The Baltic Way – Human Chain Linking Three States in Their Drive for Freedom

1989 - 2009
The Baltic Way on the Pskov (Russia) Highway, an aerial photograph from a helicopter on 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
August 23, 1939

- Roughly two million people
- The Three Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
- A 600 km long human chain from the Toompea Castle in Tallinn, all across Riga and the river of Daugava to the tower of Gediminas in Vilnius.
The Baltic Way 1989 – 2009

• Events Prior to the Baltic Way
• The Course and the Significance of the Baltic Way
• Documentary Heritage of the Baltic Way
• The 20th Anniversary of the Baltic Way
I Events Prior to the Baltic Way
Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

• A "Treaty of Non-aggression between the Third German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" is signed on August 23, 1939.

• Appending the pact were secret protocols that marked the spheres of interest of the Nazi Germany and the USSR in Europe.

• With this pact both powers divided their influence in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.
The First Paragraph of the Secret Protocol

- Für den Fall einer territorial-politischen Umgestaltung in den zu den baltischen Staaten (Finnland, Estland, Lettland und Litauen) gehörenden Gebieten bildet die nördliche Grenze Litauens zugleich die Grenze der Interessensphären Deutschlands und der UdSSR.

- Only later was Lithuania added to the Soviet sphere of interest.
The Admission of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

• After the end of the Second World War the USSR denied the very existence of the pact and everything even remotely connected to it was made confidential.

• According to the official propaganda of the USSR, the presence of the Baltic states within the USSR was completely voluntary and the results of the elections were called upon to confirm it.
The Uncovering of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

• In 1986 M. Gorbachov began to approve a more candour approach towards the crimes of Stalinism.

• In 1986, during a USA-USSR conference in Jūrmala (Latvia) the USA demanded the USSR to cease the occupation of the Baltic States.

• The radio stations from Western Countries like “Voice of America” and “Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty” supported the propagation of ceasing the occupation.
The United Path of the Baltic States

• In 1986, the former political detainees from the Baltic States agreed upon organising different actions on August 23.

• On August 23, 1987, extensive actions of protest took place in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn and were dispersed by local militsia.

• Widespread national movements began to develop in the Baltic States in 1988.

• On August 23, 1988, actions of protest took place in all three capitals of the Baltic States.
II The Course and the Significance of the Baltic Way
August 23, 1989

• 50 years since the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

• A unified goal – the restoration of independence of the Baltic States and public acknowledgment of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.
The Baltic Way on Lenin Street (today – Brīvības Street) in Riga (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Boriss Koļesņikovs (Latvia)
The Grenctāle (Latvia)/Saločiai (Lithuania) border crossing point. In the centre – the then editor of the newspaper "Pedomju Jaunatne" ('Soviet Youth'), Andrejs Cirulis. 23 August 1989.

Photo: Vitālijs Stīpnieks (Latvia)
August 23, 1989

The Baltic Way was organised by the national movements of the Baltic countries:

• *The Rahvarinne* – the Popular Front of Estonia,
• The Popular Front of Latvia
• And the Reform Movement of Lithuania – the *Sajūdis*.

The practical organising of the Baltic Way relied upon the regional branches of these national movements.
A view of the chain from the Latvian side, looking into Lithuania.
23 August 1989. Photo: Vītaļijs Stīpnieks (Latvia)
The Baltic Way near Cēsis (Latvia). Aerial photograph from helicopter. 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
August 23, 1989

- People joined hands at 7pm o'clock, commemorating the events of the August 23, 1939, and demanding their international acknowledgment.

- The human chain ranged from Tallinn, all through Riga to Vilnius.

- People of various ages and social, national and religious backgrounds had all joined together in this human chain.
The Baltic Way on the Riga (Latvia) – Pskov (Russia) Highway
23 August 1989. Photo: Gunārs Janaitis (Latvia)
The Grenctāle (Latvia)/Saločiai (Lithuania) border crossing point, 23 August 1989. Activists from the nearby Brunava (Latvia) Catholic congregation with their priest, an ethnic Uzbek, born in Tashkent. Soon after the boy’s birth, his parents perished in the Tashkent earthquake in 1966. Having been brought up in a religious Latvian family, he entered a Roman Catholic seminary. Photo: Vitālijs Stīpnieks (Latvia)
August 23, 1989
in the Press of the World

• News headlines all over the world were dedicated to the impressive and important action of the Baltic states.

• Gatherings of solidarity with the Baltic states were held in Moscow, Leningrad, Stockholm, Melbourne, Toronto, Berlin, Tbilisi and in many other places all over the world.

• Newspapers all over the world paid a special attention to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its consequences in Eastern Europe.
REPERCUSSIONS OF THE BALTIC WAY IN THE WORLD PRESS

THE BALTIC RALLY IN THE CENTRE OF BONN
August 23, 1989
in the Press of the World


“Three-deep they stood, old and young, almost all carrying a votive candle tied with a black ribbon.” // “Human chain stands up against the Soviet Union”, Independent, 24.08.1989.
Photo: Uldis Briedis (Latvia)
August 23, 1989
in the Press of the World

“Yesterday's 400-mile-long human chain dramatically symbolized the shared passion for freedom of the Baltic peoples.”

“...human chain stretching 370 miles through Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in protest against the secret 1939 pact between Germany and the USSR which gave control of the Baltic states to the USSR; and to demand more autonomy.”
At the village of Masa, on the road from Karks-i-Nuia (Estonia) to Rūjiena (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
Foto: Gunārs Jaunaitis (Latvija)
The Baltic Way – for the People

- A unified goal – fair evaluation of the past events and the restoration of independence.
- The feeling of unity and fraternity both in national scale and in between all three Baltic States.
- Expression of believing in the ideas of democracy
- The symbol of unity – the song “Atmostas Baltija, Bunda jau Baltija, Argake Baltimaad”.
The Baltic Way in Vidzeme, a region of Latvia. Aerial photograph from helicopter. 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
The Baltic Way on the Riga (Latvia)–Pskov (Russia) Highway
23 August 1989. Photo: Gunārs Janaitis (Latvia)
The Baltic Way on the Riga (Latvia) – Pskov (Russia) Highway
23 August 1989. Photo: Gunārs Janaitis (Latvia)
The Baltic Way – for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

• The injustice that ensued as a result of the Second World War was publicly acknowledged.

• The Supreme Councils of all three Baltic States signed declarations of restoration of independence in 1990.

• The foundation of the unified path of the Baltic States in the following years was created – joining the European Union and the NATO in 2004.
The Baltic Way on the October Bridge (today – Stone Bridge). Riga (Latvia) was the central geographical point of the chain, and these three Baltic flags joined on Riga’s central bridge across the Daugava River. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vilhelms Mihailovskis (Latvia)
The Baltic Way – for the World

• The USSR officially acknowledged the existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocols and on December 24, 1989 it was announced to be abeyant.

• The abeyance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact showed the World the decline of the USSR as a superpower and contributed to the further democratic movements in the USSR and the countries of the Warsaw Pact.

• It demonstrated the Baltics as united and democratic region of the world.
The Baltic Way on the Pskov (Russia) Highway. Aerial photograph from helicopter. 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
III Documentary Heritage of the Baltic Way
The Baltic Way has left a significant documentary heritage:

- The organisation documents of the Baltic Way – letters, announcements, audio and video recordings of the meetings;
- Photo, audio and video footage of the Baltic Way, its course, organisation and repercussions.
Documentary Heritage of the Baltic Way

The National commissions for UNESCO together with the respective memory institutions of the Baltic States nominated this documentary evidence to be included in the UNESCO “Memory of the World” International Register in 2008.

July 30, 2009 the documentary heritage of the Baltic Way was proclaimed inscribed upon the UNESCO “Memory of the World” International register.
The UNESCO Programme

“Memory of the World”

• Conservation, access, cognition and study of the documentary heritage of the world.

• The “Memory of the World” International Register - documentary heritage that is of high significance for the whole world.

• The repository of the memories of humanity
The Nomination of the Documentary Heritage of the Baltic Way

The documents are united by:

- **time** / the organisation and course of the Baltic Way, July 15 to August 23, 1989.

- **place** / documents during and along the Baltic Way – in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

- **people** / the Baltic Way was positively international – Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Russians, Belorussians, Poles, Tatars and other nationalities participated in it.

- **Subject and theme** / the action of people in the name of a significant political goal, neglecting the risk and standing up for human rights.
The nomination of the Baltic Way by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

“The Baltic Way – Human Chain Linking Three States in Their Drive for Freedom”
IV The 20th Anniversary of the Baltic Way
2009 – 20th Anniversary of the Baltic Way

“It was a special day and I didn't even consider of not going and not participating [...] We stood in a place that was free. But the Akmens [Stone] bridge was crowded. We stood with our hands joined and risen above our heads and foreign tourists which had come out of a hotel in Pārdaugava were astonished and took pictures of us [...] We stood for a more honest Latvia and were hoping that the government would be more considerate and understanding of it's people, – tells participant of the Baltic Way Zenta Denisova.”

Proudly holding a flag that had been forbidden for half a century. The Baltic on the October Bridge (today – Stone Bridge) in Riga (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Uldis Briedis (Latvia)
2009 – 20th Anniversary of the Baltic Way

“In the evening of August 23, at 7pm o'clock the residents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, from border to border for 600 kilometers joined their hands in order to tell the world “We want our independence and countries back – a free Estonia, free Latvia and free Lithuania!” Hundreds of journalists were filming the Baltic Way and it was broadcast by all major news channels of the world. The Baltic problem was no longer just a political and diplomatic issue, it had gained a wide support in the Western society. If we bother to take a look in the bibliography, the statistical increase of the publications on Baltic states is clearly visible.” – remembers Sandra Kalniete, one of the organizers of the Baltic Way.

Departing from a legacy of the past, in a rally near the Masa village in Estonia. 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
2009 –
20th Anniversary of the Baltic Way

- The Baltic Way – a symbol of unity of the Baltic states.
- The Baltic Way – a symbol of common aspirations for restoring the independence of the Baltic States.
- The Baltic Way – a symbol of spiritual unity to face the injustice of the past.
- The Baltic Way – a historical symbol of the power of non-violent action.
On August 23, 2009 it will be the 70 years since the darkest day in the history of the Baltic States and 20 years since the unity of the Baltic States managed to change the course of history.

Commemorative events: www.balticway.net
The Riga (Latvia) - Bauska (Latvia) - Panevėžys (Lithuania) Highway at the Riga bypass. 23 August 1989. Photo: Māris Zemgalietis (Latvia)
Commemorative Events of the Baltic Way

Events organized by the Baltic Assembly:

• Driving along the path of the Baltic Way and lighting of the Baltic torch.

• Awarding of the initiators and main organizers of the Baltic Way with the medal of the Baltic Assembly.

• Festive parlamentarian session on August 23 in Vilnius with the participation of the chairmen of the parliaments of the three Baltic States.
Commemorative Events of the Baltic Way

On September 8, 2009 commemorative events will be organised in the French Senate by the embassies of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania:


• Traveling photo exhibition “The Baltic Way that Moved the World”;

• Screening of documentary movies of the Baltic Way.
Commemorative Events of the Baltic Way

The joint project of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO and Museum of the Occupation of Latvia “The Baltic Way and schools: the living memories” for the history teachers of the Baltic states:

• A study of the school history textbooks;

• Development of a methodological material on how to include and present the Baltic Way in the school curricula.
Commemorative Events of the Baltic Way

Events all over the Baltic States – in Ape, Ilzene, Padedze, Trapene, Valmiera, Naukšēni, Karksi, Vireši, Smiltene, Valka, Bauska, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Viļņa, Sigulda, Tallina, Rīga ...
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1989 – 2009

Thank you for your attention!
The Vilnius (Lithuania) - Panevėžys (Lithuania) - Riga (Latvia) Highway in Lithuania, just 10 km from the capital Vilnius. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vladas Sciavinskas (Lithuania)
• The presentation was prepared by the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO

• The materials from the nomination file “The Baltic Way – human chain linking three states in their drive for freedom” of the nomination for the international registry “Memory of the World” were used for this presentation, as well as the reproductions of the collections of Museum of the Popular Front of Latvia.

• The photos of the travelling photo exhibition “Baltic Way that Moved the World” were also used in this presentation. Latvian National Commission for UNESCO thanks for the support in developing this presentation to the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and photographer I.Znotiņš

• Design by Kārlis Vilītis.