THE BALTIC WAY

THAT MOVED THE WORLD

AUGUST 23, 1989

An exhibition dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the human chain linking three Baltic states in their drive for freedom
The Baltic Way on the Pskov (Russia) Highway, an aerial photograph from a helicopter on 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
The world was moved by the sheer audacity of the Baltic way. By the passion of the people involved. By the commitment of so many, against such enormous odds. But when 2 million Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians joined hands across their Baltic homelands to demonstrate their desire for independence, they showed the world the Baltic Way to freedom.

August 23, 1989 was the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet-Nazi plot to rule of Europe. The popular fronts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania chose this day to send a message to Moscow that a half century of illegal Soviet rule was about to end. Two million Baltic men, women and children formed a living chain that extended for 600 km and linked the three Baltic capitals of Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius.

In support, the Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians living in exile gathered in Bonn (Germany) and Toronto (Canada), at the same time as millions of their compatriots behind the Iron Curtain, to demand freedom for the Baltic states. Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall signaled change in Central Europe, this remarkable show of unity by the Baltic Sea made headlines around the world. It was here, that the ‘Singing Revolution’ of the Baltic States got its name.

Two years later, in 1991, the goal of the Baltic Way was achieved and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania restored their full independence.

This year, the people of the Baltic states mark the 20th anniversary of this historic event, and hope that the next generations will remember how their lands regained their freedom.
In the morning of 23 August 1989, Uldis was to go on a helicopter flight, to document the Baltic Way. He, however, declined this unique opportunity, as he believed it was more important to photograph the funeral of Kārlis Krūmiņš, a Latvian who had perished in the Soviet Army. Photo: Uldis Briedis (Latvia)
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 on the Riga (Latvia) - Pskov (Russia) Highway.
23 August 1989. Photo: Gunārs Janaitis (Latvia)
At the village of Masa, on the road that leads from Karksi-Nuia (Estonia) to Rūjiena (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
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 Baltic Way on the October Bridge (today – Stone Bridge) in Riga (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Uldis Briedis (Latvia)
The Baltic Way on the October Bridge (today – Stone Bridge) in Riga (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Vilhelms Mihailovskis (Latvia)
The Baltic Way on the October Bridge (today – Stone Bridge) in Riga (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Vilhelms Mihailovskis (Latvia)
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)
The Baltic Way on Lenin Street (today – Brīvības Street) in Riga (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Boriss Koļesņikovs (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 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 near Cēsis (Latvia). Aerial photograph from helicopter. 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
The point at the border where Latvians and Lithuanians joined hands and hearts. The Grenctāle (Latvia)/Saločiai (Lithuania) border crossing point. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vitālijs Stīpnieks (Latvia)
A view of the chain from the Latvian side, looking into Lithuania. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vitālijs Stīpnieks (Latvia)
The Grenctāle (Latvia)/Saločiai (Lithuania) border crossing point, the Lithuanian side. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vitālijs Stīpnieks (Latvia)
The Grenctāle (Latvia)/Saločiai (Lithuania) border crossing point. In the centre - the then editor of the newspaper “Padomju Jaunatne” ('Soviet Youth'), Andrejs Cīrulis. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vitālijs Stipnieks (Latvia)
On the Latvian side of the Latvian – Lithuanian border, 23 August 1989. Photo: Vitālijs Stipnieks (Latvia)
A rally at the Lithuanian - Latvian border after the completion of the chain. The Grenctāle (Latvia)/Saločiai (Lithuania) border crossing point. 23 August 1989. Photo: Vitālijs Stīpnieks (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)
The Baltic Way in Vidzeme, a region of Latvia. Aerial photograph from helicopter. 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
The Riga (Latvia) – Bauska (Latvia) – Panevėžys (Lithuania) Highway at the Riga bypass. 23 August 1989. Photo: Māris Zemgalietis (Latvia)
The Riga (Latvia) – Bauska (Latvia) – Panevėžys (Lithuania) Highway at the Riga bypass 23 August 1989. The participants of the Baltic Way sign a letter to the Supreme Council of the Latvian S.S.R. and the U.S.S.R. Congress of People’s Deputies on the denunciation of the Declaration of 21 June 1940 (the annexation of Latvia to the U.S.S.R.) and on a democratic restoration of Latvia’s statehood. Photo: Māris Zemgalietis (Latvia)
The Riga (Latvia) – Bauska (Latvia) – Panevėžys (Lithuania) Highway at the Riga bypass. 23 August 1989. Photo: Māris Zemgalietis (Latvia)
The Baltic Way on the Pskov (Russia) Highway. Aerial photograph from helicopter. 23 August 1989. Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)
The Vilnius (Lithuania) – Panevėžys (Lithuania) – Riga (Latvia) Highway 10 km from Vilnius (Lithuania). 23 August 1989. Photo: Vladas Sciavinskas (Lithuania)
The Vilnius (Lithuania) – Panevėžys (Lithuania) – Riga (Latvia)
Highway 10 km from Vilnius (Lithuania). 23 August 1989.
Photo: Vladas Sciavinskas (Lithuania)
At the village of Masa, on the road from Karksi-Nuia (Estonia) to Rūjiena (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
At the village of Masa, on the road from Karksi-Nuia (Estonia) to Rūjiena (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
At the village of Masa, on the road that leads from Karksi-Nuia (Estonia) to Rūjiena (Latvia). 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
Departing from a legacy of the past, in a rally near the Masa village in Estonia. 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
A rally near the village of Masa (Estonia) after the completion of the chain. 23 August 1989. Photo: Tiit Veermae (Estonia)
The Baltic Way in Toronto, Canada, on 23 August 1989. The Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians living in exile gathered in the central square at noon (7 p.m. Baltic time), at the same time as millions of their compatriots behind the Iron Curtain, to demand freedom for the Baltic states. Photo: Ilmārs Znotiņš (Latvia)
On 23 August 1989, a Baltic rally was held in the centre of Bonn, the then capital of West Germany. The audience was addressed also by Eduards Berklavs and heard the performance of "Skandinieki", a folklore group. The Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonian living in exile arrived in Germany to attend a church service in the Bonn Minster and to join in a march through the city. Photo from the external information sector archives of the Daugavas Vanagi (the Daugava Hawks) Latvian Welfare Fund.
Repercussions of the Baltic Way in the world press. Foreign press materials gathered by the Daugavas Vanagi testify that the Baltic Way had achieved its goal — it made headlines of the leading papers in Western Europe, North America and Australia. Materials from the external information sector archives of the Daugavas Vanagi (the Daugava Hawks) Latvian Welfare Fund
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

Curator Ilmārs Znotiņš