

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA, JANEZ JANŠA,
AT THE MAIN NATIONAL CEREMONY ON THE OCCASSION OF INDEPENDENCE AND
UNITY DAY**

Ljubljana, 22 December 2012

Dear fellow citizens of Slovenia,
Dear Mr President,
Dear new Mr President,
Dear fellow citizens, members of the Italian and Hungarian National Communities,
Dear fellow Slovenians living abroad,
Your Excellencies,
Relatives of the fallen in the war for Slovenia,
Members of the Slovenian Armed Forces and Police in missions and duties,

Dear fellow citizens,

December is a festive month, a month of hope full of expectations, joy and happiness. It is a month when we usually devote more time to our relatives and friends than we do during the rest of the months, a month of good thoughts and best wishes. Through the collective historical power of the twenty-third December 1990, we also expressed such good thoughts and best wishes for our Slovenia. A decision was taken on something which every mature nation yearns for – a free and independent state.

When we laid foundations of our state, we believed that independence and democratisation would also bring us a free and fair society. Not a society of equality, which was utopian, but a society of equal opportunities for everyone in which people would accept both their rights and their proportionate share of responsibility.

This was an era of enthusiasm, courage and optimism. Economic and political freedom unleashed the creative potentials that had always existed in the Slovenian nation. Our creativity and competence soon placed us among the most rapidly developing EU countries. Slovenia became a member of the most important international organisations. We proved that we could reach the same and sometimes even better results under equal conditions. New prospects and new opportunities were emerging. It seemed that our path would lead us upward forever, that everything could be taken for granted and that in fact, no great efforts were expected from us.

When I addressed you and some of the guests in this auditorium five years ago from the same speaker's platform on a similar festive occasion, speaking about what laid ahead of us, the shape of reefs which we had failed to evade in good time and skilfully enough were already looming in front of us. It was then when I asked the public from this very speaker's platform whether we had not overlooked or forgotten something in the midst of all this development, enthusiasm and glittering success? Although our standard of living today is twice the one we used to have when we were deciding on a free and independent state, it still seems that we have overlooked quite a lot of things, considering all the discontent expressed in our country even on this festive occasion. I know that there is nobody today who is not aware of it. We know the things we have overlooked. We know what we have failed to eliminate in the transition process that we should have eliminated. We also know that we should have adapted more to the economic and technological changes in the global world and that we have not adjusted enough. Economic challenges that we are facing are not just a consequence of the global financial crisis and recession in the euro zone as we often hear, but are in particular the consequence of a persistent violation of the fundamental principle which reads: "Never spend more than you can earn".

Today Slovenia is economically and also politically integrated in Europe, but the Europe of our integration does not constitute more than about eight per cent of the world population. However, this eight per cent of the population living in Europe creates one-quarter of the world income and this quarter finances more than one half of the world consumption. But these formulas no longer work and as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel put it this week, such ratios will make it difficult in the future for even the most developed countries to maintain the existing social model and provide financing for everything we got used to during the past years, during the era of prosperity.

In our short period of independent economy, our budget was balanced only once, in the period from 2005 to 2008, when our economic growth was above average. But in that period, our companies incurred too much debt. In the years that followed and when the crisis struck worst, we borrowed all the money that we needed for mitigating the effects of the crisis. We know what we spent it on and also what we did not spend it on. Also on the account of obstacles of different kinds, we adopted the recipe of uncritical spending of the borrowed money, which was used only to mitigate the effects of the crisis, and all the time we were hoping that the crisis would just go away as some kind of a short storm.

If we had been able to step together back then and adjust the public spending at the very onset of the crisis, do what the economy had been forced to do anyway, more would have been left for investments and creating new jobs and the adjustment of budgetary expenditure today would be less severe and less painful. It would have been dispersed over a longer period of time and many would not even have noticed it. The confidence of foreign and domestic partners in Slovenia would be stronger.

Today it is almost unnecessary to declare that we have failed this exam; our citizens remind us of this fact. They say that Slovenia is not a state governed by the rule of law and not a just state. They say that we have become a country where greed and arrogance are valued more highly than fairness, diligence and hard work. Our citizens remind us that we have become a country where many people feel second-class citizens who are humiliated and above all, often disappointed. We have become a country where individuals and groups who have been enjoying different privileges for years and decades, still cling to them despite the crisis, no matter what the price. We have become a country where many young people do not see their future and cannot find an opportunity to realise their talents.

The life of every nation, and also every individual, is sometimes faced by difficult challenges. The time we are now living is such a time. Facing such challenges calls for introspection and we should ask ourselves what we have done wrong as individuals and as a society. What have we missed as a society and where have we taken a wrong turn on the path we embarked on, full of hope and trust, twenty-two years ago? All societies, not only ours, can quickly and easily fall in the trap of easy life, privileges and selfishness. The history gives us hundreds of such examples. But such examples are not only encountered in the history, they are also encountered today in Europe and elsewhere in the world. To put it simply, easier paths are sought where more difficult paths should be taken if we are to make the right move. I think this is where most mistakes were made.

The average gross wage in our economy is EUR 1,300 and the average gross wage in the non-economic sector is EUR 1,700. We need both, of course, a strong economy that will create new jobs and a quality public sector. A general agreement to this effect was reached when Slovenia was emerging as an independent state and when we were setting up the framework for our life together. We cannot provide more money for the public sector in the time of crisis than we used to before the crisis. In the Slovenian economic sector, there are 130,000 less domestic and foreign workers today than there used to be in 2008, i.e. 130,000 less people generating income in the economic sector today than before the crisis. At the same time, however, when jobs were lost in the economic sector, the number of employees in the public sector, in education, rose by almost 5,000. I believe that we do need them. However, we can only pay as much as we create. No public finances can sustain such a gap over a long-term period, therefore the expectations of workers and entrepreneurs, the Slovenian economic sector, for more understanding in the required adjustments, are not unjustified. The state, however, is a guarantor that, in good and even more so in bad times, must provide that burdens are divided fairly and responsibilities determined clearly. The new Slovenian President, Borut Pahor, addressed the same issues in his speech today. But in the rule of law, these responsibilities must also be enforced when mistakes are made and abuses occur. And this is where the worst error of all was made in our country. In the marshiness of transition and a specific systemic approach in education, the elementary feeling of what was right and what was wrong began to fade. This, however, cannot be regulated by the law, because it belongs to the sphere of general education and culture; that we are able to distinguish between the two.

At the very beginning, during the time of greatest abuse and illegal privatisation, the word »honesty« was stripped of its genuine meaning. This word was mocked about and humiliated. After a while, it began to have the opposite meaning in the public talk. People were mocked by being called “honest men” and “sub-honest men.” If a person was called an honest man in the nineties by the media, it was an insulting expression. And what was the final result, if we refrain from describing the details in-between: over 700 criminal charges for illegal privatisation and not a single final judgment.

Justice had been expelled from the rule of law. A stolen bike was a criminal offence, but a stolen company was just a big swindle, or not even this. It was said that a person was just smart enough to take advantage of the situation. Disarmament of the Slovenian territorial defence upon the oath taken by the new Demos Government was just compliance with the applicable legal system, whereas the armament of the new Slovenian army was criminal trafficking in arms.

The policy of the so-called national interest dictating that all major companies, banks, insurance companies and institutions should be state-owned, was utterly abused. It served above all to protect personal and group benefits of the national interest's

advocates. A simple glimpse at the list of Slovenia's richest individuals and their background interest groups shows whose interest it was really all about. The benefits from the national interest were pocketed by individuals whereas the damage was charged to the nation and taxpayers.

A decade and a half ago, Slovenian taxpayers were faced with a several billion gap in the state-owned banks. We fully covered it and nobody has ever been held responsible for the situation. Moreover, people responsible for the gap simply assumed their functions in the rehabilitated banks or in their immediate surroundings.

This, and not just the crisis, is the reason why we are again faced with the same problem today. In the recent years, Slovenian taxpayers invested almost a billion of fresh euros into state-owned banks through capital increase, but the gap still kept increasing every day. But can we think of a single case when an individual was surrendered to justice on this account?

During the whole lifetime of the independent Slovenian state we still have to do with ideological remains of the past that we have not been able to come to terms with; moreover, we have not been able to decently bury all our dead. These still lie scattered in the Karst caves and mine shafts across Slovenia without the right to have a grave, to the shame and scorn of all fundamental human values. It is no coincidence that today, in December of 2012, the public language vocabulary again contains the words that certain individuals use for the purpose of sending the people to Barbarin rov, Hude jame or of glorifying similar crimes against humanity. Single phenomena are not such a problem. Today, no modern society is safe from the left or right extremism. The big problem, however, is that the majority media space of this country has not clearly condemned this and similar phenomena.

Times that we are living are also times of protests. During yesterday's protests at Trg Republike, some of the individuals waved the national flags in protest against the Government that I am head of. Nothing is wrong with this. The Slovenian national flag that they waived in their hands is also their flag. When in December of one thousand nine hundred and ninety we were deciding on the independent and democratic Slovenia, we made a decision for a country where every citizen may freely express his/her opinion and calmly protest against any of its institutions. Everyone who does this with the Slovenian flag in his hands deserves my respect because this involves active citizenship.

But, there were also other flags and symbols. Some people protested by waiving the flags of the country and of the army which attacked us, which killed our brothers and tried to prevent us from using our right to self-determination. Or they waived totalitarian symbols which upon proclamation of the Slovenian statehood were taken of the wall and removed – maybe with too much dignity. I would like to quote the words pronounced upon proclamation of the plebiscite outcome in this same Cankarjev dom by Dr Jože Pučnik: "Yugoslavia is gone, this now is about Slovenia"!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think that after twenty-two years it is about time to say it out loud: Yugoslavia has disappeared and will never be back again. The same holds true of the past regime, although its scattered remains toughly resist the inevitable destiny which is that of landing in the dustbin of history. What matters now is Slovenia. Slovenia integrated in the European Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the present situation we have two alternatives. One of them is unification of our views as a society on the existence of the dividing line between the right and the wrong and on the non-existence of several truths, as well as serious fight against obvious delusions and by-ways of the present development, including return of the right to existence of honesty and justice. The second alternative, which is worse, contains keeping our hopes that things would change by themselves along with our staying at home on the election day. And hope that we will manage it alone, everyone on one's own. But we are plunging deeper in the swamp of apathy, impotence, rule of financial and political backgrounds and lobbies, and in the final instance, perhaps even chaos. In this respect, there was plenty of polemic, however, anyone appearing at the poll station in a jogging suit will be considered to pay more respect to Slovenia than someone wearing a suit and a tie but staying at home. For my part, I firmly believe that we will choose the first alternative. And that in this moment, when it has become more evident by itself, this alternative will have the same plebiscitary support as Slovenia had twenty-two years ago.

As a result, there is no reason for pessimism. We do have problems, but we will overcome them. External environment is demanding; it has not been so during the past twenty years, however, it is gaining on stability. The system of euro, the eurozone created the most needed defence mechanisms and will not fall apart. In the present protests, some are suggesting that Slovenia should leave the eurozone and introduce its own currency. This is not necessary. The European Union will not disintegrate, either. No European country is keen on leaving it. On the contrary, an ever increasing number of countries wish to become its members. After long years of crisis, the credit rating of Greece went up. In addition, following the issue of the Slovenian Constitutional Court decision prohibiting referenda, the price of financing our public debt was strongly reduced practically overnight. One single reasonable decision helped us save tenths of millions of euros that we badly need.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, which was an extremely difficult one, we managed to take some important steps necessary for the Slovenian economy to exit the crisis. In agreement with the social partners we halved this year's deficit. Consensually, what seemed utopia only last year, we adopted the pension reform. In doing so, we stopped the drop in pensions, stabilised the pension system and made it somehow more equitable.

Despite attempts aimed at inciting unrest just before the second tour of presidential election, we performed the job in accordance with all democratic standards without any mistake whatsoever. In the recent days, three systemic blockades were lifted; as a result, we have a valid public finance framework for the coming two years, and Slovenia can normally enter the New Year.

In spite of this, we all know that the year ahead will be difficult; however, due to what we have managed to do, it will be objectively easier. For the first time since the beginning of the crisis, we have at our disposal the instruments most needed to fight it.

As a Prime Minister, I wish for myself as few blockades as possible, since more than half of the energy needed to fight the crisis was wasted on their account.

Franc Jeza, a Slovenian writer, who for reasons of his sincere patriotism in 1948 was forced in exile where he spent the rest of his life without Slovenian citizenship, wrote in one of his works: "There come the moments when one is seized by a feeling that the present state of things can no longer be changed because it is too deeply anchored in the reality and psychology of the people and their living habits. To oppose such a situation would be like the chirping of a bird numbed with cold on a bare tree branch in the middle of winter. Its chirps are totally weak, they cannot chase away the cold and bring the sun. But the instinct tells it that winter will be mild and that spring is to come again, the splendid, sunny and green spring, and that such is the natural course of things, which is unstoppable".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twenty-two years ago, all circumstances, internal and external, were opposed to our independence. But we achieved it, in spite of everything. Because we believed in it! Of course, without highly set goals and taking risks and responsibility for them, good results cannot be expected.

For this reason, I take this opportunity to express my special thanks to all the deputies and delegates of the first democratically elected Slovenian assembly - you who are present here in this hall or who are following us in some other way - who twenty-two years ago by a huge majority voted in favour of the plebiscite decision. You deserve immense thanks and acknowledgment. The historical decision of the Slovenian nation would not be possible without this act. With regard to the composition of the first democratically elected national assembly, I would like to extend my special thanks and congratulations to the deputies of the Demos majority, who in November 1990 at the consultation at Poljče assumed an enormous political responsibility and proposed in the capacity of the Government coalition the holding of plebiscite. Without such courage, today Slovenia would not exist.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovenia was not created with the aim that its people would be worse off. Nobody voted for independent and free Slovenia for this reason. All of us, we deserve more. Our commitment is creation of a prosperous state for all, that is of a community where we can live and bring forward our talents, wishes and expectations; of a society where co-existence, mutual understanding and trust go hand in hand. Of a society where awareness will finally develop so that everyone can feel responsibility for him/herself and, at least, a little bit also for his/her neighbour. We deserve a just and social state based on the rule of law where life will be more based on reality and not just on rules written on the paper.

Our past, as painful as it may be, cannot be changed; it is the mother of our future. We should learn from it to be respectful, fair and truth-loving. These values do not rely on the existing differences but on the benefit common to us all. We have proved many times that we can. That we can overcome the most severe tests and that in overcoming them we are often able to come out even stronger. Could we possibly have our own state if we didn't believe that courage and taking risks pay off?

We've had enough obstacles and blockades in the past; let this come to an end. Today we have to enter into friendships and alliances in order to be stronger and more creative. As a result, now in this place, I am giving my response to the offer made by the new President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr Pahor, who pointed out in his speech that he would work toward connecting all political groups in Slovenia and acting as arbitrator, if need be, between politics and the social partners. I promise, on behalf of the Government that our door will remain open as always. We are ready to debate with all those who bear the responsibility for the future of Slovenia; we are ready to provide coordination on the measures that Slovenia has to adopt in the coming two years in order to exit the crisis, ensure revival of the economic growth and to become a more just country.

I believe that we are capable of doing this and that each one of us is able to assume his/her part of responsibility for the situation we are in and, as it has been said before, ready to forget eventual resentments.

As a society, we will still be torn between what we want - and this is on the increase - and that what we have to do. But, what today seems out of reach may tomorrow be well within our hands' reach. We have to pull together the best we have as a nation and we will be successful. All other alternatives are inferior to this.

The Day of Independence and Unity is a holiday of entire Slovenia. This is a holiday of the people who have proved in history that we never give up. This is a holiday of brave and creative people. It belongs to the people who feel their motherland and who wish to keep it nice and friendly, unified and independent for the future generations; for all future generations.

I extend my sincere congratulations to all Slovenian citizens on today's national holiday. I wish you a lot of Christmas peace, pleasant holidays and a happy New Year.