



**THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM**

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The Political Spectrum  
Dry Erase Marker on Whiteboard 5m x 5ft

24th August - 17th September 2006  
Waves Exhibition  
Arsenals Hall, Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga

The Political Spectrum was a collaborative artwork organised by Julian Priest that explores themes around radio spectrum regulation and was performed during the Waves exhibition at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga in August and September 2006. A white board was used to represent The Radio Spectrum – an infinitely re-writable medium for any possible communication and interaction. The participants were appointed several institutional roles: the museum – National Jurisdiction; the curators – The Government; the artist (Julian Priest) – The Regulator; visitors – The Public.

Starting with a blank white board, a data set taken from the frequency allocation database EFIS, provided by the European Radiocommunications Office, was hand drawn in a grid. The data is a textual analysis of the national frequency allocation tables of countries in the Baltic region and the terms displayed are harmonised across jurisdictions. Appearances of each term were counted for each jurisdiction and placed on the logarithmic scale from left to right on the board. Terms that appear once in an allocation table appear to the far left and those that appear 200 or more times appear to the far right.

Each term in the table represents a use of radio spectrum and the social or political group that has lobbied for allocation of frequency. The graph shows the relative success of political groups in settling boundary disputes during the long history of radio spectrum management. The Political Spectrum.

Access to the white board was mediated by The Regulator using different techniques taken from contemporary Spectrum Regulation. The Public were invited to draw on the board with pens in an Unlicensed Band, in the centre between the blue lines. The Latvian Band was left free from frequency data; the left part to be allocated by Beauty Contest to the best proposal; the right part to be Auctioned to the highest bidder. Coloured pens representing Technical Solutions were provided for use anywhere on the board to those agreeing to use only white space.

During the opening day The Regulator left the exhibition space for one hour for unscheduled refreshments. On The Regulator's return he saw that the crowd had disregarded the regulations, and had taken the provided pens and were writing all over the piece. The Regulator had to decide between allowing the participants to continue writing or withdrawing the regulatory approach altogether. Finally he was able to accept the change in authorship and reveal in the work of The Public who made the piece theirs. It should be noted that in what became an unregulated space, The Public largely used White Space and respected both the underlying frequency data and each other's lines.

The powerful reaction of The Public to the piece, underlines the strength of the urge to communicate, to transmit and for individuals to represent themselves in public media.

The piece was donated to the Economics Faculty of Riga University. A print was shown to European Spectrum regulators at the 13th CEPT conference in Berlin in October 2006 and now hangs in the offices of the European Radiocommunications Office in Copenhagen.

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