parties, will address the gathering”⁴⁰

³⁷ Cf. Velikonja 2005, 7.

³⁸ Cf. *Slovinci v lastni državi enakih možnosti* (The Slovenes in Their Own State of Equal Opportunities) 2004.

³⁹ Cf. the report by Mateja Babič “Janša: glasujte za združeno listo” (Janša Says: Vote For The United List), *Delo*, September 21, 2004.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The justification for the event thus acquired the main features of the motto: people at the rally will have relaxed entertainment. An interesting detail is the interpolation 'among other things', which was there to suggest cautiously that this was not going to be solely a "large popular merry-making." Indeed, Rupel later attempted several times to downplay the unavoidable impression that this was a political event with electoral connotations. "This event, undoubtedly importantly politically charged, cannot deny the fact that it is taking place one week before the elections[.]"⁴¹ was how he voiced his thoughts about the unusual proximity of this event to the elections, which, just in passing, came after a supposedly completely accidental pre-election presentation of collected essays.

Jambrek acted in a similar way when he pointed out that it was time for people who had listened to them in previous monthly gatherings to "be given in return a more **relaxed** event."⁴² The protagonists of the idea attempted to be relaxed and to make other people relaxed. Jambrek, too, thought that the coincidence of this event with the pre-election period was "brilliant," since the election is a celebration of democracy and a time when people can see who are the supporters of proclaimed views on development and public affairs. He, however, denied that this was a pre-election meeting, but rather presented it as a gathering at which there was going to be less talk (they anticipated just five to ten speakers) and more entertainment (including music). In Jambrek's words, it was not intended for the supporters or members of political parties, but for individuals.⁴³

There were around 4000 to 5000 people in the Kongresni Square in Ljubljana on September 25.⁴⁴ The announcements that it was going to be

⁴¹ Cf. Mateja Babič, "Volitve 2004" (Elections 2004), *Delo*, September, 25, 2004.

⁴² Cf. Suzana Lovec, Meta Roglič, "Levi in desni (ne)politični nagovor volilcem" (Left and Right (non)Political Addressing of Voters), *Dnevnik*, September 16, 2004.

⁴³ Ibid. Janez Podobnik, the leader of the Slovenian People's Party, denied Jambrek and confirmed, in the same breath, that the event was a pre-election rally. Answering the question whether they would instruct participants at the rally how to vote, Jambrek said that he would personally strive against such invitations. Political parties do that during the run-up to the elections, so there is no need to do so at the Assembly. So, does this mean that the speeches will not contain pre-election messages? "Skillful seekers will find them, no matter whether or not they are there," said Jambrek. Cf. the text mentioned above.

⁴⁴ Suzana Lovec thus described her impressions: "In the crowd of 4000 to 5000, green caps of SLS supporters mixed with blue NSi's and yellow SDS's balloons. The stalls selling food and drink were next to the parties' stalls; SDS's and NSi's electoral buses were parked nearby; performers were mainly well-known known singers. Someone carried a banner with a message for the former President: 'Kučan, go to the polling station if

an apolitical gathering were not true: the leaders of the Spring Parties, Janez Janša (SDS), Andrej Bajuk (NSi) and Janez Podobnik (SLS) invited citizens to go to the elections and vote for the opposition parties. It was clear that the event was a pre-election meeting. The pretense was over. "Let's unite and forget old resentments," said Janez Janša.⁴⁵ Yet, just a few days earlier, his advice had been quite different. Answering a question for the daily *Delo*, when asked whether, given the planned brevity and clarity of addresses, we could expect that the speakers would give the audience a clear signal of how they should behave at polling stations, he replied like a shot, as the journalist metaphorically described his answer: "The voters will be told to vote for the United List."⁴⁶

Quite expectedly, the relaxation discourse was taken over by some speakers at the gathering, perhaps in order to give legitimacy to the slogan. The leader of the NSi, Andrej Bajuk, talked about the release of suppressed energies and the creation of a relaxed Slovenia, a free and honest society, a state ruled by law and based on social justice in which all individuals would be equal before the law. The current and the then Foreign Minister, Dimitrij Rupel, communicated his thoughts in a Hegelian manner, in famous triads. We have three connected parties, three problems with Croatia which spreads three false assumptions, our for-

you still want to lead Slovenia.' Among the members and supporters there were several who had already consumed a few drinks, and one MP from the SDS confided in us, speaking from the safe shelter provided by the crowd, that he was furious at the 'pre-election move of the SLS which boosted its support by provoking the Croats.' When the host of the event, Eva Irgl, who is also a candidate on the SDS list, announced the speakers, the greatest applause went to the SDS leader, Janez Janša. He was accorded a special honor by the MP Pavel Rupar, dressed in a folk costume, who shouted: 'Bravo, tsar, bravo, tsar!' Cf. Suzana Lovec, "Dan velikih besed in predvolilnega nagovarjanja" (The Day of Big Words and Pre-election Addresses), *Dnevnik*, September 27, 2004.

⁴⁵ Half a year later a journalist uncovered one of these explicit circumstances. During the studio debate on national television (Slovenia between the Left and the Right Wings), Jambrek's statement at the time when the SDS and the SLS split over the voting system, that those were "the resentments that are never forgotten" was challenged. The journalist wanted to know how long this resentment lasted and had it perhaps already been buried. When she wanted to ask him to forecast the future of the governmental coalition and whether he still remembered his words, Jambrek shrugged it off: "I don't remember the words you just quoted, but I surely said something like that. I don't care any more. One says many things in the course of a life." (RTV Slovenija, April 13, 2005).

⁴⁶ Mateja Babič, "Janša: glasujte za združeno listo" (Janša Says: Vote the United List!), *Delo*, September 21, 2004. The journalist adds that his interlocutors and supporters, faced with such honesty, rushed to correct him. [The United List is the short name for the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD). This is a center-left party which sees itself as the only true social democratic party. It was renamed the Social Democrats in 2005 (SD). The leader of the party is Borut Pahor.]

eign policy needs to be characterized by three main qualities: originality, culture and morality.⁴⁷ He could not omit a simple recipe for victory, since in his view Slovenia would achieve victory if it fulfilled three conditions: if it were united, self-confident and relaxed.⁴⁸

Just a few days later, on September 28, 2004, Janez Janša addressed foreign guests, candidates, party members and sympathizers at an event that concluded the election campaign. The hostile metaphor was as follows: LDS's promises are like a lottery. "That is really the Slovenia Express," concluded Janša piquantly, and listed several demands, including "good and **relaxed** schools that will teach and educate young people for life, and the modernization of the educational system, which must as soon as possible step out from under Gaber's [the then Minister of Education] stifling shadow and into the European sun."⁴⁹ The Slovenian right-wing was ready for all challenges, *jusqu'au bout*, and so were its voters.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Cf. Jože Poglajen, "Ognjemet kritik in danih obljub" (The Fireworks of Critique and Promises), *Delo*, September 27, 2004.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* We should add that self-confidence is another signifier from the collection of *Nova revija* thinkers.

⁴⁹ Cf. the archive of the SDS web page at www.sds.si. The metaphor "from Gaber's shadow to the European Sun" is of an earlier date and was used on many occasions, for example, in an editorial by Jani Sever "Strumno na sredini" (In the Center with Determination), *Mladina*, March 22, 2004. As regards Janša's electoral strategy, we should mention another interesting detail. In line with Lacan's principle that a message is always returned to its originating address, and with the marketing principle that the party should always be offered an immanent phantasm, the "agency hired for this purpose prescribed calmness and **relaxedness**" to Janša in his pre-electoral appearances (Marko Pečauer, "Predsedniki pred kamerami" (Presidents in Front of Cameras), *Delo*, September 13, 2004). Of course, the use of the term in this case may have been purely coincidental. And more on the relaxed marketing: in the promotional spot for the Slovenian People's Party made in the spring of 2004, a young woman gets out of bed and is shocked to find on the table *his* admission statement for membership in the LDS. She bursts into tears. The slogan that follows is: "Left-wingers bring tears. Join the SLS". Some time later the SLS explained that they wanted to introduce into Slovenian political marketing a new breeze, a relaxed mood, humor and entertainment. Cf. Gregor Golobič, "Koga snubi SLS" (To Whom Does the SLS Propose), *Delo*, April 13, 2004.

⁵⁰ The slogans belonged to the extreme context of the assessment of the allegedly horrifying dimensions of "left-wing politicians" corruption. For example, several days before the elections Janša said: "Clientelism and corruption: their people are everywhere. Gregor from the LDS and Potrč from the United List have held, and still do, every important position in the administration, economy and banking. Even people from the LDS have been complaining. Bragging about expertise, while an LDS or United List ID card is more important than ever. Much potential goes unexploited. Corruption. Slower economic growth. The winners of public tenders are their people, not better bidders. For this reason we all pay higher taxes." From Janez Janša's speech at the SDS convention on September 28, 2004, available at www.sds.si.

POST-ELECTORAL RELAXATION

The winner of the October 3rd elections was the Slovenian Democratic Party, which, to the surprise of some, received 29.08 percent of the votes. The Liberal Democracy of Slovenia received 22.80 percent of the votes, and the then United List of Social Democrats 10.17 percent. In total, 991,263 voters cast their votes, meaning 60.65 percent of the electorate. The program goal of the designers of country's relaxation was realized with the victory of Janez Janša and the constitution of a new, right-oriented government.

The first opposition parties in Slovenia were formed in 1988-1989; in the Majniška Declaration of 1989, they demanded the sovereignty of the Slovenian nation. At the first democratic election, in April 1990, the victory went to DEMOS, with Lojze Peterle as the PM. Following the plebiscite, the gaining of independence and a short war, a split within the DEMOS government led to its replacement, in April 1992. Janez Drnovšek established a wide coalition led by the LDS, and ever since then the right wing had been unable to regain the leading position.⁵¹ So, *Nova revija* again sounded the bell of anti-communism, and the result was plain. After joining the EU and NATO, all the grand state-formative slogans across Slovenia became depleted, so the mobilization preceding the 2004 elections had to be carried out differently, and above all, the immanently political character was replaced by an ideological one. Instead of fixing our eyes on the future, which would be a gesture that unites, we were given a gaze into the past, which divides, and on top of that, we obtained an interesting category apparatus.

The very change of government, was, *eo ipso*, a relaxation for its protagonists. Such was the peremptory assessment of Jambrek in an interview for *Delo's* Saturday Supplement, in response to a clear question about how relaxed Slovenia was after the 2004 election. The election brought a "moment of **relaxation**," but not for those defeated, who had their moment of "sobering up", or "at any rate, something that, psychologically speaking, is opposite to a **relaxed mood**."⁵² This is to say that relaxation is dichotomous: while some become relaxed, others are gripped by a frenzy of sobering. If some become relaxed, others must cease to be re-

⁵¹ The LDS party, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, was the main and ruling party for 12 years following the gaining of independence. As a center-left party it was the target of fierce criticism from the right wing throughout this period.

⁵² Rok Praprotnik, "Kot Slovenec bi volil ameriške republikance" (As a Slovene, I'd Vote for the US Republicans), *Delo*, November, 6 2004.

laxed. The slogans about the unity of all, dialogue of everyone with everyone else, burying of differences and so on, were not meant seriously: only the victors can become relaxed.⁵³ Yet the electoral victory was just one part of the task, indeed an inevitable precondition for fulfilling the program goals. Jambrek was not very precise when he referred to the future of the new Slovenia: “The **relaxation** of Slovenia is simply an allegory, and can comprise all sorts of efforts on the part of the government and various institutions. In fact, it is a program that only started with the electoral success of the parties affiliated with the Assembly for the Republic. Personally, I see this more as the beginning of a longer relaxation process in various areas ranging from education to the economy, and political and cultural life. The first condition has been set forth.”⁵⁴ Dimitrij Rupel spoke similarly six months later in an interview with *Mag* magazine, when he explained various dimensions of relaxation and its scope:

“**Relaxation** is a slogan of the Assembly for the Republic. **Relaxation** definitely has an essential importance. What is meant is a **relaxed mood** in terms of the economy, in the sense that people should create as their minds tell them and as their knowledge allows them. There are so many administrative hurdles here. Of course, not for the privileged! Look at how many billionaires we have. On the other hand, ordinary citizens can hardly get through the administrative procedure for acquiring a construction permit! But even more important is **relaxation** in the sense of a **relaxed spirit**. Some link **relaxation** to the lack of restraint, but that’s not what it is about.”⁵⁵

From that time on, the conceptual cohesive force attempted to be the incentive for the victorious coalition composed of SDS, NSi, SLS and DeSUS. We shall now examine what political content was attributed to it and which mechanisms were used to make it palpable. Since we have interpreted relaxedness/relaxation as an ideologem and, through it, as a

⁵³ The Assembly for the Republic invariably legitimized their *raison d’être* with mottos such as transcending divisions and polarization, call for dialogue, tolerance, and unity of all. So, for example, Dimitrij Rupel repeatedly invited the then PM and the leader of the LDS, Tone Rop, to join him in the Assembly. Such an invitation was accepted by the leader of the then United List of Social Democrats, Borut Pahor, and he acted similarly later when he accepted another of Janša’s invitations, to join the Partnership For Development.

⁵⁴ Ibid. It is not clear how (for some) changes in education, culture and the economy can at one moment be just an allegory, and in the next moment become part of a real program with clear guidelines, since such a reality was suggested before.

⁵⁵ Janez Markeš, “Pogovor s slovenskim zunanjim ministrom dr. Dimitrijem Ruplom” (An Interview with the Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel), *Mag*, May 11, 2005, available at <http://www.mzz.gov.si/index.php?id=123>.

tool of interpellation, let us rely on Rastko Močnik's felicitous explanation of Althusser's thesis: ideology always interpellates individuals as subjects, says this famous formulation. The question, of course, is what stands behind the mechanism of interpellation. According to Močnik, in natural speech it can only mean that ideology is addressed to individuals, whereby they are "addressed in such a way that they have to respond, and they respond as subjects."⁵⁶ Interestingly, relaxation does this literally without even demanding identification.⁵⁷ All of its heterogeneous meanings address the subjects, citizens and their relaxedness in living and in thinking: relax, dear citizens!

⁵⁶ Cf. Močnik 1999, 7.

⁵⁷ "Reconnaitre", says Althusser; cf. Močnik's explanation, *ibid.*, 8.

RELAXATION AS A POLITICAL PROGRAM

With the help of our program for the future we want to make the years ahead of us the golden age of Slovenia's development.

Janez Janša

Look at his history. Janez Janša competed twice for the leadership of ZSMS. First in 1984, when he was removed from the game, and second in 1988 when he ended in military prison. Three years later he gained independence for Slovenia. Independence was the idea of Janša and Bavčar. At that time, no one dared confront Belgrade or the Yugoslav Army, not to mention clashing with them. Janša and Bavčar dared. They are great reformists. He did not break down in 1994, when he was suspended from the position of Defense Minister. He was under pressure all the time, under investigation. Obviously, they did not find anything. He is thick-skinned. He has guts.

Jože P. Damijan, former Minister of Development

It is quite insane to assert that the present government is leading us towards a cultural disaster.

Do any of the "cultural workers" really think that a member of the Slovenian PEN club, Janez Janša, the writer Dimitrij Rupel, or the historian Vasko Simoniti, for example, who all belonged to that resistant formation, want to suppress or destroy Slovenian literature, theatre, film, or perhaps language?

Drago Jančar, writer

I don't understand those young economists, whom we educated, and who now make objections to the implementation of the coalition agreement in the part referring to the retirement bonus ... I'm convinced that those economists whose education was amply supported by the state should in the first place ensure new formulas for the more successful development of the Slovenian economy, rather than scratch themselves where they are not itching.

Karl Erjavec, Defense Minister

Following the formation of the new government led by Janez Janša and the announcement of the implementation of the program for the future entitled "Slovenia on a New Road", the euphoria accompanying the new terminology did not subside. It has become a mandatory part of the vocabulary, not only of the winners, but occasionally, and spontaneously, also of the losers and even the President. We wondered how it was going to be translated into reality and which spheres of social life it was going to inhabit. Could we expect new economic and educational (methodological?) approaches, a new direction within the education system, new history, economy and foreign policy? Would relaxedness become an idio-

syncratic Slovenian *forma mentis*, or even better, *modus vivendi*. Or was it just a form of address, a form of political therapy bestowed on citizens and, as such, just empty rhetoric extended beyond the elections. It seems that for the uninitiated, the new conceptual gain became a synonym for the general rhetoric of tolerance, openness and dialogue, behind which hid the designers of the power grab inside the Assembly for the Republic. It became a fashionable political slogan, but it also wanted to become content. As an intentional or unintentional underlying idea of the new government's program, it stretched across a vast range of changed perspectives on various spheres of social life: schools and education, the media, the economy and foreign policy. It forecast a golden age.⁵⁸ I will now first briefly present certain main traits of the relaxation in the economy that was carried out with the help of young reformists and a new economic deal. We will then look into what was described as the relaxation of foreign policy and capital (although referred to using different terms) and the relaxation of the media through changes in ownership structures, the appointment of new editors, balancing and pluralization.

After the victory, Peter Jambrek identified several new components of this concept: the "strengthening of creative potential," the ultimate awakening consequence and a demand by the new government. He also gave a more in-depth explanation:

"For this reason, **relaxation**, the removal of various curtains and the elimination of blocks are those crucial issues and a chance of the new government. It is really paradoxical that the government eliminates itself or that it uses its levers of power in order to remove obstacles to creativity ... if this happens within the next five or ten years, this can become a healthy competitive society."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ It was not just during the public debate organized by the SDS in July 2004 that Janša stated that he wished to achieve a golden age for Slovenian development with this program (compare www.rtvsllo.si and STA, "SDS za zlato dobo Slovencev" (SDS for the Golden Age of Slovenia), July 15, 2004). He had already said this four years earlier before the previous parliamentary elections. On May 8, 1999 in his speech to the congress held in Portorož he said: "If we know how to find the right answers to the challenges of the 21st century, then we can reckon with a period during which the nation's potential will be fully put to use... We, Slovenes, have not yet lived through something like that, such a golden age. Social democrats believe that it is in front of us ... In order to achieve such a golden age, we need something that our predecessors called a United Slovenia." Speech available at www.sds.si.

⁵⁹ "Block" is an important term in the *Nova revija* terminology. Jambrek's colleague and the editor of *Nova revija*, Niko Grafenauer, repeated the idea of blocks at the Assembly for the Republic. In his words "we, Slovenes, as a nation, established in the manner of the will to power and through it as a subject to which is subjected the existence of

He came up with a similar appeal in an interview for the *Mladina* weekly. Finding himself in the role of the leading ideologist, he forecast the general relaxing of society:

“We have not yet begun to address other important and topical issues, for example economic issues and the related social development, or concrete reforms and corresponding measures. These issues are no doubt strategically important for Slovenia in the long run, and they are also interesting viewed from the perspective of the basic philosophy pursued by the Assembly for the Republic, which is based on the liberalization of social, economic, cultural and media life, on the liberation of the individual and **relaxing** of society. I don't know which course the debate about the developmental changes in Slovenia and about reforms should or will take, nor which types of consensus will be reached through public debate within wider or narrower circles.”⁶⁰

Jambrek unambiguously forecast the liberation and relaxing of social life across the entire social register and linked it to the necessity of reform, since relaxation of such proportions is a unique reform in itself. The softening of viewpoints is not limited to power holders only, but involves our views as well, meaning the perspective of civil society. We shall see later that one of the main predicaments was going to be the search for a political or even national consensus regarding these changes. It will transpire that the main sin was the polarization of the political space, which proved to be not relaxed and was artificially divided into the left and the right wing, as Jambrek's colleague from the *Nova revija* circle, Dean Komel said.⁶¹ Obviously, the main problem confronted by the new government was the fact that it saw itself as a kind of “democratic rev-

concrete people in the name of a common national idea, which is characteristic of the nationalisms of the 19th century, were throughout our history a “blocked movement” as Dušan Pirjevec put it. In Pirjevec's words, this inhibition of the Slovenian nation as a movement towards establishing a nation on the level of the subject is manifested as dual self-restraint...” Cf. Niko Grafenauer, “Človeška in nacionalna identiteta Slovencev” (The Human and National Identity of the Slovenes), in: *Slovenci v lastni državi enakih možnosti* (The Slovenes in Their Own State of Equal Opportunities), 2004, 11. The discourse on emotional suppression and inhibition in Slovenes can therefore be traced back to Pirjevec. According to Grafenauer, this resulted in the “subjective non-satisfaction” and “habitual under-development” of Slovenes. (Ibid.)

⁶⁰ Jure Trampuš, “Intervju s Petrom Jambrekom” (An Interview with Peter Jambrek), *Mladina*, November 28, 2005.

⁶¹ “Shall we then, as civil society, recognize just one part of it and not the other? The problem with civil society in our country is related to the non-transparency and **unrelaxed** state of the political space, among other things, because of the artificial and manipulative division into left and right, which makes impossible normal functioning of society as a whole.” Cf. Gašper Blažič, “Pogovor z Deanom Komelom” (An Interview with Dean Komel), *Demokracija*, September 29, 2005.

olution.” The relaxing of Slovenia was understood as an enduring and deep change on the symbolic level as well, and as an implication of the new system of the social. Janša would later say that now everything was “in place,” while Rupel spoke about the previous tyranny of the minority over the majority. Now, the majority was finally liberated, which was the normal state of democracy.⁶²

In this text we will not dwell upon the structural changes within individual spheres of social practices; we will restrict ourselves to those contexts that clearly and declaratively refer to relaxation. To what an extent transformations within these were really a consequence of adherence to the slogan in implementing the program and how they should be interpreted in these contexts, is another, quite complex question.

RELAX THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

It is interesting that the implications of relaxation first struck the educational system. Janša reiterated his conclusions a month and a half later in an opening speech, now in the role of Prime Minister. “School must be excellent, but also **relaxed**, places in which the students will not be just containers for the storage of information and data, but active participants whom school will enable to understand, use and make sense of the knowledge acquired.”⁶³

If we forget for a moment wishful thinking and what is very likely a rhetorical idealization, the opening speech of PM Janez Janša was an ultimate confirmation and suggestion of two things: that “relaxation” was not just an electoral concept but that it was becoming, and wished to be, a concept underlying the program of the new political elite; and that various systems of social and political activity and practice would be subject to relaxation, whatever that relaxation actually meant. This further means that understanding relaxation was a prerequisite for properly understanding the political intentions of the new government. Janša thus reasserted his pre-electoral postulate and intellectual *tour de force* when he demanded “good and **relaxed** school that will teach and educate

⁶² The appropriation of the speaking position as the position of a united people, which is here probably just another term for the majority, is, according to Lefort, clearly a gesture of totalitarian power. In totalitarian regimes, power is not an empty place but strives to materialize itself through a body which, as it claims, represents the united people. Under the disguise of the unity of people, totalitarianism denies the social divisions exposed by the logic of democracy. After Laclau, quoted in Mouffe, 1987, 151.

⁶³ Grega Repovž, “Iz predstavitenega govora Janeza Janše” (From the Introductory Speech of Janez Janša), *Delo*, November 10, 2004.

young people for life” and the modernization of the educational system that will be pulled out from under the previous minister’s stifling shadow and exposed to the European sun.⁶⁴ It is precisely the educational system that was to be mentioned in this connection most frequently afterwards – we should strive for “relaxed schools” was the message of a number of appeals, while the syntagm “education for life” most frequently concealed instant manuals of spirituality. During the first months following the elections, this was reflected in the new and statistically unconfirmed conclusion that students in Slovenia were overburdened, which was an assessment made possible by the hegemony of the relaxation concept, according to which relaxation was what students most lacked.⁶⁵

Second, the issue of school is an ideological issue *par excellence*. The Minister of Education, Milan Zver, commented that the interference of parents in the selection of textbooks for pupils and students (this idea was put forward by the Association for School Made to the Measure of Man) was an ideological problem that demanded a relaxed attitude. Later on, he attempted to extend his explanation to historical textbooks as well. As regards required reading, his opinion was as follows:

“That could be a problem. Today parents are closely involved in the shaping of educational policy, whether indirectly or directly. I already said that the educational system is like football. Everyone knows all about it. In short, every change in the educational system is perceived through children and as affecting themselves, too. I remember the case of Vitomil Zupan. Probably some time will have to pass before we start seeing certain things from a more **relaxed** viewpoint, liberated from ideological inoculation and ideological basis. Some people are ‘allergic’ to certain works, including literary works, for example, those dealing with Partisan fighters.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Compare the web page archive at www.sds.si.

⁶⁵ The then leader of the SDS parliamentary group was not keen to discuss the issue of overburdened students that was initiated in the National Assembly: “When I said that students were overburdened, I wanted to emphasize the necessity of changes in our schools, so that schools will become more friendly and more **relaxed**. I’m still convinced that they are not such at the moment. I did not intend to criticize the work of teachers with this statement, but expressed an expectation that the new Prime Minister will ensure that school will be friendly and **relaxed** towards students. And not only towards students! Towards teachers, as well, who are today overburdened with administrative work ... I will myself work, as much as possible, towards friendly and **relaxed** schools for students and teachers.” Cf. Mirko Zamernik, “Poslančeve prelahkotne izjave” (Overly Hasty Statements), *Delo*, November 30, 2004. Let me add that the inflation of the apologetic articulation of “relaxedness” was not just a defense mechanism, but perhaps a cause that gave rise to the thesis itself: what if the recognition that students were overburdened was caused by the belief in “non-relaxedness” which, by definition, is always in short supply?

⁶⁶ Dejan Pušenjak, “Treba je ‘trkniti’ na kulturo, zavest, vrednote ljudi” (A ‘Prod’ to Culture, Conscience, Values Is Needed), *Delo*, April 09, 2005.

Speaking about the amended law on elementary schools, which mentioned the reduction and elimination of external exams, his MP colleague Jože Tanko of SDS similarly resorted to relaxation in giving a diagnosis: “That the elimination of external exams from the enrollment procedure means that a kind of **relaxed** mood has been returning to school thanks to this pressure on external exams.”⁶⁷ Rudi Moge, an MP from the LDS, objected that it was a “too harsh an intervention of politics into the area of education,” but to no avail. What is surprising is the lack of arguments in all the cases cited: under the guise of relaxation it is possible to demand anything in the apparent concern for overburdened students.

ECONOMIC RELAXATION

The break with the LDS government gave rise to a new economic paradigm known as neo-liberalism. An undefined and undefineable relaxation, as a total concept, affected the historical, political and economic sphere. This was the sense in which the neo-liberal (or rather, neoconservative) new right wing problematized the economic principles pursued until then by the LDS.⁶⁸ A group of young economists, writing for the *Finance* daily and speaking publicly on various other occasions, succeeded – *igni et ferro* – in inciting experts and the wider public, sometimes by resorting to unprecedented blows below the belt and personal discrediting, contributing in this way their part to the forging of new economic visions. The reasons for the reform were found in the two strains of belief: the first was the belief that reform was a necessity and that delaying it could inflict irreparable damage; the second was the struggle for excellence as a state of mind, one in which the majority population will become imbued with an ambitious creativity, resistance to the old and the established, a thirst for novelties, extraordinariness and uniqueness. So said Marko Kos, a researcher with a PhD in Economics, whose essays and columns frequently appeared in the media over the last decade.⁶⁹ The first wave of relaxed politics was introduced into the government by Mićo Mrkaić and Jože P. Damjan, both liberal economists, who were hired by the Prime Minister to implement the intended model of reforms.

⁶⁷ An interview broadcast on RTV Slovenija, Odmevi, March 10, 2005.

⁶⁸ In addition to the relaxation of the media and personal relaxation, the relaxation of the economy was another constantly repeated call by the members of the Assembly. For instance, Niko Grafenauer observed: “The state of affairs must be **relaxed**, through the arrival of foreign capital, among other things”. Cf. STA report, April 20, 2005.

⁶⁹ Marko Kos, “Moč lobijev” (The Power of Lobbies), *Finance*, January 11, 2006.

However, both resigned of their own accord and promptly, the former from the position of chairman of the strategic council, and the latter from the position of the Minister of Development.

“People will be **relaxed** if they have a lot of knowledge. A society that is more educated is more resistant, more tolerant, and more perceptive of changes. Change inspires a search for the best solutions. Therefore, the government has a great advantage if it prompts consideration of reforms in all areas of social activity, ranging from the economy and the judicial system to taxes and education. The proposals for reform refreshed Slovenian society; there have been no such considerations of serious change in the past years. Stagnation and control made reforms necessary. Whether the reform will be more fundamental or gradual is not an essential obstacle: what is important is to trigger changes and initiate a quest for better solutions. That is the road leading to excellence. Stagnation and torpidity lead nowhere.”⁷⁰

These were the words of Marko Kos that came after all the disastrous personnel solutions in the economic sector (at a certain point Kos was even mentioned as a potential candidate for the position of Minister of Development).⁷¹ His words echo those of the economist Mičo Mrkaič, which were symptomatic of the search for a reformist moment of relaxation:

“The elite, striving for continuity, resists changes in every area, safeguarding the present state of affairs which represents its privilege. It feels threatened. It feels that it will lose strength and power. These are cartels of all sorts, fighting with all their might against every change. However, all those cartels will lose their strength and power. They will lose privileges, because progress towards better solutions necessitates it. The lobbies of notaries, of doctors, scientists, pensioners, urban planners, trade unions, the university lobby. These are the protagonists of the continuity of old structures and old practices, who go out of their way to protect their privileges.”⁷²

The paranoid logic of liberalization is therefore as clear as a bell: relaxation is an economic path leading away from the forces of continuity that wait at every corner and are embedded in the social and economic system.⁷³ Relaxation is an immanently economic category. “If the new

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “Forces of continuity” is a commonly acknowledged syntagm that is a result of a paranoid reasoning, according to which during the past decade Slovenia was governed by communists in disguise, who primarily struggled to preserve their privileges and prevented the right-wing from seizing power.

taxation reform lifts the burden of salaries from the shoulders of companies, the employees will be able to redirect one part of their income thus released to increase social security,” explained Damijan when he was still the vice-chairman of the strategic council.⁷⁴ Mrkaić, himself an associated thinker of the Assembly for the Republic, was later the target of criticism. At a press conference in April 2005, Jambreč expressed his wish to build a bridge between “the view held by Slovenian corporative nationalism” and the view of the “advocates of free economic initiative.” The poet Niko Grafenauer commented on the economic situation in terms of the quest for relaxedness, the struggle for small entrepreneurs, but above all, said he, it was necessary to establish what sustained the inherited state of affairs within the economy, which “needs to be relaxed through the entry of foreign capital among other things.”⁷⁵ In this respect some participants, among them Jan Makarovič, attacked Janša’s government for planting a cuckoo’s egg by bringing in Mičo Mrkaić. Mrkaić first presented his expressly “vulgar liberalism” at a public debate organized by the Assembly, and was later appointed the chairman of the strategic council for the economy.⁷⁶

Simultaneous with the search for new economic ideals was a purge within the economic sector. Political appointments and interventions were poorly concealed and even not denied. The journalist Rok Pra-protnik described the “personnel policy tsunami” as being most effective precisely within the economic sector.

“‘Old guys’ were either sunk or they left of their own accord, many of them members of Forum 21 – Tone Turnšek (retired), Janez Lotrič (left on his own), Bruno Korelić (left on his own), Miloš Kovačič (retired), Črt Mesarič (left on his own), Franc Hočevar (KC, left on his own). But the greatest shock was the sale of the government’s stake in Mercator. The opposition made an outcry and Janša was criticized even by some from the ranks of his own (young) economists. The commotion caused by this sale had not yet subsided when the new owners of Mercator, Istrabenz and Pivovarna Laško, removed Zoran Jankovič [CEO of Mercator]. Sales women in Mercator shed tears over the departure of the millionaire. The relatively unknown Žiga Debeljak (34) took the helm of the largest retailer. The Mercator mayhem most harmed the government itself, so its rating

⁷⁴ Compare the interview conducted by Jani Sever: “For example, I would never take part in the government that, say, restricts some fundamental human rights, say, the rights of homosexuals. That is where my collaboration would end, because I believe in human rights.”, *Mladina*, March 14, 2005.

⁷⁵ Cf. Vanja Pirc, “Nesproščeni mediji in gospodarstvo” (Unrelaxed Media and the Economy), *Mladina*, April 25, 2005.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

plummeted. A part of the **relaxation** package, through the workings of some perverted logic, is probably the government's approach to the issue of the weekly *Mladina* as well."⁷⁷

Neo-liberalism and its ideology proved to be an excellent platform for relaxation. The members of the National Council for Culture were also convinced that reforms were necessary and found it a good opportunity for a major overhaul within the area of culture. The result was the Resolution on Reforming the Public Sector of Culture and on Flat Tax Rate. The chairman of the Council, Janez Pipan, expressed his conviction that the attitude towards culture should be more relaxed and should contain a more genuinely liberal spirit.⁷⁸

However, there was more to it than that. The proponents of the neoliberal perspective and of the flat tax rate and other measures wanted to demonstrate their commitment through their own lifestyles and working habits, too. The new Ministry of Development, led by Jože P. Damijan, began its work on the first day of 2006. At the press conference held on January 11, 2006, the new minister made an effort to show that the ministry itself would be governed by a relaxed atmosphere. To this end, a table-football was introduced into the premises of the ministry, plus an energy drinks dispenser for late-night workers. A *Dnevnik* journalist wrote: "As the new minister tried to demonstrate at yesterday's press conference, the ministry will be dominated by a **relaxed** spirit."⁷⁹ The press conference was an occasion to demonstrate how to express passion for football. Minister Damijan was very satisfied with his team: "They are the kind of co-workers with whom you go out for a glass of

⁷⁷ Ibid. Relaxation within the media field is the subject of a separate chapter.

⁷⁸ "Culture is definitely one of the most regulated areas in Slovenian society. Our work and everyday life is regulated by a number of rules. On the one hand, it is good, given the negligible number of financial scandals and non-discipline within the area of culture, but on the other, we have been suffocating and choking under the pressure of the regulation and rule books, some of which are elaborated in absurd detail. This can also be perceived as an expression of the basic lack of trust on the part of the government, a somewhat patronizing doubt that we are able to run business and operate correctly and successfully. Therefore, more **relaxedness** and a genuinely liberal spirit would not do us any harm." Cf. Janez Pipan, "Ekonomska uspešnost je ena od mogočih usod umetnosti, ni pa nujna" (Economic Success Is One Possible Way for Art, but not an Imperative), *Delo*, January 5, 2006.

⁷⁹ Samo Trtnik, "Damijan si bo pomagal tudi z nogometom" (With the Help of Football among Other Things), *Dnevnik*, January 12, 2006.

beer, with whom you can play football, go skiing or sailing.”⁸⁰ Damijan’s era was short-lived, ending after only three months with his enigmatic resignation “for personal reasons,” much like a few dozen other careers during 2005 and 2006. Unofficially, the reason was differences with the Minister of Finance, Andrej Bajuk, over the withdrawal of politics from the economy. Accordingly, it was not much of a surprise when his close reformist colleague and potential candidate for this position, Janez Šušteršič, the director of UMAR, the government Office of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, said: “So I find rather too shallow the speculation that I will readily jump in and put things in order now that Damijan has finished his game of table football and gone sailing.”⁸¹ Although PM Janša announced the appointment of a new minister by the end of the Parliament’s summer recess in 2006, no such thing happened.

To shed some light on the new, obviously *bon vivant* style of life and work, let us add that Damijan’s “relaxed” arrival and subsequent resignation was followed by his moving from Ljubljana to Koper. He and his like-minded colleagues, popularly known as the squad of young economists, including Jože P. Damijan, Igor Masten, Aljoša Feldin, Sašo Polanec and Aleš Ahčan, left the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana and joined the Faculty of Management in Koper. In explaining his decision to the dean of the Ljubljana faculty, he said that his vision was to “start a working day with a coffee in Tartini Square.” But the mobile unit of macroeconomists changed its mind after three months and returned en masse to the Ljubljana Faculty of Economics, persistently refusing to comment on their move for the media, to which they had made themselves readily available on all other previous occasions.⁸²

For example, at a conference held in June 2006, Slovenian economists and sociologists concluded that the new era of reforms in Slovenia had already yielded results, that the main question was not “reforms yes or no,” but how radical and which changes would be sensible, and even more importantly, how these reforms should be implemented.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Cf. “Odzivi po odstopu ministra” (Responses to Minister’s Resignation), RTV SLO’s web page, March 21, 2006.

⁸² Cf. Ksenija Koren, “J. P. Damijan si je spet premislil” (J. P. Damijan Changed His Mind Again), *Večer*, August 11, 2006. It should be said that, after the initial admiration they expressed for Prime Minister Janša, Mičo Mrkaič and J. P. Damijan, who brought home to the government neo-liberal ideas, turned their backs on him and mainly criticized the government for “not being serious about reforms.”

“The framework plan addressing this issue offers neo-liberal recipes. We will achieve a **relaxed** Slovenia by first releasing capital, and that will, with a certain delay, have a **relaxation** effect on society as a whole. And, quite expectedly, precisely this entirely unoriginal concept, actually a cliché, has met with negative response, even from those who launched the encouraging slogan about a **relaxed** Slovenia. Whether that plan stimulates the creative chaos that would mobilize all development resources, or whether this fruit of the work of two hundred experts is just an “expert basis” for reformist “improvization games,” or a national show staged by the government for the gullible, while behind the scenes the second wave of privatization is taking place, meaning the birth of a protectionist, homeland national capitalism.”⁸³

Damijan later criticized the government’s hesitation, saying that despite it the free sun would eventually shine on Slovenia, if not in two years, than perhaps in six, when Slovenia will be hit by a serious financial or economic crisis. “Obviously, a crisis is unavoidable. And then the economic bankruptcy of this communist ideology will be accompanied by an intellectual catharsis. Similar to what has happened in the Baltic and Central European, formerly communist, countries. It’s a pity that we will waste the current economic advantage and miss the train to technological change.”⁸⁴ Towards the end of August, 2006, following the adoption of the proposed changes in taxation as part of the announced social and economic reform measures, changes which were certainly a far cry from (neo)liberal initiatives and the long “promised” flat taxation rate, Damijan sighed in relief at the anticipated failure: “Well, as far as I’m concerned, I’m very happy that I left that ship of fools on time and that I won’t be held accountable for that botch job.”⁸⁵

When interviewing Pavel Gantar, an MP from the LDS, the *Mladina* journalist Jani Sever linked the relaxation of Slovenia to flexibilization. Gantar corrected him: “A **relaxed** Slovenia is an ideological concept of *Nova revija*. **Relaxation** is domesticated flexibilization. This expression should be taken the same as when one says ‘if the government offers you a loan, hold onto your purse tightly.’ The trademark ‘**Relaxed** Slovenia’

⁸³ These were the topics at the third round table discussion of the Slovenian Sociological Association dedicated to reforms. It was held at the Škuc Gallery on May 25, 2006. Guests: Igor Pribac (Faculty of Arts), Ljubica Marjanovič-Umek (Faculty of Arts), Pavel Zgaga (Faculty of Education), Srečo Dragoš (Faculty of Social Work) and Andrej Klemeč.

⁸⁴ Jože P. Damijan, “Retoriki navkljub: državno podjetje ne bo mednarodna uspešnica” (Despite Rhetoric, a National Company Will Not Be an International Success Story), *Manager*, July 4, 2006, available at: <http://www.manager-on.net/show.php?id=157293>.

⁸⁵ Jože P. Damijan, “Bajuku ni mar za podjetja” (Bajuk Does Not Care for Companies), *Finance*, September 1, 2006.



has been used to promote Slovenian landscapes through music and words, as on the national television channel on Friday nights. The term 'flexibilization' is here used to say that today so called non-economic factors, for example, tolerance, creativity, diversity, and the presence of foreigners, contribute to social and economic development."⁸⁶ Can we then conclude that flexibilization is a plausible and legitimate economic concept close to Janša government's ideologem, which fell short of clear articulation even within the economic alphabet?

RELAXED DOMESTIC POLICY

As regards the area of internal affairs, various spheres of operation were eased: public administration, the legislature, political culture. A reshuffle within the economic sector was the main preoccupation of the new government. The LDS MP, Matej Lahovnik, giving an interview to Ciril Brajer, emphasized still another conceptual antipode: inhibition. The governing structures tightening the reins, sweeping personnel changes, the elimination of supervisory committees, removals for "personal reasons" not caused by wrongdoing, uncertainty and fear of reform – these are just some of the reasons for inhibition.⁸⁷

Two notable Christian commentators drew attention to several important implications: public opinion needs to be de-electrified; ideological tensions need to be reduced; the cultural war has to be brought to an end, and the illusion of one's own intellectual superiority needs to be eliminated. Public life, too, has to be relaxed.⁸⁸ Stand-by watchdogs took it

⁸⁶ Jani Sever, "Intervju s Pavletom Gantarjem" (An Interview with Pavle Gantar), *Mladina*, August 19, 2006.

⁸⁷ Brajer posed an ironic question to Lahovnik: "In a **relaxed** Slovenia? Parliamentarians fear only the boss; workers are increasingly intimidated; patients fear reforms that obviously only take away rights; it is said that journalists are increasingly frightened, and so are the managers who are sacked one after another..." Lahovnik answered: "For me that is the greatest disappointment. Instead of **relaxing**, Slovenia is becoming stiff. The governmental palace is tightening the reins, and an increasingly wider circle is being bridled. Replacements within the police, the educational system, public institutions and the economy are following one another; various commissions that could exert control over the government are being dissolved; people are removed not on the basis of wrongdoing; as if they had received the state into their possession and use rather than management. Uncertainty and fear have been spreading, unharmonized reforms being one of the reasons.....". Cf. "Povejte mi, za vruga, kaj me čaka!" (Damn! Tell Me What I'm in For), *Nedeljski dnevnik*, January 15, 2006.

⁸⁸ Brane Senegačnik, "Je burka končana?" (Is the Comedy Over?), *Družina*, May 7, 2006. "The last elections introduced substantial changes into the life of Slovenia; I'd say that now, two and a half years later, we can say so. The most important shift towards a



upon themselves to alert the public to the danger of this not taking place. For example, the law on religious freedom presented for parliamentary scrutiny was assessed as still another opportunity for ideological polarization in Slovenia, which is dangerous, as the theologian Ivan Štuhec argued, because it could induce a deluge that would swallow a “**relaxed** and libertarian Slovenia.” We definitely must not allow this to happen.⁸⁹

The *Nova revija* slogan also became a cause for celebration. On celebrating the fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Nova Slovenija party (NSi), its proponents stayed faithful to it: “We want to celebrate in a **relaxed** manner, since in the company of Nova Slovenia we feel at home.”⁹⁰ In an interview for *Delo’s Saturday Supplement* on December 31, 2005, Janez Janša was asked whether Slovenia was any more relaxed one year on. The answer was predictably affirmative.⁹¹

relaxed life is a gradual ‘de-electrification’ of public opinion, a lessening of ideological tension that once governed the sensitivities of the public and enabled politics and the media to direct it. I do not know when exactly this shift occurred – the elections were just an outward sign of deeper processes – but it was definitely not an abrupt turn and not a result of an individual, spectacular event. Rather, it was a consequence of the absence of ideas, cultural poverty and the pragmatism of the ruling party, the once unconquerable and today miserable LDS. In this context, the LDS is actually a metaphor for the entire left-wing in Slovenia, or better said, for the continuity that ruled over society during the transition period (‘practical’ democracy in fact could start only when the transition, which invented new forms for preserving old social relations, was over): it was an attempt at linking the post-modern lack of ideas with the real and symbolic heritage of communism; democratic formalism with old party exclusivism. Genuine comedy.”

⁸⁹ “People, don’t horse around! Do you really think that we are all half-witted and that we do not see through the game [the passing of the law on religious freedom] played by those who would readily spend several more decades using religion and its institutional branch offices to foment cultural war for the purposes of daily politics? Across the parliamentary lobbies, the main protagonists of this policy announce that they will do anything to prevent any solution that may bring any advantage to the Catholic Church. Of course, it is primarily about the Catholic Church, since according to the paranoid views of some, it is precisely the Catholic Church that has hooked up with the current government and again threatens to bring the biblical flood upon a **relaxed** and libertarian Slovenia.” Ivan J. Štuhec, “Zmajev rep” (Dragon’s Tail), *Dnevnik*, June 9, 2006.

⁹⁰ For more on the celebration, see Siniša Gačič, “Sproščena petletnica” (A Relaxed Fifth Anniversary), *Mladina*, July 25, 2005.

⁹¹ “Let’s return to a **relaxed** Slovenia during the past year” says the journalist. Janša answers: “One year on, the general state is, realistically speaking, solid. Slovenia today belongs in the middle group of European countries. In the first group are three or four states that have already completed reforms and are now discussing the results; then we have countries that say that reforms are unnecessary. For these, a sobering process is still to come. Our reformist group of countries, the largest one, includes countries with rather weak points of departure for reform, large budget deficits, such as Greece and Portugal, and countries with low economic growth, for example Italy. Slovenia can

Rok Praprotnik, a journalist who fled from the *Delo* to the *Dnevnik* daily, recapitulated the relaxation process throughout the year 2005 in an article entitled “The Year of Living Relaxingly” published on the last day of 2005.⁹² In this article he mentioned two new holidays: September 15th, in memory of the day the Primorska region was returned to the mother state, and November 23rd, when Rudolf Meister took over military power in Maribor.⁹³ In his opinion, reform has also affected Independence Day, December 26th, which has been celebrated ever since Slovenia became a sovereign country, only that in 2005 it was no longer just a day of independence but of unity as well. All these holidays, and particularly the two new ones, were replete with patriotism. Such was also the mood that dominated the celebration in Kočevska Reka in memory of the foundation of the special unit named Moris, which later became part of the Slovenian army and was credited for its contribution to the gaining of independence. “Patriotic feeling in Slovenia has become **relaxed**,” concluded Praprotnik.

In his review, Praprotnik also mentioned a “more patriotic” approach to the issue of the erased people, whose patriotism seems to be disputable in itself, otherwise they wouldn’t have been erased.⁹⁴ After one year of respite, the Interior Minister, Dragutin Mate, prepared the political

today still take steps starting from an essentially better position; we have lower inflation, greater economic growth, including standard growth. In short, we do not need to tighten belts or reduce public expenditure in order to reduce the budget deficit ... This enables a much more **relaxed** approach to reforms, since there is no ground for nervousness, for insinuations that we will have to tighten our belts. Viewed from this perspective, the offensive launched by the media, trade unions and politics against the proposed reforms is rather outside the context of normal developments within Europe.” Cf. Vojko Flegar and Mišo Renko, “Nekatere ptice so odletele in jih ne bo več nazaj. To je leto 2005, ne 1992!” (Some Birds Have Flown Away and Won’t Be Back. This Is the Year 2005, not 1992), *Delo*, December 31, 2005.

⁹² Rok Praprotnik, “Leto sproščenega življenja” (The Year of Living Relaxingly), *Delo*, December 31, 2005.

⁹³ In September 1943, the plenary of the Liberation Front proclaimed the “annexation of the Slovenian Primorje region to a free and united Slovenia, part of a free and democratic Yugoslavia.” The Primorje region thus became part of Slovenian territory. Rudolf Meister was an army general whose small army disarmed Austrian-Hungarian soldiers in 1918 in Maribor, which decisively contributed to the establishment of Slovenia’s northern border.

⁹⁴ “The Erased” is a name for a group of people, 18,305 of them altogether, mainly originating from other republics of the former Yugoslavia, who in 1992 were erased from the register of permanent residents and were transferred to the register of foreigners. The year 1991 was the deadline for acquiring Slovenian citizenship. In 1999, the Constitutional Court ruled that the erasure was unlawful, but the problem has remained unresolved to this date.

basis for drafting the Constitutional Act, which would “eliminate the problem” of the Constitutional Court’s decision and enable the individual treatment of erased persons. “But the **relaxation** took place on other levels, too,” says the journalist, listing, among other things, the quick abolition of car registration labels, which turned off the money tap for the Mirage company that for several years had thrived on this unnecessary expenditure borne by citizens, and the reduction of notary fees. However, the public administration has earned a few negative points:

“However, it would be hard to talk about **relaxed spirit** after the Minister of Public Administration, Grega Virant, coined and put into practice the notion of ‘political compatibility’ evocative of the notorious demand for ‘moral and political irreproachability,’ which we thought had been consigned to the junkyard of history. Owing to ‘political incompatibility,’ some high ranking public servants have been removed, because the government did not trust them. Even legislation was modified to meet this purpose.”⁹⁵

“We are stepping from the year of a **relaxation** spirit into the year of the fire horse,” concludes Praprotnik alluding to the first “hearing” of the then newly appointed Minister of Development Jože P. Damijan, who in an introductory speech described himself as a typical Capricorn and a fire horse according to the Chinese horoscope. The proverbial persistence turned out to be ephemeral – Damijan resigned just three months later.

The next opportunity for reflection on the new road taken by Slovenia was the 15th anniversary of independence in June 2006.⁹⁶ It brought us, among other things, three weeks of exhaustive television coverage dedicated to the memories and commemoration of the June 1991 events. The gaining of independence in 1991 was in itself an act of relaxation, ob-

⁹⁵ Ibid. The author then mentions the removal of the general manager of the police, Dar-ko Anželj, who had to leave, although the Interior Minister Mate praised his work. Similarly, the work of the dismissed director of the office for the prevention of money laundering, Klaudio Stroligo, was also assessed in positive terms; Zvezdana Geržina, the director of the Tax Administration of Slovenia, and the director of the national archive, Dragan Matič were also removed. A similar luck seems to be in store for the head of the anti-corruption commission, Drago Kos, and the President of the Court of Audit, Igor Šoltes. The predictions came true. The same happened to Marjan Erhatic, a criminologist with many years of experience.

⁹⁶ The European MP from the SDS, Romana Jordan Cizelj, was a speaker at the celebration of the 15th anniversary of sovereignty on June 16, 2006, which was part of an annual event organized by the Student Club from Mengeš. “Slovenia remains a variegated collection of differences integrated by means of a strong core – tradition. It is up to you, young people, to take on the challenge of preserving this tradition and to enrich it with the opportunities provided by an open and **relaxed** Slovenia. Congratulations on the 15th anniversary of sovereignty.” Cf. www.rjordancizelj.si.

served the President of the National Assembly, France Cukjati: “Just one more thing was needed: freedom of political association and free and democratic elections. And we now have a **relaxed** political atmosphere, so people can sing ‘Slovenia – my country’ from the bottom of their hearts and with plebiscite determination.”⁹⁷

Janez Janša’s speech at this celebration (which inevitably included the concept of “relaxation”) contained a sentence that was later frequently commented on: “We want to be nothing less than one of the best countries in the world, one of the beacons for the 21st century.”⁹⁸ The rest of his speech was more than illuminating, since it was a kind of appeal to make still another effort towards reforms. This speech is revealing of the two problems surrounding the lobbying for reforms. While, initially, reforms were presented as necessary for survival, the diction of this speech requires the maximum. The difference is not only palpable, it is maximal. Reformist anticipations ran into contradictions. And those who did not understand the message obtained an additional explanation. As if the appeal had not been commensurate with the importance of the task and lest it was perceived as a solitary gesture, we witnessed a very similar call from Janša’s political “partner,” Borut Pahor, and his Party of Social Democrats. Their program “Slovenia among the Best in the World” de-

⁹⁷ Cf. <http://www.15let.gov.si/poslanice/cukjati/>. As early as 2001, Lojze Peterle assessed the first months of sovereignty in his contribution presented at the symposium “Slovenia’s Gaining of Independence in 1991” held in Brežice: “During these war days in June and July we again felt the unity of the Slovenes. The victory over the YPA [Yugoslav People’s Army] and its departure was followed by **relaxedness** and freedom of all.” Cf. the archive at the web page www.peterle.si.

⁹⁸ Cf. “Janša: Želimo biti svetilnik 21. stoletja” (We Want to Be the Beacon for the 21st Century), www.delo.si, June 24, 2006. This time, relaxedness came close to happiness: “The company of **relaxed**, happy people calls for mutual trust.” (Ibid.). However, where did such taken-for-granted certainty of the Prime Minister come from? Have Slovenes really longed to be the best and the model for others? Has anyone ever asked the citizens whether this was self-evident? Doesn’t being unparalleled require too great a strain, much or too much self-sacrifice and high expectations, perhaps even unattainable ones? The linking of happiness and relaxedness was criticized by Milan Kučan on national television: “These celebrations, too, demonstrate the difference between what is said and what is actually happening. For example, it is said that Slovenia will be a happy and **relaxed** country where one will create things, for which we need mutual trust. Is it [trust] being created? Or, that Slovenia will be the beacon for the 21st century and that there is room in this project for all. Is there, really? Including for those who have been removed from companies, public administration, cultural institutions and so on? Well, trust is created through actions and not so much through words.” Cf. Lado Ambrožič, “Intervju z Milanom Kučanom” (An Interview with Milan Kučan), RTV SLO, July 2, 2006.

clares that they want to be the “driving force of the development stream.”⁹⁹ Within just one week, citizens were twice plunged into the company of the *crème de la crème*. Perhaps this Alpine beacon triumphalism was necessary to cover up the weaknesses, or the absence of reformist programs, or even worse, their impossibility. Was it perhaps a cautious suggestion that reformist programs were impossible to carry out?¹⁰⁰ Because if someone requires that citizens do the impossible, then that person is probably not serious. We are not the largest, but we can be the best, was Janša’s conclusion. “Let’s bestow on Slovenia our ideas, our energy, our hopes, all of our talents ... we can be the best,”¹⁰¹ said Janša, revealing an ideologization that served to conceal impotence, which is suggested by the fact that it was no longer we who spoke, but it was the state that spoke for us. It stepped in and became the receiver of our irrevocable donation. The state is someone else. We should present gifts to something that exceeds us, perhaps to the “Slovenian national substance,” as Jambreč would say.

The story does not end here, though. In the Prime Minister’s speech the role of citizens was instrumentalized literally:

“On the path leading to this goal, we will reach for the best in our national character. Even if in the past some of it was hidden deep underneath. Creativity. Entrepreneurship. Commitment. Justice. Openness. Tolerance. Honesty. Solidarity. Old Slovenian values. New Slovenian self-confidence.”¹⁰²

We should not overlook the announcement “we will reach for.” Will they reach for it, or, how bizarre, will we reach for it within ourselves? According to Janša, Slovenia is a “heaven under Mount Triglav.”¹⁰³ This

⁹⁹ “Slovenija na vrhu sveta” (Slovenia on the Top of the World), STA, July 1, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Boris Vežjak, “Najboljši in na vrhu” (The Best, on the Top), *Večer*, July 8, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Cf. e.g. *Dnevnik*, the main news program on RTV SLO, June 24, 2006. The will of those who are the best will triumph through the use, among other things, of the adjectives “better” and “best,” which Janša repeated in his speech as many as 13 times.

¹⁰² The syntagm “Slovenian self-confidence” is a favorite one of Tine Hirbar (see, for example, the chapter with this title in his book *Euroslavenstvo/Euroslavenianness*, 2004, 205). The collection *Relaxed Slovenia* includes Rupel’s essay, where he lists the following traits of the “Slovenian national character” supported by extensive references: introversion, malice, crudeness, self-conceit and servitude. Cf. *Sproščena Slovenija/Relaxed Slovenia* 1999, 303.

¹⁰³ The cheap nationalist pathos calls to mind the thought of George Bernard Shaw: “Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it.” In addition, *Blut und Boden* ideas sound dangerous, like a call to submission. Hannah Arendt drew attention to the thin line that separates loyalty to a

type of rhetoric can be rationalized as follows: fifteen years ago when we were seeking independence we made self-sacrifice for Slovenia, so let's do it again today. Yet such a comparison would overlook the fact that fifteen years ago it was all about citizens, while today someone is calling on us to give, but we do not know why or for what. The search for national consensus also included the shaping of public opinion, which culminated in the occupation of the public television channel that lasted for several weeks, during which it broadcast a program in honor of the government and according to its wishes on the grounds of the "round number" 15th anniversary.

The diagnosis made by Tonči Kuzmanić in 2000 came true in a way. He established some traits shared by the late Croatian President Tuđman's and Janša's style of government: "How do they understand the state? What is the state for them? They understand it as a child of war, as a result of violence invested in it ... Or, violence is at least a midwife that helped with the delivery of the state, and it is perceived as an apparatus of coercion."¹⁰⁴ Therefore it is not surprising that the 15th anniversary was linked to the demand for new victories, this time reformist victories. Reforms may be a necessity, but why should they be a means to victory?¹⁰⁵ Two paradoxes remain unexplained here. If Slovenia had been so badly off under the previous government, how come that economy is planned to become one of the most prosperous in the world within just a year and a half? And, if we are close to joining the club of the best, why do we need reforms? But all this is to no avail: "partnership and unity"

country from loyalty to the ruling structures, warning how interchangeable these were and how dangerous was the reduction of a country to objects. The totalitarian regimes of the previous century are a clear warning of the danger of the instrumentalization of an individual; insatiable as they are, they believe in their own power and predominance in the world. Yet the protagonists of such systems were born a century or so too late: today social and political systems can no longer stand such anachronistic patterns, but at best their variations.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Kuzmanić, in: *Nova desnica: zbornik predavanj 3. letnika delavsko-punkerske univerze* (The New Right Wing: A Collection of Lectures, Workers-Punk University, 3rd year, 2003, 117). In his analysis of two "right-wing phenomena" in contemporary Croatia and Slovenia, the author exposes something that we experienced after the 2004 elections: "When Janša says that what we have in Slovenia is not true democracy, he literally means: 'I'm not yet in power.'" (Ibid. 125).

¹⁰⁵ In this respect, it was not by chance that Janša's speech at the main celebration of the Day of Independence was accorded the leading position in the brochure "Slovenija jutri - država blaginje" (Slovenia of Tomorrow - A Welfare State) distributed to Slovenian households in July 2006. The publisher was the Government Public Relations and Media Office. It was intended as an address to the "partners for development" to facilitate the acceptance of reforms proposed by the government.



has become a slogan that has replaced the old, disdained Yugoslav motto “brotherhood and unity.”

RELAXED FOREIGN POLICY

Rupel, who infallibly repeated Jambrek’s thesis on the Slovenian national substance, also believes that Slovenia is a special kind of substance:

“If Slovenia did not have some kind of its own special and original substance, it wouldn’t be interesting and wouldn’t be a partner in a conversation with anyone... if we did not have something special to say, if we didn’t know some interesting and important things, and if we were not skilled at something, then, of course, we would be ignored and sidelined. By all means, I have the impression that Slovenia has gained ground at the very centre of the European processes.”¹⁰⁶

Substantiality came to be viewed in relation to Europe. Immediately following the elections, the European MP Alojz Peterle extrapolated the relaxation techniques to the European level: “I would like to see every one of our politicians feeling **relaxed** and assured on the European level and working within the framework of the European ‘we,’ while starting from Slovenian points of departure.”¹⁰⁷ Nova Slovenia wrote a Resolution on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia, where they demanded a relaxed attitude from neighboring Italy.¹⁰⁸ Relaxedness obviously splattered across Slovenia’s borders and became a yardstick against which circumstances abroad were measured. It explicitly became part of Slovenia’s foreign policy, at least in the opinion of the minister responsible for this area. That such a vocabulary was somewhat weird did not escape the attention of journalists. In an interview given in January 2005 to Dragica Korade and Boris Jaušovec of the daily *Večer*,

¹⁰⁶ Janez Markeš, “Pogovor s slovenskim zunanjim ministrom dr. Dimitrijem Ruplom” (An Interview with the Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel), *Mag*, May 11, 2005, available at <http://www.mzz.gov.si/index.php?id=123>.

¹⁰⁷ *Delo*, January 19, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ “Slovenia should **relax** partnership relations with neighboring Italy, strengthen its links with Austria and dedicate itself more determinedly to the issues of the West Balkans, where it can offer to its partners from Europe a quality analysis of the state of affairs and proposals for the stabilization of the region. At the same time, it can offer suitable assistance and experience to the countries of South East Europe that want to accelerate their integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations.” www.nsi.si.



the Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel was asked to explain the meaning of “relaxed foreign policy” as one of the (new) content bases of the political program. However, we were not given any plausible explanation. Instead of offering an explanation in response to the clearly formulated question, the minister furnished varying uses of this adjective in four contexts: “The public is well aware of the fact that the previous Prime Minister Rop and I were at odds. While he was the Prime Minister I really could not implement a **relaxed** policy.”¹⁰⁹ He then went on to list Slovenia’s liberating achievements on the international stage (“thanks to this, we can now pursue a more **relaxed** foreign policy”), said that today he could “talk in a **relaxed** mood with any foreign minister,” and finally stated that citizens of Slovenia had “our fortune in our own hands, so we can be **relaxed**.”¹¹⁰

Rupel managed to extend the program of relaxation beyond Slovenia, as befits such a program. Understandably, he first did this on a private plane: Slovenia’s presiding over OSCE was a reason for his own relaxed

¹⁰⁹ An interview with Dimitrij Rupel in *Večer*’s Saturday supplement entitled “Vsi skupaj smo samo drobiž” (We Are All Just Peanuts), January 29, 2005. The question was: “One of the directions of foreign policy development mentions a ‘**relaxed** foreign policy.’ What is this? Why haven’t you practiced such a policy before, given that you have been at the helm of Slovenian foreign policy practically since Slovenia gained independence?” Rupel slightly distanced himself, and instead of answering the question he said: “You should not exaggerate. I left foreign policy in 1993 and returned in 2000. The term in office I have just started is different from the previous one, because the circumstances have changed, not I. The public is well aware that we were at odds with the previous Prime Minister, Rop. While he was the Prime Minister I really could not implement a **relaxed** policy. Now that we are a member of the EU and NATO, we have important roles in international political life. We no longer need to fight tooth and nail in order to get somewhere. Today Slovenia is where it wanted to be. Because of that, we can practice a more **relaxed** foreign policy. Today I can converse in a **relaxed** manner with any foreign minister. Slovenia is not on bad terms with anyone and has good relations with all countries. Thanks to that, we can be **relaxed**. The Slovenes have never before experienced something like that. Take a look at the past. When did Slovenes have a role or a task in international affairs? At the Ljubljana congress in 1821, our task was to take care of the food and ensure heat in the rooms. Then we were part of Austria-Hungary, and then we decided to become part of Yugoslavia, in which we did have a role, but it was not a decisive one. Today we are the masters of our own fortune. Thanks to this we can be **relaxed**.”

¹¹⁰ This assertion calls for more than one explanation. For example: why does the minister have the impression of an unrelaxed mood, whatever that means? Why did this impression emerge in the year 2004, of all years, and why did such a turn towards relaxedness come after the 2004 election in particular? Let’s ignore for the moment the fact that the foreign minister was “unrelaxed” between 2000 and 2004, and before the year 1993. Were there any special reasons that relaxedness came to the forefront precisely at this moment in time?

manner.¹¹¹ Since he was the OSCE Chairman-In-Office during the political crisis and change of government in Kyrgyzstan, he gave an explanation of the situation there, concentrating on the “street revolution” in particular.¹¹² The diagnosis of events in Kyrgyzstan went as follows: “The events were undoubtedly an expression of political dissatisfaction and, I’d say, of a **relaxed** political background.”¹¹³ This statement is important because it shows how polar opposite and arbitrary can be the meanings of this concept – in this case it does not describe peace, ease and relief, but precisely the opposite – unrest, protest, change of government. Although it can be read differently as well: relaxation may have undesired effects, and in the profane sense this can be understood as a “release of negative energy.”

Since the spring of 2005 brought disappointment and forecast new shifts, this time in an unfavorable direction, Rupel became worried. The French and the Dutch rejected the EU Constitution. The discussion at the European Council on June 16 and 17, 2005 in Brussels left an impression that the French and the Dutch ‘No’ vote exacerbated future ratification of the Constitution in other European countries, which Rupel described as the “end of European **relaxedness**.”¹¹⁴ The solution he proposed was the one chosen by Slovenia. There are two options: being relaxed or being reserved.¹¹⁵ Rupel was no less pessimistic some time later, in August 2006, but at issue this time was Slovenia’s openness towards the world:

¹¹¹ Slovenia was “praised and acknowledged” by the EAPC for its OSCE presidency, said minister Rupel in Brussels after reporting the activities to the 46 partners, or to be more precise, to NATO members and partner countries. “We were praised by Germany, the US, Portugal, Austria and Moldova, among others...” The minister added that he returned from that day’s meeting “unburdened and **relaxed**,” since it was proof that hard work paid off. Cf. STA, “Slovenija pohvaljena za vodenje Organizacije za varnost in sodelovanje” (Slovenia Praised for Its OSCE Presidency), November 16, 2005.

¹¹² “It is true that the people’s revolution in Kyrgyzstan claimed victims and brought aggression and plundering, but the country now has a new government whose first task is to improve security and stability. Now our interest has to be redirected from the previous week to the coming months leading to the presidential election on June 26, 2005,” said Rupel. Quotation taken from the web page http://www.gov.si/mzz/novinar-sko_sred/szj/05033102.html.

¹¹³ The statement given for the prime time news program Dnevnik on RTV Slovenija; quoted after *Mladina*, Izjave tedna (Statements of the Week), April 4, 2005.

¹¹⁴ Dimitrij Rupel, “Prihajajo slabi časi?” (Are We in for Bad Times?), *Mag*, June 22, 2005.

¹¹⁵ Rupel says: “These days the European Union has been making a fundamental choice: **relaxedness** or reserve? There are signs in the statements of European politicians that suggest reserve, fear, uncertainty. Europe lags behind other large economic and military systems. It has difficulties with its internal organization, efficiency, competitive-



"It is my impression that today in Slovenia there are more factors that encourage self-absorption and closing in and fewer factors that encourage **relaxation** and openness towards the world."¹¹⁶

On one occasion, it is we who lack a relaxed attitude; on another, it is Europeans. It is a matter of their freedom and, surprisingly, one part of that freedom is a relaxed attitude "towards sacred things." For Rupel, a relaxed attitude can at one moment be a symbol of intellectual openness and tolerance and the next moment, when he speaks about the cartoon images of the Prophet Muhammad, it symbolizes exaggerated criticism and irony.¹¹⁷ On still another occasion, it is a synonym for relief, for example, at the death of Slobodan Milošević. The following is how he commented on the situation in the Balkans, observing that Milošević's death had a symbolic meaning and was the end of an era: "This is an opportunity to devote to it, all of us, perhaps in a more **relaxed** manner; an opportunity for Serbia to concentrate on its future in a more **relaxed** manner." According to Rupel, this opened the European prospects for Serbia.¹¹⁸

As a regular columnist for the *Delo* daily, Rupel repeatedly used relaxation to outline Slovenian foreign policy, saying that it must maintain persistently its strong international position to dull the appetite for con-

ness and with leadership strategies, or to be more accurate, with leaders. Citizens have been expressing their mistrust of national structures." Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Dimitrij Rupel, "O vplivu Slovenije" (On Slovenia's Influence), *Delo*, August 12, 2006.

¹¹⁷ Discussing the cartoons published by the Danish newspaper, Rupel said: "The EU General Affairs Council in Brussels discussed this problem At that time, the Danish foreign minister asked for solidarity on our part: there is solidarity and readiness to have a dialogue on one level. We all supported the stance that a more **relaxed** attitude should be established in relation to the dignity of Muslims and freedom of Europeans, and I think that we, as European politicians, could not state otherwise. I hope I'm not much mistaken if I say that a **relaxed** attitude towards sacred things, of one kind or another, is a new phenomenon, here as well. In the past they could not be the object of irony or criticism. We have to put ourselves in their shoes. We have stepped into the minefield. The outcome of this conflict will be more caution on the part of journalists and editors, less criticism, less irony, less **relaxedness**, and on the other hand, the anger of radical Muslims will be reduced. I see in this a serious danger. We have to be extremely considerate; we must begin to talk about these things in general, talk broadly about sacred things and the issues of upsetting others." Cf. Rupel's appearance on RTV SLO, the Omizje studio debate, Spopad civilizacij (Clash of Civilizations), February 22, 2006.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Rupel's statement for the prime time news program Dnevnik on RTV SLO, March 11, 2006.



quest in others, and that it must cultivate a dialogue and “**relaxation** of the intellectual space.”¹¹⁹

RELAXED CRITICISM BY THE OPPOSITION PARTIES

On April 18, 2006, the representatives of parliamentary parties, save for the LDS, and the representatives of minorities signed the Partnership for Development. The document states that its main goal is to increase citizens' welfare and improve the quality of life, while shaping a dynamic and innovative economy that would be able to respond to the challenges of globalization and would be based on knowledge, entrepreneurship and greater mobility of people. The inclusion of the Social Democratic Party and the self-exclusion of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia only widened the gap between these two opposition parties. Nevertheless, the leader of the Social Democrats, Borut Pahor, and his party colleagues estimated that they continued to be the critical conscience of the government, whose heavy loss of credibility was a result of their failure to implement the “relaxation” promise given before the elections.¹²⁰ According to Mr Pahor, the party is preparing to join the coalition in 2008. Their goal is to beat PM Janša's coalition at the next election, but on the road to success they do not want to “wipe out all shreds”, that is to say, to use the kind of politics exploited by the Prime Minister before the last election, which disqualifies opponents in advance. Pahor's main reproach related to the concept of relaxedness – which he took seriously – and for him the

¹¹⁹ Let me insert here a purely subjective remark. When I saw the column by the foreign minister in *Delo*, my previous experience told me that he would again use the term relaxedness. I was not disappointed at the predictability of his discourse. This is the quotation from that column: “I see two tasks awaiting Slovenian politics. On the one hand, Slovenia must (through its defense, economic and political connections) maintain and protect its firm international position, which will dull in advance any appetite for conquest in others; on the other hand (through its educational and cultural system), it must work towards a widening and **relaxation** of intellectual space, i.e. a space for dialogue, understanding, expert debates etc. Several demanding preconditions have to be fulfilled if these tasks are to be accomplished, among these the harmonious and regular functioning of the economic and national system; experience and historical memory; firm belief and broad learning, respect, understanding towards the interests of our interlocutors, but also an uncompromising stance when it comes to fundamental principles; moderation in expectations, and above all, as much diplomacy as possible.” Cf. Dimitrij Rupel, “Razlike ali nasprotja med kulturami” (Differences or Contrasts between Cultures), *Delo*, August 26, 2006.

¹²⁰ “Pahor Janši predlaga zamrznitev koncesij” (Pahor Proposes Freezing of Concessions), STA, May 5, 2006.

failure of the government consisted in its failure to fulfill this promise. What was meant as irony is here taken as a deficit:

“That which cost this government most of its credibility is the fact that one year and a half after it came to power the state of affairs is exactly the opposite of what it promised. The government of Janez Janša promised a **relaxed** atmosphere in this country, but in the current situation there is no **relaxed** spirit and there is no ambition among people. That is bad. That cannot be resolved through the kind of politics that earned Janša victory. I think that our colleagues from the Liberal Democracy have been attempting to do it. But I won't do that and that's the point on which we disagree most.”¹²¹

Pahor's moving closer to the governing coalition created a split within the opposition which widened during 2006. The journalists began to conspicuously favor his stance as a constructive one, which tied in well with the then already established practice of demonizing the Liberal Democracy as a corrupt party and now a sinking ship. When Social Democrats formulated the program entitled “Slovenia on the Top of the World” they only repeated Janša's gesture of a week before. The allegory of a beacon for the 21st century can be understood as cool political thinking, as they themselves described it. Journalists, too, came to their support and became thrilled by political optimism. In a paradigmatic piece of praise for the constructive attitude of social democrats in the *Žurnal* weekly, Dejan Steinbuch said that “Pahor's political party members remain politically moderate, rational and correct even during the periods of extreme heat.”¹²²

In a similar manner, at the next press conference on May 19, 2006, Mr Pahor stated that PM Janša was not sufficiently relaxed, that he had failed to fulfill promises and that social democrats wanted to be an alternative to the government. What had to be done, said Pahor, was to take the demand for relaxedness seriously. “Instead of a **relaxed** mood we have constraint, and instead of governing, he attempts to master.”¹²³ The deputy leader of the Social Democrats, Igor Lukšič, further explained that the draft program entitled “2030 – Towards a People-Friendly Slovenia as Part of the EU and Modern Global Trends” considered the vision but also stressed the European and global links, which in their opinion

¹²¹ “Izjava dneva” (Statement of the Day), *Delo*, May 6, 2006.

¹²² Dejan Steinbuch, “Fatamorgana LDS” (LDS Mirage), *Žurnal*, July 1, 2006. During 2005 and 2006, pro-government journalists deluged us with “comparative” praise for Borut Pahor's “rational stance” in collaborating with the government.

¹²³ Cf. “Borut Pahor: Na volitvah je ponuditi alternativo Janševi vladi” (Borut Pahor: Alternative to the Janša Government Needed at the Elections), STA, May 19, 2006.

were crucial.¹²⁴ Neoliberalism is by now a prevalent option everywhere, including in politics, while the left part of the political spectrum has experienced a decline.

This was the line followed by social democrats when writing the new program entitled “Slovenia on the Top of the World.” Even before that they argued that politics must be cool and that it was a lifestyle, reasserting this conviction by creating the page www.kulpolitika.si.¹²⁵ Lukšič’s address at the party congress held on July 8, 2006, at which the program was presented, suggested the ideological denial of the political party’s roots (“We will ask those colleagues to step aside and make room for those who have trust, energy and determination. Once we win, there will be enough room for them, too”). Among the best, but not on the top of the world, was where he saw his political party (“We have to climb to the top of Slovenian politics”).¹²⁶ Pahor promised a genuinely relaxed mood:

“Slovenia can develop a winning mentality and a winning culture only under the condition that people here feel **relaxed** and not like prisoners of their political beliefs. Slovenia can score victories in the field of science, culture, sports, politics and elsewhere if we encourage and help one another, and if one’s victory will be the inspiration for others. The Social Democrats are committed to this type of political culture, a winning culture. The current government promised this kind of relaxed Slovenia, but broke

¹²⁴ Program 2030 comes with one of the most banal explanations, that is, numerological. On their page www.kulpolitika.si the Social Democrats explain that in the 2008 elections they wish to obtain 20 to 30 percent of the votes. If these two figures are put together, they yield the year of the program - 2030. Lukšič identified this miraculous correspondence on his own.

¹²⁵ They want to spread a “winning mentality,” they want to establish social democracy as the “leading political force in Slovenia,” and they want to confront “neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism.” See www.kulpolitika.si

¹²⁶ Cf. “S Socialnimi demokrati v vrh sveta razvitosti” (With Social Democrats to the Top of the World of Development), www.delo.si and STA, July 8, 2006. Lukšič’s desire to find the roots of social democracy among the renowned names of Slovenian history is also impressive: “Our roots have names associated with them: these are names important for orientation through the past and the future. Only the main names. This is not a telephone directory or an academic expertise. Through these names, and primarily their combinations, we demonstrate our values: Trubar’s courage in battling uniformity of thought; Prešeren’s vision of united nations, of a new era in which “we, free, vote for faith and the crew;” Cankar’s firm social democratic stance and his faith in a new society; Kosovel’s youthful astringency; Zofka Kveder’s establishment of women’s role in society and public life; General Maister’s courageous reflex. And resistance and state-formative movements. That is the illustration of our country. These names clearly delineate the space of our priorities. These names show where we belong of our own free will: in the core of the best legacy of the sons and daughters of the Slovenian nation. Our message is: we have history of which we are proud. And we go on.” An excerpt from Lukšič’s speech available at www.socialnidemokrati.si.

that promise. Instead, we have again been differentiating between ours and theirs, and not only in politics but across the board."¹²⁷

The appeal invoking a man, and the character, can be interpreted as a special form of relaxation. While PM Janša mentioned the traits of the Slovenian character, the Social Democrats referred to the values, the attractive politics, the sparkle in the eyes and the energy that will enhance human character. "Bringing a sparkle into the eyes of people, awakening trust in man and in peaceful coexistence among people, in people's freedom and in vigorous individuals are the main tasks of the Social Democrats. Politics must be attractive in order to appeal to the people to concentrate on their own opportunity and take a step forward in the development of their character."¹²⁸

The unexpected application of ethology actually points to a strange *Blut und Boden* mobilization of the masses grafted onto the party's own political ambition. Pahor's vacillation from vision to victories, became even more palpable in another prognosis:

"I have a vision of Slovenia that is at the same time a competitive and a solidary society. Without these dreams I wouldn't be able to push forward. I'd rather withdraw after all that. However, I imagine that within the next five or ten years Slovenia will be like other small countries: lively, tolerant and open to diversity. If we fail to surmount the experience of recent history, we won't have any future. Janša must realize that the public atmosphere is not as **relaxed** as he promised. One part of the public feels constraint."¹²⁹

This newly produced antonym, just one among many from this author, suggests a critique that touches on the issue of tolerance: the public would be relaxed if society were tolerant, is very likely the moral of this message. And quite unexpectedly, the Liberal Democrats, the leading opposition party, also began to strive for true relaxation. In the manifesto written by Dušan Keber, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia outlined their commitment to the future:

"Liberal Democrats accept our responsibility for future challenges. Our task is to find answers that will increase the freedoms and rights of individuals, equality of citizens,

¹²⁷ An excerpt from Borut Pahor's speech at the SD congress on July 8, 2006, available at www.socialnidemokrati.si.

¹²⁸ Taken from the Social Democrat's program adopted at the congress held on July 8, 2006; cf. www.socialnidemokrati.si.

¹²⁹ Cf. an interview with Borut Pahor: Uroš Škerl, "Bolj mi je do tega, da pade enotna davčna stopnja kot kakšen minister te vlade" (I'd Rather See the Removal of the Flat Tax Rate than of a Minister), *Delo*, August 19, 2006



relaxed mood and justice in society, the dynamism and competitiveness of economy and the preservation of the environment.”¹³⁰

As is obvious, the concept has become an accepted value among the opposition parties – *et ab hoste doceri* – without critical reflection or explanation of what it implies and what is meant by it.¹³¹

RELIGIOUS RELAXATION AND THE RECONCILIATORY MOOD

The concept of relaxation was not limited to the areas mentioned above, but also extended to those concerned with man, spirit and religion. In December 2005, at a meeting with President Janez Drnovšek, renowned politicians, representatives of religious communities and civil society exchanged their views, among them academics, theologians, social scientists and historians. The invited participants stressed the need for a profound dialogue between the two “partners” and respect for religious communities; they also broached the issue of the anticipated law on religious freedom. France Bernik, a member of the Academy, observed that an important shift had been made towards better relationships with religious institutions since the gaining of independence. The government and the faithful had been brought closer together thanks to a series of recent measures such as the re-incorporation of the Faculty of Theology into the University, denationalization of property nationalized after the Second World War and the return of this property to dioceses and religious orders. Religious culture was revived, and believers have begun to demonstrate a more relaxed stance recently.¹³²

¹³⁰ Taken from the LDS manifesto adopted at the conference on April 22, 2006; available at www.lds.si.

¹³¹ Pahor’s diction was closely matched by that of Jelko Kacin, the LDS leader, when he rejected the initiative “Partnership for Development.” “After all, history teaches us that those states that succeeded in accelerating their development first achieved the release of all of their creative potential. This can be done only in an open, inclusive and solidary society. Before the elections you enthusiastically spoke about a **relaxed** Slovenia, but today we can establish that there is no trace of this **relaxedness**.” See www.lds.si. The criterion for assessing the success of the political program is here again the achievement of “true” relaxedness.

¹³² Cf. “Odnos država-cerkev je treba negovati” (The Church-State Relationship Must Be Cultivated), STA, December 14, 2005. Christian ideologists also took over relaxation discourse. In an interview for *Delo* in 2000, Tine Hribar assessed their influence quite differently: “It is a group of theologians comprising Janez Juhant, Drago Ocvirk, Ivan Štuhec and others. There are less than ten of them, but they have been poisoning the intellectual atmosphere day by day, month by month, and year by year, or, to be a bit



The relaxation diction also touched upon the sphere of reconciliatory attitudes and respect for the dead. Such an attitude was adopted at the end of 2004 by the President of the National Assembly Feri Horvat of ZLSD. At the unveiling of the monument to the victims of the communist era at Teharje, he encouraged the gathering: "Let's try, let's make an effort towards a different, more **relaxed** and tolerant life."¹³³ This was also the spirit that suffused the column entitled "A Long Road to a Relaxed Slovenia" by the theologian Drago K. Ocvirk, featured in the Catholic newspaper *Družina* immediately after the elections. This road is a road away from totalitarianism seen in the light of its concurrence with the "victory of the Slovenian spring in the election" and the unveiling of the monument to the victims of the communist era at Teharje.¹³⁴

Relaxation further proved to be a handy Easter wish.¹³⁵ And not only an Easter wish. On Independence Day Janša said: "Today we can remember the fateful, courageous and good decisions in a **relaxed** mood. I wish you a proud celebration of the day of independence and unity."¹³⁶ Later

less acrimonious, they prevent **relaxed** breathing in Slovenia". Quotation taken from Hribar 2004, 544.

¹³³ Cf. brief news by STA, October 10, 2004.

¹³⁴ He says: "The President of the National Assembly, Feri Horvat, offered this encouragement at Teharje: 'Let's try, let's make an effort to begin a different life, more **relaxed** and tolerant. We can do that, as we ourselves are responsible for our common luck. Let's carry into the future this sense of interconnectedness and eliminate the traumas of the past. Teharje and the election results both show that we have opened the door for **relaxedness**; it is time it became our personal and social lifestyle.'" Drago K. Ocvirk, "Dolga pot do **sproščene** Slovenije" (The Long Road to a Relaxed Slovenia), *Družina*, October 17, 2004. The economist, Marko Kos, similarly delineated relaxedness one year later: "Ethics, too, should function as a regulator of interpersonal relationships. As Spomenka Hribar said, the foundation of democracy is tolerance, habituation to accepting differences and opinions that are different from ours, or do not agree with ours, or challenge ours. For her, reconciliation is not a compromise on some general level, but the coexistence of different opinions. If we unify around one truth, it is not democracy any more. It is something enforced which suffocates people and makes them phony and dishonest. There is no **relaxedness** in such an atmosphere. No creativity. Those media that attack different, sectarian thinking poison the atmosphere. That is not a road to excellence. That, too, is a prerequisite, that, too, creates a **relaxed** atmosphere. *Nova revija* gave a stimulating title to its 2004 collection: Relaxed Slovenia. That is a prerequisite for taking the road to excellence." Cf. Marko Kos, "Moč lobijev" (The Power of Lobbies), *Finance*, January 11, 2006.

¹³⁵ "More **relaxedness** and creative spirit that enables justice and love to breathe is a wish for this year's Easter; bringing with it some spring impetus, such as we repeatedly experienced in our recent history. Unfortunately, we are neither sufficiently aware of it nor do we sufficiently rejoice in it." Ivan Štuhec, *Dnevnik*, April 14, 06.

¹³⁶ "Poslanica predsednika Vlade Republike Slovenije Janeza Janše" (Communication by the Primer Minister Janez Janša), STA, December 27, 2005.

on, addressing the nation at the beginning of the new year, President Janez Drnovšek also resorted to the same convenient vocabulary. He wished a relaxed new year 2005: "Let us forget old resentments and begin the new year in a **relaxed** mood, with healthy optimism and satisfied that we are here, enjoying beautiful nature and peace, surrounded with good and friendly people," was the advice of the President, who is invariably neutral with regard to values.¹³⁷ Any mention of "old resentments" obviously has political connotations, so the attribution of "signifier" cannot be accidental in this case.

The *Nova revija* slogan could also be traced in the study of value systems among Slovenes. "Values among Slovenes and Europeans" by Niko Toš and Veljko Rus, deals, among other things, with the question of why Slovenes feel less happy than others and what should be done to alter the development of Slovenia so that in the future its citizens do not become even more unhappy. In their opinion, the announced economic reform did not inspire optimism in this respect. Presenting their findings, they concluded that public opinion surveys in the 1980s showed that Slovenia and Croatia, although close in terms of values, responded to social and political transformations quite differently. In Slovenia, the value systems did not change, while Croatians experienced a radical shift in viewpoints. The Slovenes continued to display a "certain **relaxed** attitude towards the issues of religion and the Church, while in Croatia reserve prevailed, or rather, a kind of limited civil religiousness. After the change of the system the picture changed: the Croats became very religious, including in terms of Church going, while the Slovenes remained moderately religious."¹³⁸

In April and May of 2005, the celebration of Liberation Front Day (the Liberation Front was a resistance movement during World War II), the 60th anniversary of the first Slovene government, the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and some other events, sparked heated debates over historical facts, particularly the status and the motives of the Liberation War fighters. Spomenka Hribar concluded that there was an insufficiently reconciliatory mood present on the 60th anniversary of the end of the World War II, May 9, 1945, the most beautiful day in the 20th century. History once more proved to be something that required from us a relaxed attitude:

¹³⁷ Cf. brief news by STA, December 30, 2004.

¹³⁸ Ranka Ivelja, "Reforma, ki se požvižga na stališča ljudi, je že propadla" (A Reform that Brushes Off the Opinion of People Is a Failed Reform), *Dnevnik*, October 29, 2005.

“If we could afford more compassion for people who suffered in the past and who suffer now, including compassion for the errors they made, we would be more at ease. And we would be able to rejoice in a more **relaxed** manner in the anniversary of the victory over Fascism and in the fact that we preserved our name: Slovenes.”¹³⁹

The battle for historical interpretation became a political topic *par excellence*, so no wonder that Lojze Peterle, the European parliamentarian and a high ranking member of the Nova Slovenija political party, realized the importance of a relaxed attitude not only towards historical facts and their modification, but also in the sense of the political openness of society towards historical research and the stance of historians:

“It is clear that I’m not proposing that the state should take on the role of historiographer, but that it should ensure a democratic environment so that the historian can trace the truth in a **relaxed** manner and without difficulties.”¹⁴⁰

For Spomenka Hribar, a relaxed manner is an attribute not just of a reconciliatory stance, but also of individual freedom and sincerity, of a viewpoint. In a polemical discussion with Vlasta Jalušič, after Jalušič, referring to a TV show in which Hribar was a guest, described her role as a “group portrait, with lady”, Hribar answered: “Those who sit with them are not with us. That is how Jalušič saw my public appearance. I’d say that it depends on how **relaxed** one’s viewpoint is: some noticed that I had a polemical discussion with the first, second and third interlocutor.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Cf. an interview conducted by Dragica Korade, “S sovraštvom si samo trgamo korenine” (Hatred Tears Up Roots), *Večer*, May 9, 2005.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. an interview conducted by Branko Maksimovič, “Peterle za prevrednotenje zgodovine” (Peterle Supports Revaluation of History), *Večer*, May 7, 2005.

¹⁴¹ Polemics took place in the readers’ letters section in *Mladina*, May 22, 2006.

THE RELAXATION OF THE SLOVENIAN MEDIA

Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.
Napoleon Bonaparte

The image of sport, as presented by both media, is primarily the image of gladiator games, with the numbers showing time, distance, height etc in the foreground, and, of course, numbers showing goals, hits and missed opportunities.

Nace Polajnar, a representative of the Ministry of Education and Sport

*The front pages of the media will feature the best and the most encouraging events at home and abroad. The motto "bad news is the best news" will be replaced with the motto "good news is the most encouraging news." Gossip newspapers, magazines and broadcasts will disappear. Life issues will be treated with sensitivity to the sacred and with a positive openness towards everything that is beautiful. **Mladina's** circulation will plummet causing its bankruptcy, and its employees will live off their past work.*

Ivan Štuhec, theologian

The first articulator of media relaxation following the establishment of the new government was once again Peter Jambrek. In his opinion, Slovenian media were indigestible since they did not distinguish between news and opinion, and we had to "stomach this fact with resistance."¹⁴² Therefore, the Slovenian media had to be reformed, so we were not surprised to hear that "a lot of **relaxation** work awaits us in this area."¹⁴³ The relaxing of the media was therefore implicit in a kind of control over the media, or at least in guidelines for journalists on how to distinguish between the two genres, that is, news and opinion – and not only these two. The demonized Faculty of Social Sciences that churns out journalists, the fortress of red communism as it came to be called, allegedly did not provide this kind of knowledge. Jambrek later added that the turn taken at the last parliamentary elections occurred because "people ceased to believe the media."¹⁴⁴ The media were evidently a hur-

¹⁴² The Omizje studio debate on RTV Slovenija "Slovenija med levico in desnico" (Slovenia between the Left and the Right Wing), RTV Slovenija, April 13, 2005.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

dle whose successful overcoming enabled the establishment of the new government.¹⁴⁵

This idea is intriguing and interesting: it took nothing less than mistrust of the media to turn the tide at the parliamentary elections. Jambrek's syllogism goes as follows: (1) until now people (firmly) believed the media; (2) the media sustained and upheld the previous government, but (3) people ceased to believe the media. Therefore, (4) the end of trust/confidence in the media caused the change of government. The importance of journalistic work and the influence of the latter on political events could not be more correlated.

In a very similar way, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel accused the media of being rude and malicious. He, too, missed the distinction between news and opinion in the media:

"I have a feeling that during the recent years harsh speech prevailed in our communication. The majority of the media production is intended for an immediate effect. I see a lot of rudeness and malice in our media. There is a lot of it elsewhere, too, in the US, Great Britain... however, apart from meanness, these media contain a lot of good, excellent, witty texts and careful design. It has become almost completely non-existent here. For example, I miss more proposals for the future, constructive criticism and professionalism. The distinction between news and opinion is a must."¹⁴⁶

The members of the Assembly for the Republic were also active regarding the media issue. On April 18, 2005 they gathered in the wine-growing region of Prlekija at the house of the ethical theologian Ivan Štuhec. This was allegedly a secret meeting at which they enjoyed the company of the head of the government and other ministers, although after the elections they allegedly resigned from the leadership of this civil society

¹⁴⁵ The media are an interesting area as regards relaxation. It is interesting that years ago Tine Hribar complained about Jambrek and his "absence of **relaxedness**," although they subsequently jointly enjoyed success at the Assembly. Moreover, Hribar stated that Jambrek was among the reasons for his resignation from the editorial office of *Nova revija*: "I could not stand them polemicizing about my text even before it was published – it was an editorial – and in addition, Jambrek prevented the publishing of Spomenka's [Hribar] text 'Relaxed Slovenia' in which she linked Kardelj to Mahnič." (Iztok Klemenčič, "Več kot le revija" (More than just a Journal), *Mladina*, January 27, 2003).

¹⁴⁶ Janez Markeš, "Pogovor s slovenskim zunanjim ministrom dr. Dimitrijem Ruplom" (An Interview with the Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel), *Mag*, May 11, 2005; available at <http://www.mzz.gov.si/index.php?id=123>. Markeš's connotation was correct when he asked: "More **relaxedness**, then?" (Ibid.)

formation.¹⁴⁷ Several days later, on April 22, they decided to present their findings and their views on the two issues hotly disputed at the time: the Slovenian media and interests in the field of the economy. Niko Grafe-nauer, a member of the Slovenian Academy, the editor of *Nova Revija*, a member of the Assembly for the Republic and a fervent right-wing sup-porter, was convinced that not all was quite right within the Slovenian media. He noticed that “continuity in thinking and in activity is excessive and there is a lack of **relaxed** spirit.”¹⁴⁸ He later nevertheless detected a relaxed spirit in “anomalous and other matters, all the way down to tab-loids. There, **relaxedness** is abundant, as is confirmed by the many law-suits we have been witnessing.”¹⁴⁹ Obviously, the author makes a distinc-tion between a genuine and a non-genuine form of media relaxation. Jambrek added that the main Slovenian media should represent “at least the main lines of thinking, ideas, lifestyles and value orientations in Slovenia and around the world.”¹⁵⁰

The obsession with the media continued into the first year of the gov-ernment’s term in office and acquired the proportions of a war. Initially, there was a demand that the media should be the subject of consid-eration. At some later stage it turned into an open warning that it was not advisable to tangle with the government unless you were in favor of it. Rupel exclaimed indignantly: “Have you ever seen a country that has media such as we do in Slovenia? I don’t know of any such country (...) My articles appeared in all world newspapers, but your newspaper rejected my texts – the texts of your Foreign Minister. Media policy needs to be subjected to serious and **relaxed** consideration. I don’t know of any coun-try in which the media so unanimously took a stance against the demo-cratically elected government.”¹⁵¹

This was just one in a series of addresses that he made in mid 2005, to the publishing house *Delo*. A call to reflect on the media in a relaxed manner should not be taken *expressis verbis*, since Rupel made a mis-take: his intention was probably not to propose a relaxed rumination over the Slovenian media, which in his view were overly critical, but to

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Vanja Pirc, “Nesproščeni mediji in gospodarstvo” (Unrelaxed Media and the Econ-omy), *Mladina*, April 25, 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ The interview entitled “Sem liberalec. Sem vedno to, kar sem” (I’m a Liberal. I’m Always What I Am) for the *Delo*’s Saturday Supplement was conducted by Saša Vidmajer, *Delo*, July 9, 2005.

appeal to relax the media. The media, presumably fed up with the old patterns, need to become relaxed, too. But whether a relaxed reflection on the media leads to a relaxed mood within the media was quite another, as yet unanswered question.¹⁵² Why at all should the media, that gigantic body controlling the sensibility of the masses, relax?

Ever since the parliamentary elections, the ruling political parties have held a very peculiar view on both the realistic and the desired state of the Slovenian media. The media should be balanced and “unbiased in a **re-laxed** manner.” The last *Delo Saturday Supplement* under the editorship of the subsequently removed Ervin Hladnik Milharčič (i.e. the issue that was censored by the editor-in-chief of *Delo*, Peter Jančič) featured an interview with the President of the National Assembly, France Cukjati. Answering the question of whether the media perspective on domestic politics was sufficiently balanced, Cukjati said:

“In my opinion it is not. I may be wrong, but a substantial difference is obvious between the presentation of the work of the previous government by some media and their presentation of the work of the current government. Or, between how they presented the work of the then opposition and how they present the work of the current opposition parties. It is easy to notice how biased some journalists were when presenting the press conferences of the opposition parties during the previous government’s term in office, and what an amount of attention they now devote to the press conferences of the current opposition parties. I think that the Slovenian media space still lacks a lot of maturity and a **relaxed**, unbiased attitude. But I am convinced that Slovenia, like any other democratic country, will some day find a healthy balance, when one newspaper will offer one opinion, another one a different opinion, or even one newspaper will offer two different views, and the like.”¹⁵³

Janša’s comment was even sharper. In his opinion, rather than being biased in a non-relaxed manner, the Slovenian media looked upon the new government with express disfavor. Janša thus mentions the “emotional and financial collaboration” of some writers and even the “demonizing of the new Slovenian government.”¹⁵⁴ Obviously, the impression

¹⁵² For more on media relaxation, see Boris Vezjak, “Sproščanje slovenskih medijev” (On Relaxing the Slovenian Media), *Delo*, January 7, 2006. I addressed this topic at the Journalistic Days in Ankarán in 2005, in my lecture entitled “On the Relaxation Techniques within Slovenian Journalism: New Philosophy for the New Media Era”. The lecture in Slovene is available at www.novinar.com.

¹⁵³ Dejan Pušenjak, “Celo na domačega psa nisem nikoli kričal” (I Never Screamed at my Dog Even), *Delo*, April 29, 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Taken from an interview for *Demokracija*. Quoted after Vanja Pirc, “Kdo bo zahteval referendum?” (Who Will Demand a Referendum?), *Mladina*, June 27, 2005.

that journalists were biased was now compounded by dissatisfaction with the coverage of the government's work. It is a question whether this was a fruit of his imagination or just an additional shallow excuse for a declaration of war. War was diagnosed almost literally, given that the Foreign Minister Rupel said:

"Slovenia has been witnessing a media war against the politics that has been implementing the program of **relaxing** Slovenia and the program of European integration. The citizens of Slovenia gave a convincing 'no' to Rop's and Kučan's political orientation, but their politics, now even more acrimonious, continues to live through the Slovenian media."¹⁵⁵

The gauntlet was thrown down and war declared, despite an old wisdom that a politician objecting to the media is like a captain complaining about rough seas. Rupel's famous and later widely quoted statement ("Somewhere else, media owners would think it over seriously whether a war with the political side that won at the elections and received many international confirmations pays off") from the same article became the target of many comments. The military jargon he used was not accidental, but for journalists it was too late. The relaxing of the media through takeovers and appointments of loyal people had already been decided on, so the designers of the new media landscape took the guidelines seriously.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Dimitrij Rupel, "Prihajajo slabi časi?" (Are We in for Bad Times?), *Mag*, June 22, 2005. In connection with the European constitutional crisis, Rupel drew attention to the role of the media, which should take a stand in defense of Europe: "The present time is not the right moment for settling scores, but for an answer to the question of how Slovenia as a whole will navigate through the whirlpool of bad times that are approaching. Sooner or later the Slovenian media will have to join in the defense of European policy, otherwise we may all be in for some unpleasant things." (Ibid.) A threat and an unusual demand to which the media should respond in accordance with the Foreign Minister's conceptions.

¹⁵⁶ The idea about the media settling the score with Janša appears pathetic and may have been just a weak excuse for what followed. Rupel piquantly described the situation: "And at home a new phase has been launched, of a revolutionary settling of scores with Janša and in support of the abandoned 'socialist' program. In this, special tasks and roles are fulfilled by the media linked with the previous government through capital and personal contacts. Such en masse, brutal and one-sided attacks on the government as practiced by these media, can hardly be found elsewhere in the EU. The media in Slovenia created a separate (virtual, fictitious) reality that has no connection with facts and real problems. A special feature of the Slovenian media space is that the majority of editorial offices (save for the honorable exceptions that may be counted on the fingers of one hand) practically made impossible checking, i.e. any confrontation between facts and media fantasy. The situation calls to mind the past era: we are all

RELAXING PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION

One of the first pinnacles of the relaxation process was the passing of amendments to the media legislation, and the RTV Slovenia Act in particular. In contemporary philosophical debates it is possible to speak about three predominant effective models for realizing and creating democracy, that is, three forms of democracy: liberal, participatory and deliberative. Liberal democracy, particularly as conceptualized by John Rawls, is distinct in placing emphasis on a series of basic human freedoms and rights through which the demand for equality, justice, or, for instance, effectiveness within the economic sphere of social life is fulfilled. In participatory democracy, the stress is on the role of citizens insofar as they are actively involved in (co)decision processes, particularly those relating to the sphere of political choice. Deliberative democracy places stress on the role of autonomous individuals and their interaction in an open and public debate, meaning public deliberation on matters that affect all. If we consider together these distinguishing features of the three models of democracy, i.e. freedom and equality, political participation and public deliberation, we would probably agree that all three elements are equally constitutive and intertwined aspects of every mature democracy. Freedom without participation or active citizens is meaningless and self-sufficient; political participation without freedom and equality is redundant and empty; and citizens cannot benefit from political participation and freedom unless they have the best possible conditions in which the free and transparent flow of available information enables them to assess and discuss political decisions affecting their existence and welfare. Philosophers like John Elster, Jürgen Habermas, or the Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen are important promoters of the idea of public deliberation and its influence on democratic processes. It seems worthwhile to repeat at this point that its essential elements are respect for pluralism of values and political orientations and a tolerant attitude towards diverse viewpoints and lifestyles, since the conceptual framework of public deliberation requires an open public debate on general matters significant for all citizens. Its task, therefore, is to encourage and motivate the political and civil involvement of citizens and their participation in the decision processes relating to social transformation.¹⁵⁷

accorded the one and the only truth manufactured by the one and only control center, which, of course, is not the government." (Ibid.)

¹⁵⁷ On de-democratic approaches related to the introduction of the new media legislation, see Boris Vezjak, "Dedemokratizacija Slovenije pod krinko demokratizacije RTV

The referendum on the RTV Act provided a good opportunity to put the principles of public deliberation into practice and take them seriously.¹⁵⁸ However, what we witnessed instead was an unusual relaxing of discourse. That Branko Grims, the bill proposer, would sweep aside brazenly the opinion of domestic experts and “so called” civil society was something we could have expected given his previous audacious and by no means self-conscious disputes with them. But that foreign media experts would be accorded the same treatment was beyond all expectations that relied on the already achieved democratic standards, including respect for differing opinion and for the expertise of the pundits.¹⁵⁹ The manner in which the credibility of experts was diminished was astonishing. Given the number of discredited opinions and persons, it would be possible to say that the strategy of discrediting was underway. I will only outline these incidents, even though they deserve a comprehensive analysis. The first example was in my view a case of “personal discrediting.” Karol Jakubowicz, the chairman of the Media Directorate of the Council of Europe was described as a “third rate official” (Niko Grafenauer) and a “eurocrat” (Miro Petek). The opinion of experts is worthless: “Those who have spoken so far were only abusive and nothing else” (the Minister of Culture, Vasko Simoniti); Werner Rumphorst, the

Slovenija” (De-democratization of Slovenia under Pretense of Democratizing RTV Slovenia), Vežjak 2005a.

¹⁵⁸ On the level of declarations, all is fine. However, the paranoid gesture of the (hypo)thesis that public television RTV Slovenia is under the control of Kocijančič, the communist clique (as Branko Grims said) and Forum 21 (as Danilo Slivnik stated) degenerated into the familiar effective manipulation, which perhaps, is not merely manipulation: several interpreters pointed out that the new right-wing government followed the principle of the mirror image of the criticized issue: it presumably fights for democracy, while proving all the while that it is not democratic; it condemns totalitarianism, but behaves in a totalitarian manner; it condemns the lack of media plurality and diversity of opinion, but it itself most restricts this plurality. Hegel’s thought that evil lies in the eye that sees evil could no be more true of the Slovenian situation: it fights against that which it itself produces, meaning that it fights against its own phantasm and fears inhabiting its very core. A critique that says that it itself follows the principles of the presumably communist government, falls short of its goal: this is not a repetition of the pattern but an immanent gesture of the new ideology.

¹⁵⁹ The truly surprising fact is that Branko Grims and the cultural minister Vasko Simoniti denied a series of statements by foreign experts or interpreted them differently: unambiguous critiques were understood bipolarly, even as attempts at praise (Simoniti on the opinion of Jakubowicz, and Grims on Rumphorst’s opinion). Grims even managed to apply all possible reading strategies to one and the same text: he described the 30 pages of a critique by the Council of Europe’s group as “worthless.” However, this did not prevent him from exulting over the courteous sentence introducing the report, which says that the law is good.

Director of the Legal Department of the European Broadcasting Union “lied wholesale” (Branko Grims), while “some members of the profession abuse their academic titles and the university to which they belong by selling ordinary political messages and prejudices under the disguise of the profession. Naturally, the government cannot include such ‘experts’ in the process of law making.”¹⁶⁰ Domestic experts, as it was said subsequently, proved to be fallible “gurus of public opinion.”¹⁶¹ Aidan White, the secretary of the International Association of Journalists, earned the label of a “wise man” after giving the insulting advice that “in Finland such a law would be acceptable.”¹⁶² The story of RTV relaxation turned into a complete argumentative and democratic fiasco.¹⁶³ The arguments put forward by the supporters of the bill were so unbelievable and fictitious that even their major populist effort to convince the voters only just sufficed to secure them success at the referendum held on September 25, 2005.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ These are Grims’s words referring to Slavko Splichal, a renowned international media expert and a professor at the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences, in a web chat room, August 12, 2005. Available at <http://www.rtvsl.si>.

¹⁶¹ “Grims predstavil ‘zamolčana dejstva’” (Grims Presents ‘Concealed’ Facts), STA, October 8, 2005.

¹⁶² Drago Jančar, “O čem govorimo?” (What Are We Talking About?), ‘For’ RTVSLO, September 2005, free brochure published by the coalition before the referendum on the new RTV Slovenia Act.

¹⁶³ One of the intriguing stories involves the “trot” used during the election procedure in the National Assembly. In voting on the members of the RTV Programming Council, the members of the governing coalition used ‘trot.’ This cast doubt that the political agreement had already been reached at the time of voting. The Programming Council has 29 members according to the new law, of which the election commission of the National Assembly proposed 21. Five of these were proposed by political parties, and 16 by the viewers and listeners of RTVS programs, universities and faculties, associations and other organizations of civil society. In addition, the members of this commission proposed five members of the 11-member Supervisory Board, all five nominated by political parties. The unseemly ‘trot’ episode was uncovered on January 11, 2006 by Dušan Kumer, a parliamentarian from the SD party, when he got hold of the ‘trot,’ as he named the scrap of paper with precise instructions on how to vote. This could have been understood as a coalition agreement made in advance had not the election commission, under the close watch of the public and pressured by objections about politicization, repeatedly reassured the public that every member would vote according to his/her own ‘conscience,’ autonomously and free from pressure. Cf. www.24ur.com, January 11, 2006, the article entitled “Novi vetrovi na RTV” (New Breeze at RTV), and *Spletno Delo*, January 11, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ For more on my analysis of 22 mistaken arguments, see Vezjak 2006a. Also, compare my article “Neznosna lahkost referendumskega varanja” (The Unbearable Lightness of Referendum Deceptions) published in the same collection (Vezjak 2006b).

Given the forewarnings, it was not a surprise that the new Slovenian government first embarked on media regulation, provoking remarks that the new Minister of Culture was primarily a minister for the media, nor was it a surprise that it set about amending the media legislation. The amended RTV Slovenia Act caused a political storm that led to a referendum and to heated, occasionally downright brainless, public debates. So, for example, Tone Jerovšek, one of the drafters of the law, asked in wonder: what would be wrong with public service television becoming governmental television, knowing that the government is responsible for it? And along the same lines, more than a month after the narrow victory at the referendum, Gregor Virant, the Minister of Public Administration and a prominent member of the ruling SDS party, recognized still another responsibility of the media. "There exist other institutions that should prevent corruption and fight against it ... the media, in the first place."¹⁶⁵

The media relaxed in this manner were assigned two intriguing new roles. On the one hand, public service radio and television as the first and foremost media in the country became dependent on politics and the government in office. On the other hand, they acquired a new role in the wake of the abolition of the anti-corruption commission – they became responsible for the systemic task of controlling corruption. However, if the government exerts control over public service media on the grounds that it is responsible for these media, then it exerts control over the agent that, in its opinion, should be controlling corruption. To put it differently, the government could not have chosen a better way of exerting control over itself.

It was soon obvious that relaxation was an erratic signifier that changed course (while concealing it) and moved in the direction from which it allegedly shifted away. Could it be that under the pretense of relaxing and liberating the media, securing independence of owners and editors, professionalism and correctness, we rush headlong into that from which we flee declaratively? From openness back to closure, from liberation to non-freedom, from independence to dependence, and from the free flow of emotions to suppressed emotions?

After reforming radio and television services, the relaxation spread to programming concepts. Vinko Vasle, the new manager of Radio Slovenia, tuned his programming vision to the political vision:

¹⁶⁵ This was the apology for dissolving the anti-corruption commission heard in the Trenja studio debate on POP TV, November 11, 2005.

"It is important to define a dividing line between programs one and two: if Ars is cultural and artistic, and if Channel One is an exhaustive and more demanding news program with a more serious basis, Val 202 should work towards a more **relaxed** atmosphere."¹⁶⁶

In much the same way, Vida Petrovčič, a journalist with RTV Slovenia and a columnist writing for the Catholic newspaper *Družina*, who is presented as a "penetrating and uncompromising journalist," wished for "a bit more **relaxed** presentation of information."¹⁶⁷ A member of the RTV Programming Council, Ivan Štuhec, noted the scarcity of humor in radio and television programs, so he proposed the widening of both programs, since they concentrated excessively on politics and sex. To achieve this goal, he "suggested that radio and television should begin a methodical search for humorists to introduce humor into all aspects of human life." The reason is indeed trivial. "Distance and a **relaxed** attitude towards very serious problems in our lives is generated through humor."¹⁶⁸

Relaxedness, or better said, ideologized relaxedness rather than just any relaxedness, was channeled and required a correct form of entertainment, since not all kinds of humor are relaxing in the right way, just as not every humorist is the right one or satisfactorily "universal." The point is clear: the quantity of political and sexual humor should be reduced. By devoting excessive attention to the democratization and pluralization of the media, the ruling coalition also diverted attention from the issue of media accountability. The media should be accountable to their owners, not the public or their own conscience. And if the owners are those who are appointed by the government, then everything is perfect. The media are "ours."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ In the next sentence he makes an unambiguous link between program content and politics: "I don't want my team to be understood as participating in political clashes because of certain events within the Slovenian media space. I'll look for professional people and not for ideologically contaminated ones." *Delo's* supplement *Vikend*, "Nova direktorja RTV brez obljub" (No Promises from New RTV Managers), April 21, 2006.

¹⁶⁷ RTV SLO, "Prvi in drugi", June 29, 2006.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Boris Vezjak "Košnik proti Hribarju" (Košnik against Hribar), *Večer*, August 19, 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. the commentary by Marjan Horvat in the light of statements by Jože Jerovšek, the chairman of the RTVS Supervisory Council. "If Slovenia wants to be '**relaxed**,' as Dimitrij Rupel likes to emphasize, it needs **relaxed** media, among other things. Yet this **relaxedness** of the media carries with it a new maxim for journalists – they have to become accountable to the owners, rather than the public and their own conscience. The break with the understanding of media accountability predominant until now has been 'professionally' explained by one of the gurus of a new harmony between jour-

The print media had no better luck. On taking the position of technical manager of the *Delo* publishing house in the autumn of 2005, Danilo Slivnik, formerly a journalist for the right-wing weekly *Mag* and a sharp critic of the communist regime in which he himself once participated, explained his appointment in terms of the relaxation goals. There is not a sufficiently “**relaxed** mood and other communication” at *Delo*, said Slivnik in response to a question from a *Finance* journalist.¹⁷⁰ In other words, by purchasing the right-wing *Mag*, *Delo*, the excessively left-wing oriented newspaper, became relaxed, and, to follow the same logic, Slivnik’s appointment had the same relaxation effect.¹⁷¹ The mention of Slivnik cannot be understood without knowing the background of the new jargon. Let’s suppose that the new slogan about media relaxation needs to be explained to someone not well acquainted with the situation in Slovenia, or translated into a foreign language and transposed to a different cultural environment. It could be the best way to expose its phe-

nalism and accountability. He announced that ‘in reality, the viewpoint that leading journalists and their editors in chief are accountable to the public and their conscience exclusively is simply a cliché’ because they ‘are aware that they were appointed by an owner, or capital, even if this capital is concealed in Slovenia and managed by some political elite.’ Marjan Horvat, “Javnost in vest sta zaveza, ne publica” (The Public and Conscience Are Obligations, Not a Cliché), *Dnevnik*, August 27, 2005.

¹⁷⁰ What has *Delo* gained through *Mag*? Slivnik’s answer to this question was as follows: “Owing to certain tendencies on the part of editors, primarily those of a recent date, *Delo* appeared as an excessively left-oriented newspaper, at least to part of the public. Because of this, it closed the door to many readers, which is certainly not good for a newspaper aspiring to be a national newspaper. The acquisition of a magazine that promotes slightly different opinions provokes a form of **relaxation**, another kind of communication, and that is extremely positive for *Delo*.” Monika Weiss, “Delo je najslabše v zadnjih desetih letih!” (Delo Worst in the Last Decade), *Finance*, October 10, 2005.

¹⁷¹ Politically motivated changes in the ownership structure of *Delo*, after KD Holding with Matjaž Gantar at its helm acquired an almost 20% stake in *Delo* in November 2005, set off the management crisis and partly the crisis in editorial work. Apart from that, journalists’ fears and expectations were also aggravated. The changes made possible the appointment of Danilo Slivnik to the position of technical manager, which soon led to the resignation of *Delo* CEO Tomaž Perovič, on January 20, 2006, and the appointing of Danilo Slivnik as his replacement. The latter was appointed by the new supervisory board, since the Chairman of the Supervisory Board, Robert Šega, resigned on the same day as Perovič. The supervisors required that Slivnik propose the new editor in chief within two weeks, but he failed to come up with a candidate within this deadline, so he was given more time to make the decision. The most frequently mentioned potential candidates were the previous editor in chief, Darijan Košir, the editor in chief of *Mag*, Janez Markeš, and Matjaž Erznožnik, a journalist for POP TV. On February 6, 2006, Slivnik surprised the public by proposing Peter Jančič for the editor in chief. Cf. www.delo.si, “Kandidat je Peter Jančič” (The Candidate Is Peter Jančič), February 6, 2006.

nomenclology. However, this self-evident relaxation would simply not be understandable to a foreigner, because this ideologem is associated with an impossible gesture: on the one hand, it is ubiquitous, and, on the other, it is conceptually absent. As Peter Jambreč would say, it primarily describes a transition from a state of suppression, and the Slovenian media are no exception in this respect. The media are bound for relaxation, balancing and pluralization, while their consumers will experience conceptual transformation of the Slovenian media space and journalistic work.

The president of the Slovenian media association Grega Repovž recapitulated the first results of media relaxation: the draft RTV Slovenia Act was negatively assessed by all relevant international organizations, the European Council and the US State Department, but it was nevertheless passed into law; also disputable were amendments to the Mass Media Act that changed the right of reply into the right of exclusive access to the media; since April 2006, journalists' movements through the Parliament building have been restricted; the term in office of the entire RTV Council was ended prematurely, as were the terms of the president and members of *Delo's* management board, Tomaž Perovič, Nataša Velkavrh Šuklje and Matija Vojsek, and the members of *Delo's* supervisory board, Tone Turnšek, Tomaž Kuntarič, Tomaž Košir and Robert Šega; also shortened were the terms of *Večer's* manager, Marko Tišma, *Delo's* editor-in-chief, Darijan Košir, a programming director at Radio Slovenia, Miha Lampert, a programming director at TV Slovenia, Mojca Menart, *Večer's* editor-in-chief, Darja Verbič, and *Delo's* Saturday Supplement editor, Ervin Hladnik Milharčič.¹⁷²

References to relaxed and non-relaxed media and editorial offices were used on many subsequent occasions, but most illustratively in the duel of the editor-in-chief of the daily *Večer*, Mirjan Lesjak, and the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Mag*, Janez Markeš. The two staged a real clash in a broadcast dedicated to (the absence of) media freedom, in which accusations about Markeš's non-relaxed manner acquired almost comical traits.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Cf. STA report, May 4, 2006.

¹⁷³ The following is a transcript of this conversation: Lesjak: "Well, I am convinced, and all colleagues, journalists and editors sitting here at this table would probably agree with me, that at this moment in Slovenia there are probably, here we speak about the most important media, only three editorial boards where journalists and editors are relatively **relaxed**. I'd say that others are not. These are, thank God, my editorial office, that is, the *Dnevnik* editorial office, or rather the editorial office of all *Dnevnik* publications, then the *Finance* editorial board; I assume that POP TV's is too, and perhaps *Mladina's*."

Even the Vatican Cardinal, Franc Rode, during his visit to Slovenia after a two-year absence did not miss the opportunity to express his view of the media landscape. After Sunday Mass at St. Nicholas's Cathedral in Ljubljana he spoke about the important changes in Slovenia and the democratization of life, naturally not omitting the “**relaxing** of the media space.”¹⁷⁴ Even one of the four intercessors expressed the request that cultural and media workers in Slovenia should follow the teachings of Jesus! The Slovenian media and their relaxation has become a matter of interest to the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia and the Vatican prefect.¹⁷⁵

Other media, I think, are seeing some tension between journalists and editors, along the lines of what will happen? Who will be appointed the editor? Who will be replaced? Who will be sent to another editorial office and so on.” Janez Markeš (*Mag*): “Do I appear **unrelaxed**? I don't understand this. I want to say, I don't know why my colleague Lesjak has made that list, and so on, but I can speak only for myself, that is, for my own editorial board. Go and ask them if they are **unrelaxed**. Now, what I have noticed today, or what I've been observing for three, four days, is that *Dnevnik*, for example, and its subordinate publication *Direkt*, were timing their attacks on Danilo Slivnik, or, I have the impression that it foists a kind of war on *Delo* in order to conceal I don't know what. The entry of WAZ into the system. This has just struck me, when I suddenly found myself in the same role, my colleague Lesjak listed it. No offense, please, what I want to say is, I haven't come here to fight, but to come here and hear that my editorial office is not **relaxed**, that upsets me a little.” POP TV, Trenja studio debate, May 11, 2006. The same reference was later repeated several times during the broadcast in an ironic manner. One could observe Lesjak's inversion of the point: those relaxed media are the “free”, not yet subordinated media, and those unrelaxed are the media taken over by the government.

¹⁷⁴ The mass held on June 4, 2006 was broadcast live, which caused quite a few complaints about the change to the schedule on national television, since this slot (16.00) had been planned for the live broadcast of the friendly football match between Slovenia and Ivory Coast. The report on www.rtvsl.si was: “Cardinal Rode expressed his joy over positive shifts in economy, democracy, **relaxation** of the media space and everything that contributes to improving the quality of life. At the same time, he feels sadness and ‘holy anger’ over everything that opposes these things.”

¹⁷⁵ The author of a leading article in *Mladina* thus commented on Rode's speech in the Ljubljana Cathedral: “And he mentioned the **relaxation** of the media space. The Cardinal certainly knows. No doubt, he liked the replacements of editors. One among the many proofs of **relaxation** is the fact that on Sunday he himself occupied more than a few minutes of airtime on TVS.” Jani Sever, “Počitnice stratega rekatolizacije” (The Strategist of Re-Catholicization on Vacation), *Mladina*, June 10, 2006. His comment on the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia was: “It cannot but be satisfied. It has gradually been turning into the state church. Or, at least, a privileged religious institution to which the government allocates substantial resources, which has its own economy and media and an extraordinary influence on public RTV, and which is successfully working towards creating its own educational field... All of this is a result of so-called **relaxation**, a policy that was announced before the elections and that began to be implemented when the current government began its term in office. That this would not have been possible without the help of the Roman Catholic Church is clear to both the government and the Church.” (Ibid.)

Yet the political takeovers and changes in ownership structure of the radio and television company and the *Delo* and *Večer* dailies, to mention only those most conspicuous cases that were not even denied, were not enough to please Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, so in August 2006 he again voiced his dissatisfaction. In his view, the Slovenes are self-focused and fenced off; we lack the “factors that would encourage openness towards the world and a **relaxed** stance. Naturally, the crucial role here is played by the media. The problem with the Slovenian media is that they are mainly intended for domestic use, meaning that they seek to satisfy internal needs almost incomprehensible to foreigners.”¹⁷⁶ While one year earlier he had complained that he had no access to the daily *Delo*, he now became its regular guest. Even *Delo*’s journalist Saša Vidmajer concluded in April 2006 that “foreign policy critique fell silent.”¹⁷⁷ Those differing voices moved to the readers’ letters section, says Vidmajer, since the mainstream media are under the control of the minister. “Henceforth, **relaxation** is measured according to the number of his appearances in the newspaper.”¹⁷⁸ Such irony aimed at Rupel and featured on the front page of the Saturday Supplement (that is, the issue that became a cult issue because it was censored by the editor-in-chief of *Delo*, Peter Jančič), later proved to be erroneous. Rupel was back in *Delo* with his total critique once again, claiming that the obviously still non-relaxed media were responsible for the low self-image of Slovenes. Evidently, the political takeovers failed to transform the media in conformity with Rupel’s standards.¹⁷⁹ In his words, the “Slovenian media scene is really poorly developed and unsuitable for media debates,” and it is responsible for the distorted and unprofessional image of the media-constructed reality and our contact with the world.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Dimitrij Rupel, “O vplivu Slovenije” (On the Influence of Slovenia), *Delo*, August 12, 2006.

¹⁷⁷ Saša Vidmajer, “21. stoletje?” (21stCentury?), *Delo*, April 29, 2006.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ “One of the greatest problems of Slovenia is its own image created by the media. The assumption that all is wrong is expressed more and more loudly. The media contribute to the erosion of national self-confidence which is extremely important in international affairs.” Cf. Dimitrij Rupel, “O vplivu Slovenije” (On the Influence of Slovenia), *Delo*, April 12, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

RESPONSES TO MEDIA RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Writing for the *Finance* daily in April 2006, Milan Balažič concluded that the new government understood editorial policy as necessarily harmonized with the election results, in accordance with the matrix of total democracy which cannot stand anything that is uncontrolled or opposing. In accordance with Jambrek's principle that media sustain the government, it is necessary to remove all ideologically "biased" journalists, editors, and even owners: "Intolerant political exclusivism is again held in high esteem; it uses autocratic methods to carry out the media revolution in order to fulfill the goals of the political party in power. The state apparatus, the financial sector, the media, economy, civil society - all have been affected by this seizure of the levers of power. The networks of autonomous spaces that make it difficult for the government to exert control have to be dispelled, critique has to be silenced, journalists must be robbed of their credibility and political alternatives discredited."¹⁸¹ The dismissed editor of *Delo's* Saturday Supplement, Ervin Hladnik Milharčič, commented thus on the situation:

"This government is in a messianic mood; it holds a sacred conviction that it has a lease on truth and that the task of the media is to disseminate it devoutly."¹⁸²

The government and some intellectuals went out of their way to convince the public that the media takeovers did not introduce the alleged bias into the media and that these takeovers were justified. One such response by the government spokesman, Valentin Hajdinjak, was that the media criticize the government so they obviously are not pro-government. It was an attempt to deny the concluding statement of the European Federation of Journalists, adopted at the regular annual assembly held in Bled, which says that the Federation is "deeply concerned with the recent intrusions of politics into the Slovenian media sphere, as well as by the ongoing lowering of social standards for journalists."¹⁸³ In denying the assertion of the EFJ that pressure on the media and journalists

¹⁸¹ Milan Balažič, "Le vkup, uboga gmajna!" (Band Together, the Downtrodden), *Finance*, May 15, 2006.

¹⁸² Jure Trampuš, "Intervju z Ervinom Hladnikom Milharčičem" (An interview with Ervin Hladnik Milharčič), *Mladina*, June 17, 2006.

¹⁸³ Cf. "Izjava Evropske zveze novinarjev o stanju v Sloveniji" (A Statement of the European Federation of Journalists on the Situation in Slovenia), available at www.novinar.com.

has drastically increased, and with it the possibility of affecting editorial decisions, Hajdinjak referred to the study conducted by the Institute for Developmental and Strategic Analysis, led by Frane Adam and Matej Makarovič, and commissioned by the Prime Minister's cabinet. It analyzed "the image of the government" during the period April 1 to 7, 2006. The conclusion was that within most of the categories analyzed, the majority of actors opposed the government. The conclusion of Hajdinjak and Makarovič was that the media were not mainly pro-government, and similarly there were no indicators that they have recently become such, but rather the opposite.¹⁸⁴

This conclusion is erroneous, and the methodology used in this study is probably disputable, if the researchers' goal was to prove that the assertion about the political takeover of the media was invalid (or their goal was abused by the government). Because, in such a case, the analysis empirically tested something else – reporting on the work of the government, and that for a period of just one week. The analysis showed that the media allegedly mainly criticized the government. So, whoever mainly criticizes the government, cannot possibly be under its influence. Is there anything wrong with this conclusion? Yes, many things. To the EFJ and others is imputed an assertion that they did not make, and then that assertion is proved incorrect through analysis. The European journalists' association concluded that the media were subject to political influence and that the government wanted to control the media. But Hajdinjak, or even the researchers, translated this into EFJ's alleged assertion that the media were pro-government. The difference between the expected and actual state is obvious. Perhaps the media have not yet become pro-government, so it is anybody's guess whether this could be merely a phase when the government hastily works towards achieving that goal by orchestrating changes in the ownership structure and consequently in editorial policies.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ "The negative presentation of the government and the Prime Minister is clearly predominant, while the government support index is 0.008, the lowest so far. It is evidently lower than in any period observed in December and January when it was 0.22 on average; there are 11.5 times more negative than positive opinions on the work of the government." (www.delo.si, "Vlada zavrača očitke Evropske zveze novinarjev" (The Government Rejects Reproaches by the EFJ), April 13, 2006.)

¹⁸⁵ It becomes even worse when one realizes that such conduct is quite probable: control and attempts at exerting influence would not be needed unless the media criticized the government. But this has not been the subject of this study. In order to facilitate the understanding of this denial, let us imagine a situation in which no media is ever pro-government. Would this be proof that the government has not tried to tailor the media to its needs? No. It would at best say something about the content of media coverage,

Other reasons stated in justification of the media takeovers were no less interesting. The fashionable explanation for pressures and removals was that the aim was to improve poor business results. From the story of RTV, *Delo* and *Večer*, the public learnt that their main sin was low ratings and low circulation figures, which legitimized changes in the personnel and ownership structure. The idea was, whether intentionally or by mistake, launched by the Prime Minister when he labeled the *Mladina* weekly as a low-circulation magazine, which in itself is a grave enough sin. The SDS MP Branko Grims, described as a media expert, soon added another original idea: "It is a fact that during the past years *Delo* demonstrated a lack of plurality, so it is not surprising that sales slumped. There were grave mistakes made in business and editorial policies, so *Slivnik* was probably chosen because he is believed to be able to reverse its backward slide. In my opinion, the choice was good."¹⁸⁶ Grims's deduction is clear: if circulation falls, one reason, if not the main reason, is the absence of plurality. And plurality is the demand put forward by the new government; it is the trademark legitimizing the apparently innocuous subjugation of the media. A question could be asked at this point: why should a low circulation be an indicator of the one-sidedness of the media? And why should political "balance", as this came to be known thanks to the reinvention of the concept by the *Delo*'s editor-in-chief, help to boost circulation?¹⁸⁷ There are no arguments, and even less empirical proof for such a conclusion.¹⁸⁸

but would not prove that the government had never attempted to take over the media. Accordingly, Adam's and Makarovič's findings by no means refute the viewpoints of the EFJ.

¹⁸⁶ Borut Mekina, "Nedolžnost vladajoče koalicije" (The Innocence of the Ruling Coalition), *Večer*, April 15, 2006.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Jančič primarily insisted on "balancing" in his candidacy for *Delo*'s editor in chief.

¹⁸⁸ Let us suppose the following hypothetical situation. For example, the *Dnevnik* daily is very successful. Does this mean that it is safely protected from a political take-over? Two conclusions can be derived from Grims's line of reasoning. If it is true that newspapers with low circulation have to be "pluralized," isn't *Delo* the first on the list of newspapers that should receive resources from the fund earmarked for media pluralization later mentioned by Grims? This assertion would evidently lead to the conclusion that so-called vertical pluralization could be a criterion for offsetting the poor business results of any media outlet! The absurdity of the statement, however, clearly proves something else: the tendency of the ruling establishment to finance the media that it favors under the pretense of pluralization. Grims has caught himself in a trap here: sometime in the future he would probably not be able to claim that the circulation of some newspaper he likes has declined because it failed to provide diversity of opinion, especially not so because *Demokracija* and *Mag*, for example, never aimed for the diversity of opinion.

The attacks on and the control over media companies were also defended by another logic of justification. "The media in Slovenia are free, but they have not been presenting the entire spectrum of political opinions."¹⁸⁹ This sentence is taken from the State Department's report on the situation of human rights in Slovenia for the year 2005. MP Grims rejoiced at this conclusion, so much so that he kept repeating the supposed "findings" of the State Department on many occasions. In his opinion, this assertion proved his old conviction that the media in Slovenia lacked plurality, and that was the cause for the legislative hustle and other similar activities related to the political changes within media companies. These changes will bring the greatly desired balance. However, Grims misused the opinion and by quoting it partially he changed the basic intention of the report writer.¹⁹⁰

The passage from which Grims quotes clearly demonstrates that Grims allowed himself a genuine pluralism of media reading: it clearly points to the opposite of what Grims attempted to convince us. The US State Department established that in 2005 the government indirectly influenced the media, that there was self-censorship within the media and that the influence over public radio and television increased. The point is evidently different, i.e. that the Slovenian media do not present a wide spectrum of political opinion, and this is very likely a result of the government's attempts to influence the media. Regardless of whether or not

To put it differently, you cannot give financial support to the media with low circulation (low in your opinion?) and at the same time throw ideological mud at the media on the grounds that their circulation is decreasing.

¹⁸⁹ Borut Mekina, "Nedolžnost vladajoče politike" (The Innocence of the Ruling Politics), *Večer*, April 15, 2006.

¹⁹⁰ It's a pity that the text was not translated, as that would have been the best denial of Grims's panegyric. His favorite sentence viewed in its original context clearly says something different:

"The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice; however, there were reports of indirect government influence on the media. The media were active and independent but did not express a broad range of political views. The major print media were supported through private investment and advertising; however, the government owned substantial stock in many companies that were shareholders in the major media houses. Three of the six national television channels were part of the government-subsidized RTV Slovenia network.

On August 31, the district court in Murska Sobota acquitted the five persons accused of participating in the 2001 attempted murder of investigative journalist Miro Petek.

There were reports that partial government ownership of media companies resulted in self-censorship in certain media outlets. In October parliament passed a law regarding national radio and television that provides increased government and parliamentary representation on the boards that directly oversee the public radio and television network." The report is available at www.state.gov.

this explication is accurate, the basic message of this statement was such. Nevertheless, Grims took this statement out of context and even pasted it onto the wall behind him when he gave a press conference.

Tine Hribar's adulation of the media takeover was no less unusual. In his opinion, in the past media were subject to greater control than they are now. But instead of assuming the logic "yours in the past, ours now", the ruling parties hid behind the slogan of "balancing" the media rather than admitting that they did just what had been objectionable when done by the previous government. Unusually, Hribar thinks that there was nothing wrong about the media takeovers, but that there was something wrong with the previous LDS government because it did not do the same. This idea is strange because it first denies the fact that "they, too" did the same, and then takes it as a proof of their culpability, impotence and incompetence.

"At that time, too, but the leaders and the young men in it, 'the children of socialism,' were not aware that they had, say, *Delo* in their hands and that they were the profit-oriented heirs to the fear we mentioned before and that their government was actually based on fear. They did not need to make any mischief, since all dirty tricks had already been completed. Their sin is that they did not distance themselves from those dirty things. Now, when they no longer have the upper hand over *Delo*, now they will realize what they've lost. The same holds true of television that was in their hands, too. Do you know what the ideologist Žižek and the HR specialist Golobič could have done with such an instrument in their hands, if they only knew what they wanted? They surrendered by shifting into neutral gear."¹⁹¹

This moral is unusual to say the least: you are guilty because you did not "use" the media (this is probably a euphemism that should read "abuse"). The implied conclusion is clear: there is nothing wrong with someone using that instrument.

¹⁹¹ Mirko Lorenci, "Intervju s Tineto Hribarjem" (An Interview with Tine Hribar), *Večer*, June 23, 2006. Cf. an article by Alenka T. Topolovec "Hribar, Žižek in Freud o slovenskih medijih" (Hribar, Žižek and Freud on the Slovenian Media) available at http://www.zofijini.net/mediji_hribar.html.



RELAXEDNESS AS A PHILOSOPHEME

Roughly translated, Gelassenheit means submission-yielding to higher authority: God, the church, elders, parents, community or tradition. In practice, Gelassenheit demands obedience, humility, submission, thrift and simplicity.

Diane Zimmerman Umble, on the Amish perception of Gelassenheit

The lesson was: if you have a very strong government you don't have to pay a political cost if you overrule the population. That's admirable. That's what governments are for – to overrule the population and work for the rich and powerful.

Noam Chomsky

Then how can you be justified in saying that cities will not cease from evil until philosophers rule in them, when philosophers are acknowledged by us to be of no use to them?

Plato

Before the parliamentary elections in 2004, the journalist Marko Pečauer wrote a provocative article for the *Delo* daily in the form of a “Dictionary of Slovenian Political Language.” It introduced readers to the Slovenian pre-electoral discourse. The term we are interested in is here described as follows:

“in a **relaxed** manner – without fear and without hatred = without apprehensions as to how the government would react. ‘We want to commit ourselves to the issues of the present and the past in a **relaxed** manner.’ / ‘The mood in the country is not quite **relaxed**.’ – (this term is almost exclusively used by the right-wing).”¹⁹²

The Etymological Dictionary of the Slovene Language by Marko Snoj says that the etymology of the term relaxedness in Slovene (*sproščenost*) is *prost* (free), and that other terms derived from the same root are *prostiti* (to make free), *proščanje* (making free), *oprostiti* (to pardon, excuse), *opročati* (to excuse), *oproččen* (pardoned, acquitted, excused), *oprostitev* (pardon), *sprostiti* (to relax), *sproščati* (to relax), *sprošččen* (relaxed), *sprošččenost* (relaxedness), *sprostitev* (relaxation). In Old Church Slavonic

¹⁹² Marko Pečauer, “Slovar slovenskega političnega jezika” (A Dictionary of Slovenian Political Language), *Delo*, September 4, 2004.

prostb means “plain, simple, peasant”. The Old Slavonic *prostb probably originated from the Indo-European root *prostHo-, composed of *pro- meaning “ahead,” “in front” and of the derivative from the root *staH- meaning “stand.” Therefore, prost originally meant “standing in front”. As Snoj says, the “standing in front” evolved into “prostost” in the sense of simplicity, plainness through the intermediate step, i.e. “standing apart.”¹⁹³

I mention etymology because it is what the true author of this concept, Martin Heidegger had in mind. The uses of the term relaxedness described in this essay consistently conceal the source of this concept, one to which political players do not usually resort. In fact, relaxedness, as used by the right-wing intellectuals gathered around *Nova revija*, is originally a philosophical concept (*Gelassenheit*), which assumed a different, particular function within Slovenian society of the anticipated “golden era.” However, purely philosophical concepts do not mix readily with everyday practices. At this place we cannot delve deeper into the differences between Heidegger’s original understanding of this concept and its “amendments” for the purpose of political mobilization and the explanation of the condition of society, culture, media and the economy. We will only briefly look at (a) how the notion of releasement, here renamed relaxedness, was articulated in Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*, (b) the differences between the original philosophical understanding and domestic interpretations, (c) the status of Heidegger among Slovenian intellectuals (those associated with *Nova revija* and the Slovenian school of phenomenology), (d) the philosophical applications of releasement in the Slovenian environment, and (e) other uses of *Gelassenheit*, for example, in the “relaxed” Amish culture.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF SLOVENIAN GELASSENHEIT

Badiou says that theory about a good state, a legitimate regime, the good and the bad in the community, democracy and dictatorship relates to politics only through a political detour, meaning the inevitable “fictive philosopheme.”¹⁹⁴ That relaxation has not been better articulated but remained an enforced, appropriated concept whose precise meaning is not known to anyone can perhaps be attributed to the fact that its articulation already existed. “Relaxedness” has been taken over by Slovenian

¹⁹³ Cf. the entry “prost” in: Snoj 2003.

¹⁹⁴ Badiou 2004, 15.

Heideggerians who used it in their articles and translations, and also more widely, in the everyday social context. When the *Nova revija* intellectuals decided to support the political right wing through the Assembly for the Republic, they offered to it a philosophical program without explaining its roots. Therefore, there are two possible explanations: relaxedness is part of their ideology relying on the concept of *Gelassenheit*, which by its nature requires this type of mechanism, i.e. to spontaneously do something one does not understand, or at least to talk spontaneously about a concept without understanding what the term actually stands for and whence it originated. The second explanation would be that its creators actually know what releasement/relaxedness means, but they chose not to mention who the author of the concept was. *Gelassenheit* obtained its copycats in politics, and this caused a shift away from its original source. *Sproščенost* (relaxedness) is (and here lies the tragedy (of the use) of philosophy) an established Slovenian translation of Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, which has been articulated in a philosophical discourse generally familiar to the author of this text yet hardly understandable in this case. It lent the title to the collection of essays "Relaxed Slovenia", to the name of the pre-election gathering and to everything that has been described in this essay.

The intellectuals associated with the *Nova revija* gained a reputation towards the end of the 1980s as important interpreters of politics, whose contributions to the processes of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, gaining of independence and shaping of the political foundations of the present Slovenia are indisputable. In this sense authors such as Tine Hribar, Ivan Urbančič, France Bučar and Peter Jambreč importantly influenced the understanding of the political circumstances and movements in Slovenia; they were co-authors of the Majnska Declaration; they took part in independence-gaining processes, and the establishment of parliamentary democracy; they assisted in the writing of the first Slovenian Constitution and the shaping of the first, Demos government.¹⁹⁵ The disintegration of the Demos coalition led to the political takeover by the Liberal Democracy, a party that was not close to the political right wing or the

¹⁹⁵ "The major part of the conception and implementation of the independence-gaining processes in Slovenia was accomplished by the Demos government, or the emerging right-wing, so the thesis that gained ground after Slovenia became a sovereign country was that independent Slovenia was primarily the product, or the result, of the effort invested by the *Nova revija* circle," say Gorazd Kovačič and Tonči Kuzmanič in the article "Pojmovanje države in nacije pri novorevijaših v 80. letih" (The Nova Revija Circle's Understanding of the State and Nation in the 1980s), *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, No. 215-216, Ljubljana 2004.

Nova revija intellectuals, so the latter's support for the right-wing at the parliamentary elections in 2004 was hanging in the air for a long time. The Liberal Democracy party was accused of crypto-communism, with Tine Hribar even imputing to it vulgar liberalism. This was the reason for the intellectual and ideological duel of the two philosophers: Hribar, as the ideologist of the right-wing coming from the *Nova revija* circle, and Slavoj Žižek, seen as the ideologist of the left-wing, i.e. the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia.¹⁹⁶

The difference between the influence of Slovenian Heideggerians on the previous government and the influence they exerted in 2004 was that, after thorough political consideration about the role of the state, nation and independence in particular, their influence became more exclusively mixed with the hard philosophical thought. While Urbančič's political vision of "Slovenianness" always drew on the concept of power, the Nietzschean will to power in particular, as well as on Heidegger's existentialism, Hribar and his circle found inspiration in existential hermeneutics and ontology. Therefore, it is possible to say that, in a certain respect, Janez Janša's march to power in 2004 was a philosophically inspired work of the *Nova revija* circle.

The collection of essays *Relaxed Slovenia* has, in retrospect, become the manifesto of this march to power, although the term is rarely used therein, so this cannot be the justification for the title of the collection.¹⁹⁷ As Hribar explained, his essay entitled "Re-vision" was excluded from the collection and remained unpublished, but photocopies began to circulate, so Janša could open polemics with him on television over the three scenarios from the concluding part of the collection.¹⁹⁸ Originally, the collection had the title "Settlement in the Name of the Future", and the only essay that corresponded to the subsequently chosen title "Relaxed

¹⁹⁶ For more on the liberality of the LDS that began to be doubted thanks to 'vulvoliberalism', as it was read by Žižek (among others), see Bernard Nežmah, "Filozofija dveh stolov" (The Two-Chairs Philosophy), *Mladina*, June 28, 2004. See also Žižek's reaction to Hribar's attack in Slavoj Žižek's article "Izpoved vulvoliberalca" (Confession of a Vulvoliberal), *Delo*, July 3, 2004. Hribar explained the metamorphosis of the term as follows: "It is symptomatic that to some 'vulgoliberalism' sounded like 'vulvoliberalism' from the very start, so they now cannot walk away from such a reading of the term. It is unusual, although in harmony with the sexual inhibition of otherwise 'liberal' feminist Slovenian women, that this reading first affected a woman journalist who covered the Assembly for the Republic for the *Dnevnik*." Cf. Hribar 2004, 641.

¹⁹⁷ As hinted earlier, the 1999 collection may have been a preliminary preparation for the 2000 parliamentary elections.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 143. Owing to such conduct, Hribar withdrew in protest from the publishing board of *Ampak* and the editorial board of *Nova revija*. *Ibid.*, 223.

Slovenia” was an “excellent tractate by Dean Komel,” says Hribar critically.¹⁹⁹

Jambreč nevertheless made an effort to include relaxation in his introductory text. He said that in Slovenia “freedom of the press and religion in themselves do not eliminate old ideological monopolies, nor can they **relax** intellectual torpidity, which is a consequence of the long lasting fear of total government.”²⁰⁰ Or: “Instead of intellectual freedom, autonomy and creativity the governmental bodies introduce into the university, school and culture the principles of bureaucratic discipline and hierarchy.”²⁰¹ The omnipotent and omnipresent state presents one “of the main obstacles for the development and release of creative initiatives.” We also need “inner **relaxation**” and “many-sided **releasing** of creative initiatives and energy.”²⁰²

According to Komel’s philosophical anamnesis of the state of affairs in Slovenia, instead of a relaxed being-in-the-world, we are overwhelmed by anxiety: “After gaining independence, and indeed even before that, we Slovenes succumbed to a state of general anxiety, which has become the prevalent reflection and expression of being and which inhibits **relaxed** being.”²⁰³ This has become a “general communicational pattern in Slovenia that is served to us, day in day out, by media laboratories, in either its raw or its embellished form.”²⁰⁴ This kind of mood that extends all the way to journalists is also reflected in the voices of presenters:

“Concern can be sensed in the voices of presenters, commentators and journalists even when they explicitly do not attempt to communicate something that raises concerns, which, to be honest, happens only rarely. And whoever is invited to appear on television must put on the mask of concern, because otherwise he is not deemed credible. So we could see even some perpetrators of commercial crimes expressing, without the slightest reservation, their concern over the condition of the economy. Moreover, surveys would probably show that Slovenes trust them. After all, thieves are all around us. How easily we succumbed to the idea that everything around us is just one big theft! And only this metaphysics of thieves-all-around-us can calm us down and entertain us. But even the entertainment must not be in excess – because it raises a great concern among Slovenes that it will do harm to the general culture.”²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ “The majority of contributions, on the other hand, correspond to the ‘Settling of Scores’, a subtitle that obviously stands in contradiction to the title,” said Hribar critically, adding that it was the reason for the disparity of viewpoints in this collection (Ibid.)

²⁰⁰ *Sproščena Slovenija*, 16.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 20.

²⁰² Ibid., 21 and 24.

²⁰³ Ibid., 325.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 326.

Heideggerians established that anxiety blocked the “care for living,” which prevented the possibility of having identity. Since there is no free being-in-the-world, we cannot become what we really are: “This can be realized only where being in the world is realized through a **relaxed** care for the whole and for the concept of ‘to be as a whole’.”²⁰⁶ Apart from Komel’s characterization, in which relaxedness is seen as a flight from bogus, existentially inconsiderate concern, which presumably makes impossible serious political life, all other mentions are non-philosophical in character and sporadic.²⁰⁷

The articulation of *Gelassenheit* is therefore modified to suit domestic needs, and it exceeds the philosophical framework. Heidegger addressed *Gelassenheit* extensively in his later works, first in a text with the same title dating from 1959, one part of which is *Conversations on a Country Path about Thinking* (this text belongs to the later period of his philosophical development).²⁰⁸ *Gelassenheit* as submission is a kind of existential and ethical imperative of letting-be. What does *Gelassenheit* actually mean in the philosophical context? In Heidegger, this term is anything but monosemous, and, as the editor of the German edition says, it has religious connotations and is a concept borrowed from mysticism.²⁰⁹

Releasement as a historic *prostost* is an equivalent of freedom and reaches beyond it.²¹⁰ In *Conversations on A Country Path*, Heidegger used three fictive dialogues to explain the “oncoming” essence of thinking that “arises from releasement.”²¹¹ To make things more complicated, this concept is riddled with difficulties within the field of philosophy and

²⁰⁶ Ibid 328.

²⁰⁷ I refer here to an article by Dean Komel entitled “Samorazumevanje Slovencev v perspektivi evropskega sporazumevanja” (Self-Perception of the Slovene in the Context of European Communication) (Ibid., 323-340) Komel perceives relaxedness and gives its variations in terms of “mood” explicitly. For example, he says: “The mood that prevailed among the Slovenes after gaining independence is not **relaxing**, but expressly oppressing, and that oppression has been increasingly day by day” (p. 324); “After gaining independence, we became absorbed by some general concern which has become the predominant reflection and expression of being and which inhibits every form of **relaxed** being” (Ibid., 325).

²⁰⁸ Heidegger 2004.

²⁰⁹ Ingrid Schuessler, the editor of the German edition of this work, remarks that it is not possible to say anything assertive about the concept, rather we can say what it is not (ibid., 257). “What the term *Gelassenheit*, ‘**releasement**’, should not mean is clear to me in many respects. But at the same time I increasingly less know what we actually talk about. We are trying to define the essence of thinking. What does **releasement** have to do with thinking?” (Ibid., 114)

²¹⁰ Cf. the foreword by Dean Komel, p. 265.

²¹¹ Ibid., 259. The reader “experiences mental conversation as a journey to ‘affinity’: An-chibasie, thinking from releasement”, says the editor on the cover page of the German edition (ibid., 260).

within Heidegger's philosophical thought. For Meister Eckhart, *Gelassenheit* meant surrender to God. The active moment of abandonment suggests that a man can abandon himself to God only after he abandons himself. With this, abandonment ceases to be 'abandon' and becomes commitment, and commitment may be understood as "releasement", because by abandoning himself the man becomes free of all created beings to whom he remains tied until he is liberated from his created self.²¹² Abandonment, or a state without will, and releasement, lead the man to freedom from all that has been created, so that he can be filled with God. *Gelassenheit* is the main episode in the search for mystic sources and affinity in Meister Eckhart.²¹³

According to Hribar, Slovenian translation makes it difficult to come close to *Gelassenheit*. In his opinion, a literal translation would be "opuščenost" (roughly corresponding to abandonment), but not in the sense of "opuščena navada" (abandoned habit) or "opuščeni rudnik" (abandoned pit), but reflexively in the sense of the syntagm "opuščen sem," meaning not succumbing to sadness or joy.²¹⁴ Heidegger strives for "**releasement** towards things," whereby he has in mind primarily the attitude towards the world of technical things – which should be set aside.²¹⁵ Hribar explained: "We may remain, or become, simple and calm at any moment. We are simply calm. We feel fine and good in some wonderful way. This is achieved by distancing oneself from the world of technical things and objects in that world."²¹⁶ The rejection of technology in Heidegger, as a stance towards the world of technical things, is surprisingly close to the resistance to the technical world demonstrated by the Amish, for whom *Gelassenheit* is a form of religious and social guidance.²¹⁷

²¹² Compare the entry *gelâzen, gelâzenheit* as "surrender" in the Dictionary compiled by Vid Snoj, in: Eckhart 1995, 510.

²¹³ Cf. Milica Kač, "Eckhartov vpliv ali suum cuique" (Eckhart's Influence or Suum Cuique), *ibid.*, 476-477.

²¹⁴ Hribar 1994, 49. "To **relax**" therefore means to be calm with regard to "both joy and sadness, and anything that might be the source of one or another kind of emotion." How far this Heideggerian explanation, which is close to stoic dispassion (*apatheia*), is from its political actualization in which joy is a demand and sadness and concern are rejected!

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* Hribar here recapitulates and quotes Heidegger's writing in the essay entitled "Gelassenheit".

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* Making meaningful the world of technical things and its essence is just one of the aspects of the principle according to which we have to be "open to secrets" and discover their true sense. "Releasement towards things and openness towards secrets go hand in hand ... Both promise the discovery of a new ground that where we can stand firmly and subsist." *Ibid.*, 50.

²¹⁷ For more on this, cf. e.g. Thomson 2000.

Releasement has many meanings. According to Hribar, Heidegger's letting-be, which lies behind this concept of **relaxedness**, is connected with the love that stands between Christian *agape* and unrestrained sex. Hribar identifies the lack of "**relaxed** eroticism." "In the same way that eros without *agape* turns into unrestrained sex ... *agape* without eros turns into obtrusive charity... *Agape* as a substitute for **relaxed** erotic, sexual life is not love but a form of self-alienation, hatred of oneself, and frequently of others as well, concealed from the self."²¹⁸

Things become even more strange if the letting-be required by *Gelassenheit* is taken personally. As Steven B. Smith says, *Gelassenheit* is letting things go their own way, their own course.²¹⁹ Other explanations seem to trivialize the concept of releasement. Michael Heim, the American translator of and commentator on Heidegger, explains it in the sense of relaxing techniques: "It's becoming a natural practice of things like Yoga, Tai Chi, Aikido, acupuncture, the medical theories of Chi-Gong. These practices are what might be a correlate to *Gelassenheit*. They are an alternative to the high stress of the mind-brain-visual focus of Western technology. Not like a substitute, but a complement, a counterbalance."²²⁰

Graham Parkes writes extensively about *Gelassenheit* in connection with Asian philosophies.²²¹ Heidegger's path (Weg) is close to Dao, while *Gelassenheit* is presumably close to *wu wei* (non-action). As the author says, Eckhart's and Heidegger's concept has its predecessors in the stoic concept of *apatheia* (dispassion), a state beyond passion and emotions.²²² John Caputo, the author of a number of articles and books, commented thus on Heidegger's inclination to mystic traditions: "It is hard to see how the 'releasement' for which Heidegger asks can continue to make any sense." The reason is that this releasement "is detached from its religious context, ... from its relationship to loving God."²²³

The term does have purely religious connotations, too. *Gelassenheit* as calm, or quiet, is a basic term used for a religious stance characteristic

²¹⁸ Hribar 2004, 121.

²¹⁹ Cf. Smith 1997. In this stance Stevens sees Heidegger's "unvoiced rejection of his Nazi past." Nazism became a routine; along with communism and "Americanism," it has become a form of forgetting being.

²²⁰ See an interview on the "Heidegger on-line" page at <http://www.mediamatic.net/article-200.5930.html>.

²²¹ Parkes 1990, 9.

²²² *Ibid.*, 85.

²²³ Quoted after Philipse 1998, 298.

of piety and is of crucial importance for understanding the life of the Amish, and their submissive attitude to (divine) authority.²²⁴ Therefore, among the Amish people, *Gelassenheit* is the key identity concept of their religious and social organization. It almost seems that structurally our relaxed Slovenia project follows the same principle, so a comparative analysis of the life of the Amish and of the Slovenes in the light of *Gelassenheit* would require more comprehensive research.

PHILOSOPHERS VS. THE SLOVENIAN GOVERNMENT

I would now like to touch upon the status of philosophers in Slovenia. According to Tine Hribar, there exists a “philosophical basis for the independence process in Slovenia.” It comprises the attitude of Slovenes towards themselves and their attitude towards Yugoslavia and Europe. It is found in condensed form in the preamble to the Draft Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia.²²⁵ He criticizes the preamble because it does not contain the syntagms “sacredness of life,” “human dignity,” and “civil liberties.”

In answering a journalist’s question whether philosophers are those who provide the intellectual foundation of the government or sovereignty, Hribar answered affirmatively. The philosophers establish “primarily the ethical ground plan” and the ethical basis of democracy. Democracy degenerates if it is not based on values; it turns into tyranny and dictatorship, as Plato established when he said that dictatorship arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme liberty, “such as was practiced by our Liberal Democracy party.”²²⁶ Therefore, the antonym of relaxedness is political unrestraint. Democracy is a relaxed order; tyranny is disorder. In 2001, Hrib-

²²⁴ Donald Kraybill lists the following traits of the Amish, all of which are believed to be the expression of *Gelassenheit*. In connection with personality, these are reserve, modesty, calmness and quiet; on the level of values: submission, obedience, humility, simplicity; on the level of symbols: dress, horse, carriage, lantern; on the level of structure; small, informal, local, decentralized; and on the level of ritual: baptism, confession, ordination and foot-washing. Cf. Kraybill 1989, 26. The basic information on Amish life is available at <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/amish.html>.

²²⁵ Cf. Hribar 2004, 194.

²²⁶ “The ruling LDS party exchanged **relaxation** for unrestraint, carefree attitude for non-chalance, interpersonal tolerance for the acquiescence of the state. The results are phenomena and events such as those we witnessed at the Lipa night club. Tolerance is justified and necessary in civil society, but there is no room for it on the level of the state ruled by law and order. And apart from that, the Constitution mentions the welfare state ruled by law and order, not the tolerant or compassionate state.” Uroš Škerl,

ar was not so generous towards the role of philosophers in Slovenian society, since he said that the “thinker should give momentum, but not provide propulsion.”²²⁷

Janša’s insult to philosophers just before the elections at the Assembly gathering in Maribor (“In my opinion this is what is going to decide the elections and not various forums and frustrated philosophers”) was followed by a response from the SDS’s PR agent, who first denied and then admitted that fact.²²⁸ The prime target of Janša’s attack was Slavoj Žižek, primarily because of the assumption that he was the ideologist of the Liberal Democracy.

“We should not be surprised that Slovenia has recently failed to make better or faster progress. At the program congress of the leading governmental party the participants were encouraged and animated via a satellite link with Argentina by their long-time ideologist Slavoj Žižek. His most emphatic statement this year has been: Three minutes of a good movie mean more to me than the luck of all Slovenia.”²²⁹

Although we should not forget that the political uses of *Gelassenheit* largely depart from its original philosophical meaning, it is nevertheless unusual and in a way obscure that the German philosopher intruded into the relaxed Slovenia program and became the flag-bearer of the project. Therefore, the current situation is surprising and ironic: instead of Plato’s state led by philosophers, we have a state led by a philosophical concept (among other things) without us being clearly told so, without

“Zaradi sle po lasti in oblasti” (Because of Lust for Possession and Power), *Delo*, February 11, 2006.

²²⁷ Hribar 2004, 578. In an interview for the *Mladina* weekly in 2001, Hribar said that “cultural workers, along with philosophers, lawyers and others, only produced adequate programs. Plato’s conception of the state is totalitarian, so I’ve never imagined, let alone wanted, philosophers to rule our country in any form. Wrong.”

²²⁸ Taken from the prime time news program *Dnevnik* on RTV Slovenija, July 14, 2004. Cf. also Boris Vezjak, “Moč argumenta pri slovenski desnici” (The Power of Argument among the Right-Wing), *Večer*, August 21, 2004; a reply by the SDS’s spokeswoman Marjetka Raušl, August 25, 2004; my reply on August 26, 2004; her reply on August 28, 2004 and my reply on September 1, 2004; all featured in *Večer*. In these polemics Raušl admitted that when Janša referred to a “frustrated philosopher” he had in mind Slavoj Žižek (“forum” was a reference to Forum 21).

²²⁹ From Janša’s speech at the SDS convention on September 28, 2004; cf. www.sds.si. The SDS leader obviously liked Žižek’s statement, which served ideally the goals of SDS’s electoral propaganda, so he repeated it several times. “Let them watch movies, perhaps they could appear in some. For example, in the one with the title “It Used to Be Wonderful while Others Paid Our Bills.!” (Ibid.) It should also be said that after the LDS failure at the elections, Žižek publicly stated that he was moving from Slovenia.

receiving an explanation of what stands behind that concept and why *Gelassenheit* is the concept that we need as guidance. The consequences of such a lack of understanding are evident and affect everyday political jargon and actions.²³⁰ A happy match between rigorous philosophical thought, on the one hand, and the new social moment, everyday political and personal use, on the other, has a fateful effect, so to say, but apparently it remained hidden from the eyes of its (discursive) users.

²³⁰ In January 2006, Niko Grafenauer clearly admitted that the Assembly for the Republic had no function any more, but he attributed a critical function to a relaxed Slovenia: "In the past we published a collection of essays with the telling title *Relaxed Slovenia*. A **relaxed** Slovenia is an open country, yet it evaluates critically everything that affects it on the European and global level, in the sense of civilization. So resorting to any kind of atavism is unacceptable; what is involved here is a stance as such and confrontation with all challenges of the time. We have to confront challenges as individuals, as a state and, undoubtedly, as a dynamic social community that has to be politically differentiated but also to adhere to the common premise that binds us together. It is only self-critical reflection that enables society to pulsate plurally as a live organism. Without it, it begins to vegetate." Cf. Mitja Čander and Aleš Čar, "Živimo v skaljenosti, v kateri vsak lovi s svojim črvom svojo ribo" (We Live in Murkiness where Everyone Fishes for Their Own Fish with Their Own Bait), *Dnevnik*, January 28, 2006. Later, the Assembly for the Republic recognized that its function could be continued through the Assembly for Ljubljana.



RELAXED METASTASIS OF THE MIND

The latter accurately reflects the energy model of Slovenia which I installed, together with approximately 50 participants at the gathering organized by the Movement for Justice and Development, near Štatenberg castle on July 16, meaning three days before the said crop circle appeared.

Marko Pogačnik, an artist who "cures the nature"

Some cocks believe that the Sun rises because of them.
Theodor Fontane

It is a group of theologians comprising Janez Juhant, Drago Ocvirk, Ivan Štuhec and others. There are less than ten of them, but they have been poisoning the intellectual atmosphere day by day, month by month, and year by year, or, to be a bit less acrimonious, they prevent relaxed breathing in Slovenia.

Tine Hribar, philosopher

If anything cannot escape relaxation, it is certainly the mind. In July 2006, crop circles appeared in a field in Prlekija. In the explanation of the deputy leader of the Movement for Justice and Development, their origin was not at all enigmatic: they were a result of the meditation of some movement members. Indirect indicators of the positive effects of relaxation in Slovenia are, among other things, a return to nature, openness, heightened awareness, and spiritual transformation, while the indicators of its negative effects are intolerance, discrimination and a release of "negative energies." In the positive context, one could mention the religious elements within the concept of relaxation, as are present in, say, President Drnovšek's Movement for Justice and Development, and slogans such as "Slovenia invigorates", that is to say, the tourism promotion slogan advertising the relaxation of oneself and others. In the negative sense, its associations are, for example, intolerance, discrimination, segregation, xenophobia and hate speech as new elements introduced by the political relaxation of the "Slovenian intellectual substance." And, one should not forget the "relaxation" of argument and logic leading to the lowering of the standards of commonsense and argumentation, or the relaxation of democracy in the direction of de-democratization and de-intellectualization of the social sphere.



LIBERATED STATES OF MIND

The topos of intellectual relaxation is soul, so let's begin with that. The daily *Večer* features a section offering advice on how to feel better at home, in your dwelling. Relaxation is also about soul. The effects of relaxing the soul are rather similar to those expected from reforms, despite some who would like to see the use of the terms as an unsuitable equivocation:

"Back pain usually causes a specific posture, so every movement becomes painful. An awkward outward appearance is usually linked to rigid inner posture. This condition can be resolved by a chiropractor who uses swift thrusts or force to release the locked up joints. Locked up souls attain **relaxation** in a similar manner. A strong and momentary thrust or pressure releases them from the locked up state and gives them an opportunity to regain their orientation in time and space. Usually, the fear of such treatments is strong, but relief from tension opens new possibilities and gives freedom."²³¹

Relaxation of the soul is not an imaginary concept: the mind and the soul experience it in the true sense of the word. Commenting on the journalist's question about forces that originated sometimes in the past and are the source of the signals that sway our political and national substance to the right or left and prevent it from making a step forward, Tine Hribar said that he saw a solution in the liberated mind and relaxed soul.²³²

Moreover, there is only one step from ease of the soul to ease of mind. Spomenka Hribar complained about spiritual regression compared to material progress:

"Yes, the state of mind in Slovenia is varied. There are areas that are unbelievably lively, and then, occasionally it seems as if our minds somehow got stuck. It is primarily within the social consciousness and political **relaxedness** where I miss a bit more of self-confidence and pride."²³³

²³¹ Antonija Krajnc, Kvadrati (Squares), *Večer's* supplement, February 30, 2006.

²³² "As I already said, a precondition for taking a step forward, to the realm of freedom of spirit and **relaxed** soul, is the burying of all those dead who have never been buried. In my opinion, the main guilt of communists is that they shifted their sin not only to us, the generation of their sons, but to the generation of their grandsons as well. Until this remains unresolved, your generation, too, will bear the burden. Only after that will you be able to begin a new life, without inherited burdens." Uroš Škerl, "Zaradi sle po lasti in oblasti" (Because of the Lust for Possession and Power), *Delo*, February 11, 2006.

²³³ An interview with Spomenka Hribar, "Moja beseda je veljala" (My Word Was Valid), *Delo's* supplement *Ona*, July 12, 2005.



Relaxedness and a relaxed mind could be the signs of religious calm.²³⁴ Christian calm is similar to inner peace as described by Alojz Rebula.²³⁵ A special type of relaxation of the political scene in Slovenia was ushered in by the spiritual transformation of President Janez Drnovšek, followed by the establishment of the parapolitical Movement for Justice and Development. As the leader of the Movement, and alternately of the state of Slovenia, he repeated the relaxation mantra virtually incessantly, combining it with the concept of positive thinking:

“Therefore, let’s rather think positively. Do not worry about what comes next. Peace and **relaxedness** in themselves can resolve many situations. Fear, worry and tension aggravate them. Easy to say but harder to do, some would say. How do you know? Have you already tried it? Perhaps you’ll succeed. But do not give up too soon. Be attentive, be aware, do not act perfunctorily, out of habit. Arrest the moment.”²³⁶

The relaxed mind finds expression through discussion, among other things. Paradoxically, relaxation is greater if there is no pressure from the public. When the chairman of the Higher Education Council (and the dean of a faculty), Peter Jambrek, closed habilitation procedures to the public (but university senates did not follow suit), he explained that this move would contribute to relaxed debate.²³⁷ This use may be trivial, but

²³⁴ A hint about the modernization of religion may have been given in the same sense: “It is my view that the Church could play an important cultural role, but it needs to be modernized, needs a bit more of **relaxedness** and playfulness, and primarily it needs to be capable of a critical attitude towards itself. There is undoubtedly a lot of wisdom in Christian teachings, but in my opinion it is not offered in an adequate manner. **Relaxedness** and playfulness are usually better proof of inner strength than belief in the system.” “Več sproščenosti in igrivosti” (More Relaxedness and Playfulness), unsigned, *Družina*, March 6, 2005.)

²³⁵ “When St. Aloysius played with his friends they asked him what he would do if death announced itself. ‘I’d play on,’ said Aloysius. That is Christian **relaxedness**.” Alojz Rebula, “Hudiču je najtopleje v katoliškem gnezdu” (The Devil Finds Warmth in the Catholic Nest), *Družina*, May 29, 2005.

²³⁶ An excerpt from the thoughts of President Drnovšek, published on his web page www.gibanje.org. Many articulations can be found there, beginning with the first thoughts published on this page: “Begin to rejoice in small things. Forget for a while about big things, problems and plans. You can be happy here and now, because of small things that cost nothing. And if you are happy, you do not have worries, and you are not burdened. You feel light and **relaxed**. You have made a turnabout.” Cf. an article by Urška Mlinarič on her first impressions of the Movement for Justice and Development web page; “Prve Drnovškove misli” (First Thoughts by Drnovšek), *Večer*, March 4, 2006.

²³⁷ “The members of the board can hold a more **relaxed** debate in a closed session; they do not need to watch every word, to worry about how to say something so that the journalist won’t understand it wrongly, interpret it erroneously and erroneously present it to



not so much in the light of the author's ideological and amply quoted preferences.

One should not forget the new national tourism promotion slogan invented in 2005: "Slovenia invigorates."²³⁸ A vigorous, strong and energetic Slovenia²³⁹ hoped to attract hordes of tourists with the help of this slogan and its relaxed culture, as is written on the web page "Slovenia invigorates":

"The Slovenian social and cultural space is the crossroads of German, Romanic and wider South Slav cultures. This characteristic of Slovenia enables guests to feel **relaxed** and at ease. On the other hand, cultural influences that converge here and intertwine in an interesting way ensure a manifold experience of our country."²⁴⁰

Relaxedness also sneaked into the description of the capital, into the pulse of Ljubljana.²⁴¹ The historian Janko Prunk reminded us that the Slovenian spirit resides in wine, too, which invigorates us in still another way. In the leading article for the April issue of *Ampak* entitled "Slovenian Spring 2006," he clearly correlated the effervescent expectation of the blessed spring with the joy and goodness that should overwhelm the nation, proposing that wine is one of the things that will take care of it.

the public." Cf. the interview with Jambrek conducted by Ksenija Koren, "Ponavljanje je velika razvada za fakulteto in za študenta" (Repetition Is a Bad Habit), *Večer*, June 4, 2005.

²³⁸ Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the slogan was first formulated in English or in Slovene.

²³⁹ The Latin term *vigorosus* carries all these meanings.

²⁴⁰ <http://www.slovenijapozivlja.slovenija.info>; see the section entitled *Stičišče kultur* (Crossroads of Cultures). The same page carries a text about the relaxing effects of mastering space: "Ability to master something produces a sense of safety and closeness. It is connected with natural facts (the diversity of the natural environment occupying a small space). The ability to master also stimulates the feeling of **relaxedness**, calm pleasure, which perfectly tallies with the fullness of the experience of the Slovenian natural environment." (Ibid.)

²⁴¹ Compare the following attributes. "Ljubljana has all the qualities of modern capitals, and at the same time it has managed to preserve the friendly and **relaxed** atmosphere of smaller towns. It is a lively city that holds many surprises. There are two explicitly different traits of its character that complement one another in an inspired and original manner: although it is most renowned for its historical heritage and tradition, it is a relatively young and pulsating city (the average age of its inhabitants is slightly over 30). While during the winter its dreamy Central European character comes to light, during summers its Mediterranean **relaxedness** takes over. Owing to this idiosyncratic combination of different aspects, it is a very original city, full of picturesque and pleasant corners where you can expect many surprises." Cf. http://www.ljubljana.si/si/turizem/utrip_ljubljane/default.html.



An open mind and the joy of things domestic are set against gloom, ill-humor, the painting of a bad picture of the government, and unnecessary criticism, in the media in particular:

“It’s been good and pretty cheerful in our Slovenian lands this spring. The majority feels this blessed good and joy, save for some born or trained pessimists and faultfinders in the Slovenian media. They paint a dark picture of our times, tell us that the government is bad, speak about indisposition among people and so on, although it is they, if anyone, who do not lack anything. They can write freely, in a sensationalistic manner, they can provoke ill-humor, they can criticize everyone and everything, and they are even well paid to do that. Some people share this kind of writing and disposition and approve of it. Simple and good Slovenes, as Trubar would say, do not pay attention to them. They live their normal, working and creative lives and are more or less satisfied, perhaps even cheerful. They are satisfied and joyful primarily because of that which we Slovenes like, and whose quality one can rather objectively appraise – Slovenian wine. Last year’s wine that is maturing now is good, nature blessed it for our pleasure and joy.”²⁴²

A journalist writing for *Demokracija* similarly described the SDS festival in September 2006. The site of the festival was close to the beach in Izola where Janez Janša and the leadership of his party arrived in a boat to the cheers of a crowd estimated at around 17,000. The tendency to associate relaxation, as entertainment, with the political slogan was clear:

»Last Saturday Simonov Bay hosted a crowd of several thousand from all over Slovenia, who came to attend a **relaxed** festival organized by the SDS. The somewhat surprising choice of Obala, to which clings the unenviable reputation of the ‘red fortress,’ eventually proved to be the big hit. The sunny weather and summer temperatures topped off the efforts of the organizing machine that produced an impeccable event. The lavish entertainment program created a **relaxed** and friendly atmosphere that continued throughout the day ... The party lasted long after. With this festival, the SDS not only indicated its wish for an even more **relaxed** approach to politics, but it also affirmed its readiness and determination to improve local political circumstances.”²⁴³

Our state of mind does not correspond to the descriptions in the media: social circumstances call for a cheerful mood; we are free to spread

²⁴² Janko Prunk, “Slovenska pomlad 2006” (Slovenian Spring 2006), *Ampak* 7/4, April 2006.

²⁴³ Cf. Mitja Volčanšek, “Sproščeni in samozavestni” (Relaxed and Self-Confident), *Demokracija*, September 14, 2006.



a gloomy disposition – since we live in democracy, of course – but luckily this does not appeal to simple good Slovenes.

RELEASE OF NEGATIVE ENERGIES

Apart from the benign and generally accepted effects of relaxation, we could also mention those whose purport can be interpreted differently. Perhaps it was not accidental that released energies coincided with expressions of homophobia, xenophobia, segregation and legal discrimination. Among other things, they yielded the notorious machine gun logic of problem solution, a pure and unpenalized call to kill.²⁴⁴ Has relaxation in Slovenia legitimized a new brand of politicians? A journalist and the editor of the *Mladina* weekly, Jani Sever, directly linked the two, referring to the example of the vice-president of the National Assembly:

“Peče’s is indeed the mentality that prevailed. Doesn’t the majority think that the Roma should have fewer rather than more privileges? Doesn’t the majority think that homosexuals should be a bit less equal rather than a bit more, not to mention full equality? They are different, aren’t they? Doesn’t the majority think that the erased people should not get anything, not even satisfaction, save for those rare exceptions who might have been the victims of an awkward mistake? And last but not least, doesn’t the majority think that Slovenianness is the highest value? Not individualism. Not freedom. Not equality. And not solidarity. In these new times, whose groundwork was laid during the period of referendums preceding the accession to NATO and the EU, public opinion became emancipated. Slovenia has undergone the process of **relaxation**. People do not fear to say what they think. At the same time, there are no rules on how to avoid hate speech. The public sensitivity to these rules has been relativized. Intolerant are those who draw attention to intolerance. And the condemnation of those who use hate speech seems to be increasingly impossible.”²⁴⁵

Even before the elections the theologian Ivan Štuhec identified inhibition in speech and in expression and put it into the context of what was, in his opinion, an unjust and erroneous imputing of xenophobia to the relaxation of public speech: “Ever since the erased people, the construc-

²⁴⁴ What I have in mind here is a message on the door of the SNS parliamentary group which invites the erased persons to join the dance with a machine gun. The incident involved the vice-president of the National Assembly, Sašo Peče. The story never saw its epilogue and the National Assembly never distanced itself from this hostile act inciting people to take up arms.

²⁴⁵ Taken from Jani Sever’s leading article, “Ni opravičila” (No Excuse), *Mladina*, April 5, 2005.



tion of a mosque, the law on homosexual partnership and intolerance became the main topics of our orchestrated media space, Slovenes have been ripe for the psychiatrist's couch, since the diagnosis is that we are xenophobic."²⁴⁶ Relaxed speech is here a positive trait and even imputed xenophobia cannot obfuscate it: whoever is against the erased, against the mosque, or homosexuals is simply relaxed.

On June 30, 2006 in Maribor, a group of ten anonymous individuals attacked gays and lesbians in broad daylight. One day later, the same happened in Ljubljana. Gay and lesbian associations demanded that politicians should unambiguously condemn this act. In contrast to some cynical remarks by other politicians, Prime Minister Janša commented that such acts did not belong in the concept of a relaxed society:

"Recent attacks on homosexual citizens are as unacceptable as any other attack on anyone in Slovenia. No form of violence against or intolerance towards those who are different, no matter whether of a different race, gender, nation, religion, ethnic group or a different lifestyle, is part of the concept of an open and **relaxed** society we are building. As citizens and as humans, we have to accept responsibility for our attitude towards fellow citizens and fellow men."²⁴⁷

Is relaxation simply a back label for nationally motivated violence, a way to legitimize silencing and submission in the name of the Nation, invariably serving as a screen for particular interests, which would justify the "hermeneutic" reading of the *Mladina* journalist quoted above justified? And, how at all can we overcome the antagonism between intentions and acts: the government wants to relax the media, so it takes away the autonomy of public television; it wants to relax school, so it introduces segregation for Roma children; it wants to relax the economy, but it fights fiercely for "national interests;" it wants to relax the attitude towards history, but proposes its own, "correct" reading of historical facts. Does relaxation here simply stand for an ad hoc legitimization of political motives, or is it just a predicament used to conceal the deficit of political vision?

²⁴⁶ "And we know that the Slovene man, raised to live in awe first by Austria-Hungary, then by Karadjordjevic and finally Tito's monarchy, never expressed his opinion in a **relaxed** manner." Quoted after Ivan Štuhec, "Ksenofobični Slovenčki" (Xenophobic Slovenes), available at www.druzina.net.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Iztok Šori, "Odločna obsodba nasilja" (Resolute Condemnation of Violence), *Večer*, July 5, 2006.



CRITICAL AND IRONIC RECEPTION OF RELAXATION

When the student is ready the teacher will appear.
A Buddhist saying

History is written by the victors.
Niccolò Machiavelli

The time to relax is when you don't have time for it.
Sidney J. Harris

Comments on the concept of Slovenian relaxation, either spontaneous or a result of deliberation, as well as trivialization and ironic articulations in the media and among the public were plentiful. Some of these have already been described above. This type of criticism, primarily political, and mainly ironical media coverage, provoked post-reflection among the power holders and a latent decline in the use of this concept and references to it. I will give only a few examples. In June 2006, Spomenka Hribar publicly expressed her disappointment, linking the conduct of PM Janez Janša with the conduct of President Janez Drnovšek: "A few days ago I opened a newspaper, and guess who I see on the front page? The President of the state with a plate of vegetables on his head. Or was it a flower wreath? And that was when it occurred to me that the time for deliberation has come..."²⁴⁸ In examining how the head of the state had responded to changes that took the course of "Janša's logic of the Communist Party", Hribar revealed her expectations:

"My assessments and feelings are no doubt subjective, but they are also disastrous. Generally, I think that libertarian Slovenia, one that has begun the process of inner, primarily spiritual liberation, or even perhaps completed it and already began to inhale 'relaxed Slovenia,' no longer exist ... What I see and feel today is confinement once again, not only ideological but of every kind, social and intellectual. Indeed, Slovenia

²⁴⁸ Spomenka Hribar, "Novi režim in naš predsednik" (The New Regime and Our President), *Dnevnik*, June 3, 2006.

is now magnificent; fifteen years into its independence it is even more beautiful, tidier, roads wind through the country, houses are painted, but many souls are in confinement, anxious and even frightened.”²⁴⁹

Among the reasons for this state of affairs, she lists the appropriation of the government on all levels, from companies to social politics to culture, the judiciary and the media. Hribar transposes the ultimate criticism of Janša government to a critique of President Drnovšek, accusing him of self-promotion and the mixing of two functions, that of leader of the Movement for Justice and Development and that of head of state. This accusation would later turn into a daily practice.

On the same day, the journalist Marko Zorko who was expelled from the daily *Delo*, wrote an article for the *Mladina* weekly entitled “Relaxed Metaphysics,” abandoning his usual critical bite. His linking of Drnovšek’s Movement to “relaxedness” has long since been hanging in the air: “Aside from that, such spiritual invasions tally with the image of ‘**relaxed** Slovenia,’ which is a kind of mascot of militant intellectualism that likes to visit the Assembly from time to time and then leave again.”²⁵⁰ Zorko then quotes from the broadcast *Pogovori* (Conversations) on national television, in which Aleš Erjavec and Božidar Kante, both university professors of the philosophy of art, summarized their discussion of how Slovenes experienced art, concluding that Slovenes should learn to smile in matters of art as well, instead of charging headlong into metaphysics. Zorko therefore writes that the participants in the discussion “reached a serious conclusion that the metaphysical stance in Slovenia should undergo some **relaxation**. So now it is **relaxed** metaphysics! Fine, unless it gets wild.”²⁵¹

Even the right-wing sympathizer Vida Petrovčič was critical of relaxation. Writing for the Catholic weekly *Družina* about the “**relaxation**-inspired swelling” of organized crime, and particularly the theft of cars or car parts from across the Ljubljana courtyards, she said: “As far as our courtyard is concerned, we are unanimous that this is not the kind of **relaxed** Slovenia promised to us before the elections.”²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Marko Zorko, “Sproščena metafizika” (Relaxed Metaphysics), *Mladina*, March 23, 2006.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Vida Petrovčič, “Sproščena Slovenija” (Relaxed Slovenia), *Družina*, June 4, 2006.

Matija Stepinšek, a journalist for the daily *Večer*, wrote about the physical attacks on gays in June 2006 in an article entitled “Knives and the Relaxed Slovenia.” “Intolerance, which has been sprouting across Slovenia encouraged by smaller social groups and even some political voices in Parliament, also destroys the coalition’s vision of a **relaxed** Slovenia.”²⁵³ The satirical annual issue of *Pipec*, published for 43 years now by the Celje section of the Association of Journalists of Slovenia, appeared at the end of June 2006. 22 000 copies were distributed free to the readers of the major dailies *Delo*, *Slovenske novice* and *Večer*, the local newspaper *Naš čas*, and P.O.B. users in Celje. “The most **relaxed** paper in Celje, as it was described by its authors in accordance with the spirit of time, this year again taunts and punches many who have deserved its satirical bite.”²⁵⁴

Jožef Kunič, a member of the LDS party and a candidate for mayor of Ljubljana, was also on the course of Borut Pahor’s search for “true” relaxedness. He touched on this concept in the last passage of the book entitled “For the Relaxed Mood of All”: “If we want ourselves and our descendants, including my granddaughter, to live in a truly **relaxed** Slovenia, we must not yield to syrupy, deceptive proposals such as was ‘Relaxed Slovenia,’ meaning ones that promise Shangri-la in this world. We will need to work towards this **relaxed** mood, to fight for it, and sacrifice if necessary. And not for the **relaxed** feeling of one part of Slovenia, but for the **relaxed** feeling of all.”²⁵⁵ Needless to say, acceptance of discourse on who is truly relaxed and in the right manner would be an unseemly acceptance of the enforced ideological framework, urging an empty following of the imaginary, non-defined signifier.

²⁵³ Matija Stepinšek, “Noži in sproščena Slovenija” (Knives and a Relaxed Slovenia), *Večer*, July 4, 2006.

²⁵⁴ “This year’s *Pipec* is also useful reading, as it provides, among other things, plenty of practical advice on how to survive in a **relaxed** Slovenia,” was how the authors promoted it. “*Pipec* does not falsify history but ridicules present times,” added the editorial board headed by Franček Kramer. See “Celjski pipec spet zbada in nabada” (*Pipec* Again Teases and Pricks), STA, June 28, 2006.

²⁵⁵ Kunič 2006, 158. Cf. the text by Marko Kosina in the book and on the cover page. Relaxedness of all must become “the main goal of Slovenian society”.



BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Language is the most honest witness of ideological contradictions.

Mikhail Epstein

Some day Janša will have to realize: everything that he does with the purpose of obtaining political advantage and power, and ever more of it, only lays bare his methods of political battle: pretense of ignorance, use of half-truths, vengefulness. And it also reveals his extreme short-sightedness, because of which he sees nothing but himself, not even his friends, not to mention the complexity of our recent history and its identity. So, the more Janša grabs the more empty-handed he is. Not by accident: aggressive behavior combined with half-truths and figments of his imagination cannot lead to lasting success.

Spomenka Hribar, sociologist

This book does not aim to examine whether Slovenes really want to attain a relaxed state. The implicit assumption suggests an affirmative answer: after all, ideologies have effect only if they successfully interpellate subjects and win them over. In his analysis of power, Michel Foucault says that the link between power and free rejection of submission cannot be broken. Citizens know what they do: the crucial problem of power is not the problem of voluntary enslavement. How could anyone wish to be enslaved?²⁵⁶ It seems that this approach was accurately and clearly confuted by Jean-Leon Beauvois in his *Treatise on Liberal Serfdom: An analysis of submission*. People submit voluntarily, and good definitions of ideology anticipate this.

However, it seems that in his analysis of subject and power relations Foucault said something that has relation to the gesture of relaxation. His proposal that power should be understood as “la conduite de la conduite,” meaning something like government of government, arises from the dual meaning of the verb *conduire*, which means to guide/lead others (in the political or other sense), and at the same time it denotes a mode of behavior and conduct within the given field of possibilities.²⁵⁷ The dual meaning of the verb, i.e. *conduire* in the sense “to guide,” “to drive,” and *se conduire* in the sense “to behave” or “conduct,” nicely suits

²⁵⁶ Cf. Foucault 1991, 115.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

the nature of relaxation: on the one hand, it is an imperative of power, and on the other, a demand with regard to conduct that is imposed on, required or expected from citizens. The dichotomy remains: no matter how the power holders aim for and promise relaxation, it is the subjects who have to attain it. If Heidegger's existential analysis makes sense, then relaxation is an individual act; it is invariably a kind of care for oneself, to stay with the French philosopher, *cura sui*, the technique of mastering.

The three relatively arbitrary functions of relaxation, i.e. as ideologem, as slogan and as a philosopheme, seem interrelated. The ideologem behind which lies an ideology, primarily of the *Nova revija* circle, the slogan behind which there lies a political awakening, primarily fostered by the right wing, and the philosopheme behind which lies a particular philosophy, primarily Heidegger's – all spill over into one another. It is impossible to draw a dividing line between the three, because they operate simultaneously. The indicated uses of the notion certainly do not suggest that it is articulated, but rather the opposite. The question is whether relaxation in Slovenia, as an ideologem, a slogan and a philosopheme, has become and is intrinsically meant as a backing for the negative effects of "relaxation" in the sense of negative changes? What is the true intention behind it? Is it merely a pretext for political and other modifications in the direction of different, less permissive and less democratic values, and for the introduction of political exclusivism, even for the release of "energy" in the sense of introducing non-democratic and autocratic approaches under the pretense of pluralization and political neutrality? And last but not least, is relaxation in the media field a term for the revolution within the media, media intolerance, political control over the media, a reason/excuse for achieving particular interests supported by a specific political party or the ruling power?

This book mainly looked into relaxation as a concept. Is the story about relaxation actually an (ideological) mythization, which is structurally – qua mythization – irrational? Is it equivalent to the story revealed by Mitja Velikonja in his book *Eurosis*,²⁵⁸ in which he criticizes the mythical discourse that accompanied Slovenia's accession to the EU? Was Tomaž Mastnak right when he detected in our journey to the EU the greatest monolithic thinking "in our lands?"²⁵⁹ Is the road to relaxation, Slove-

²⁵⁸ Cf. Velikonja 2005.

²⁵⁹ Quoted after Mastnak 1998.

nianess, the state of Slovenia, economy and society analogous to our road to the EU? Is it a search for surplus within ourselves?

The ambiguity of this signifier beyond aurate description, its emptiness of meaning and transcendental elusiveness, make it inevitable that in certain cases the quoted conceptual uses of “relaxation” escape the grip of the usual articulation only with difficulty. It cannot be otherwise. In a number of signifying uses the concept is invariably universal and therefore its functioning is very simple: it explains all and at the same time remains a systemic, project-based concept. It is a way out of crisis in every area. It is a diagnosis and a universal medicament at the same time. Let us attempt to answer the initial question: does this eminent concept conceal a special type of ideology? The answer could be affirmative. It usually operates by demasking and falsifying the structural reality of society which is antagonistic as such. It is a kind of battle of all against all. In some sense, relaxation has become a name for the demasking of the structure of society, for an unnatural state, appeal to the man and his genuine, already relaxed nature. It is a kind of appeal to return to humanity, man’s de-alienation and humanization. We are alienated from ourselves, from the essence, so we need the government as a new guide to lead us in rediscovering ourselves. And that is where the ideological power of this concept lies: reality is distorted, fetishized, mystified and mythologized, so it needs to be guided back to its true bearing, in accordance with the wishes of the ruler and his prompters, of course.

In 1996 Spomenka Hribar asked worriedly: “When will Janša attain, and will he ever be capable of **freedom** of his own spirit?”²⁶⁰ In some paradoxical way, ten years later, her question received an “answer of the Real,” since it seems that it was manifested in his and our program for relaxed Slovenia.

²⁶⁰ Spomenka Hribar 1996, 291. This is the concluding sentence in her “psychogram” of Janša, in which “freedom of mind” is written in bold.



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