

Presentation „The Baltic Way – Human Chain Linking  
Three States in Their Drive for Freedom, 1989”

SLIDE NOTES

3.

On August 23, 1989 approximately two million people joined hands, forming a 600 km long chain from the Toompea Castle in Tallinn to the Gediminas Tower in Vilnius, all across Riga and the Daugava River, creating the unity of the three Baltic countries in their thriving for freedom.

By joining their hands the people showed that unity can change the course of history and overcome obstacles, political realities and dishonourable agreements of totalitarian regimes. The Baltic Way showed that if the people unite for a just cause, if they join both physically and spiritually for the success of a common idea, the dictatorship and aggression – the major threats of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – cannot last!

4.

Content of the Presentation:

- Events Prior to the Baltic Way
- The Course and the Significance of the Baltic Way
- Documentary Heritage of the Baltic Way
- The 25th Anniversary of the Baltic Way

6.

On August 23, 1939, the foreign commissar of the USSR Vyacheslav Molotov and the Foreign minister of the Nazi Germany Joachim von Ribbentrop signed the “*Treaty of Non-aggression between the Third German Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*”.

The expansive politics of both countries could easily become the reason of conflict about territories between these two powers and thus in order to evade such a conflict a secret protocol was made to divide spheres of interest in the Eastern Europe between these powers (however the treaty became abeyant on June 22, 1941, when the Nazi Germany invaded the USSR).

7.

The Appendix of the Molontov-Ribbentrop Pact stated that «*In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and U.S.S.R.*»

A new “*German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty*” of September 28, 1939, further stated that Lithuania is also included in the Soviet sphere of interests.

After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed by both sides, they also agreed that the appendixes would be confidential and no information regarding them is to be made public.

## **8.**

After the end of the Second World War the USSR denied the existence of any kind of agreements between the USSR and the Nazi Germany. Everything that could prove the existence of such agreements was either destroyed or hidden in classified archives. It was presumed that the copy belonging to the Nazi Germany was destroyed during the bombing of Berlin, but it is known that a microfilm of the copy of the pact was acquired by the Great Britain during the war and was leaked to the mass media afterwards. Nevertheless, the USSR continued to deny the existence of the pact.

Regardless of all the efforts of the Nazi Germany and the USSR to keep the pact a secret, the first information on the possible agreement about the spheres of interest between the Nazi Germany and the USSR reached the West and the Baltic States already in the September-October of 1939. The leaders of the Baltic States believed that their Western allies wouldn't allow such territorial changes and that both the Nazi Germany and the USSR would honour the international treaties signed with the Baltic States.

In spite these hopes in June 1940 the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic States. The official reason for the inclusion of the Baltic States in the USSR was the parliament elections that took place on July 14-15, 1940, just after the Soviet occupation. (According to the official results of the polls released by the USSR, people of some regions of the Baltic States had been so eager to join the USSR that 110% and more had voted "PRO" on joining the USSR, this being an indirect evidence that the returns were falsified).

## **9.**

Only at the second half of 1980s the question of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was raised again in the Soviet Union:

To avoid the criticism on hiding the information on the Chernobyl incident (April 26, 1986) and the stricture for being too secretive, Mikhail Gorbachev the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union made a decision to establish the so called *Glasnost* policy on matters of environmental protection and the crimes of Stalinism.

On August 23, 1986, the exiles of the Baltic States that lived in the Western countries and their supporters tried to draw the attention of the Western media and leaders to the secret appendixes of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

On September 15-19, 1986, a conference on the relationships between the USA and the USSR took place in Jūrmala. During the conference the delegation of the USA raised and issue on ending the occupation of the Baltic States. The news were immediately translated by the radio stations "Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty" and "The Voice of America" and thus reached the Baltic States.

## **10.**

The Baltic Way is without any doubt the largest and the most important mass non-violent solidarity event along the path towards regaining the independence of the Baltic States, however it was in no way the first or the only one.

On June 14, 1986, a commemorative day in honour of the people deported by the USSR took place in Riga at the Monument of Freedom. After this event the former political prisoners of all three Baltic States agreed on a joint commemorative event to be organised also on August 23 in all three states.

On August 23, 1987, massive demonstrations took place in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. The demonstrations had gathered around 10 000 people in Riga, 2 000 to 5 000 people in Tallinn and around 1000 in Vilnius. The demonstration in Tallinn was peaceful, but in both Riga and Vilnius violent clashes with the militia occurred and several hundred people were detained.

On August 23, 1988, the commemorative events were coordinated by the national movements of the Baltic States and rallied tens of thousands of people. The awakening of the Baltic States had grown from a movement of isolated enthusiasts to a movement that united the three countries.

## **12.**

Despite the previous actions that had already gathered tens of thousands of people, the official standpoint of the USSR was that those were just individual incidents embracing just a small part of the people of the Baltic States.

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1989, the three Baltic States shocked the world by joining hands in a common demonstration. The people of the Baltic States asked the public acknowledgment of the secret appendixes of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the restoration of independence of the Baltic States. This event showed both the Western countries and the Soviet Union the desire of the Baltic States to regain the independence they lost due to the treaty of the powers and the Second World War.

## **15.**

The Baltic Way was organized by the national movements of the Baltic States – the Popular Front of Estonia - the *Rahvarinne*, the Popular Front of Latvia and the Reform Movement of Lithuania – the *Sajūdis*. The main task of the regional divisions of the national movements was to mobilize the participants and confederates to join the Baltic Way in specific places so to succeed the creation of a human chain. The participants of the Baltic Way assembled in towns and districts and were collectively transported to less populated areas along the route of the Baltic Way by any means of transportation available.

Taking into account the mass media and means of communication available at the time (no modern means of communication like the Internet, cell phones etc. were available) the main sources of information were nationalistic radio and TV programs, because the press was mostly reflecting only the official standpoint of the USSR.

## **18.**

According to the information of the news agency REUTERS, the action had gathered around 700 000 people from Estonia, 500 000 from Latvia and 1 000 000 from Lithuania. According to the numbers disclosed by TASS, the official Soviet news agency, the participation in the Baltic Way was as follows – 300 000 from Estonia and 500 000 from Lithuania, no information on the number of participants from Latvia was ever disclosed. Therefore nowadays it is impossible to get the correct number of the participants due to the differences in various sources of information as well as due to the differences in the number of participants in towns and rural regions.

The people showed everyone that the independence can be achieved by uniting in a joint protest, a non-violent action. The determination of the people and their unity was the key that allowed the three Baltic States to regain their independence. The Baltic Way also showed the fellowship and the brotherhood of the Baltic States – that similar fate in the past and aspirations for independence in the present could unite the people that spoke different languages and were of different nationalities.

## 22.

The Baltic question became the main issue not only among politicians and diplomats, but also a concurrent issue of the international society. The Baltic Way was actively discussed in the world media, by human rights activists and academic society.

The August of 1989 had succeeded to bring the message to the world telling that the power of the USSR was declining and that it was the beginning of the end of the Cold War. One of the most apparent actions being The Baltic Way.

## 24.

*“Two million link hands in protest over the Kremlin's iron rule”* // “Hands of Hope”, Daily Mail, Thursday, August 24, 1989.

*“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.

## 26.

*“Yesterday's 400-mile-long human chain dramatically symbolised the shared passion for freedom of the Baltic peoples.”* // “Crumbling empire”, Daily Express, 24.08.1989.

*“...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.”* // “Joining hands across the Baltic states” The Times, 24.08.1989.

## 29.

The song “Atmostas Baltija, Bunda jau Baltija, Argake Baltimaad” was performed in all three languages of the Baltic States. It is one of the greatest symbols of the value given to unity and fraternity among the Baltic States in their strive for freedom.

It was performed by Viktors Zengals, Žilvins Bubelis, Tarmo Pirlaps

### **Atmostas Baltija, Bunda jau Baltija, Argake Baltimaad**

Trīs māšas jūras malā stāv, Tās nespēks un nogurums māc. Tur bradāta zeme un dvēseles, Trīs tautu gods un prāts.	Prie jūros miega sesēs trys Jas slegia pančiai, nevilts Klajoja lyg elgeta pajūriu Dvasia tautų garbės	Kolm õde mere palged ees, neid uinutas lainete laul. Kolm rahvast siin sajandeid heideldes tõid ohvriks muistse au.
Bet torņos jau likteņa zvani skan, Un jūra bangoties sāk. Trīs māšas no miega modušās, Par sevi pastāvēt nāk.	Bet varpas likimo nuaidi vēl Ir jūra šiaušia bangas Trys sesēs iš miego kyla jau Apginti savo garbēs.	Kui tornides juba lөөb kella hāāl, merd haarab vabaduspūūd. Et saatust ja elu kaitseda, kolm õde virguvad nūūd.
Atmostas Baltija, atmostas Baltija, Lietuva, Latvija, Igaunija!	Bunda jau Baltija, bunda jau Baltija, Lietuva, Latvija, Estija!	Ārgake Baltimaad, ārgake Baltimaad, Leedumaa, Lātimaa, Eestimaa!

## 33.

The main achievement of the Baltic Way was the fact that the USSR yielded to the joint protest of the residents of the three Baltic States by confessing part of its crimes in the past. The attained acknowledgment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by the USSR was one of the steps towards the restoring of independent states in the Baltic region.

The struggle for independence of the Baltic States had received so much support during the Baltic Way that it was self-evident that the national movements achieved a decisive victory

in the elections of the Supreme Councils of the states in 1990 (February 24, 1990, in Lithuania, March 16, 1990, in Estonia and March 18, 1990, in Latvia). Without much hesitation the newly elected Supreme Councils of the three Baltic States made a decision to reinstate the independence – the decree was made on March 11, 1990, in Lithuania, March 30, 1990, in Estonia and May 4, 1990, in Latvia. .

The Baltic Way also marked the beginning of the cooperation of the Baltic States that continues to this day.

### **35.**

Only after the Baltic Way and the resonance of this event in the world press a special commission of the USSR led by Alexander Yakovlev was established to evaluate the Pact and the situation. Later that year it acknowledged the existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and even elaborated about it to the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in Moscow announcing that the Pact was abeyant. Still officially the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was declassified only in 1992, after the dissolution of the USSR.

The action of unity of the Baltic Way contributed to the movements of democratic unity all over the world and was also a positive sign for other countries struggling for independence as well as the reunification process of Germany.

The Baltic Way also demonstrated the Baltic's as united and democratic region of the world.

### **38.**

The documentary heritage of the Baltic Way consists of a significant collection of different text, video and photo documents about this historical event.

The National commissions for UNESCO of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania started to work on the nomination in collaboration with respective memory institutions in the Baltic countries and different documentary heritage experts already in 2005. The Baltic working group for the nomination consisted of experts from National archives, National libraries, Ministries of Culture, National commissions of the UNESCO programme “Memory of the World”, National commissions for UNESCO, the Museum of the Popular Front of Latvia and the Museum of Occupation of Estonia.

The nomination commonly developed by all three Baltic States was handed to the UNESCO Secretariat on March 31, 2008.

The significance of the documentary heritage of the Baltic Way and its nomination for the UNESCO “Memory of the World” international register lies in acknowledgement of this event in the collective memory of the whole world as a mutual non-violent act of people striving for independence, justice and freedom and thus enhancing the understanding of solidarity and the value of togetherness.

### **39.**

In July 2009 the decision was adapted to include the documentary heritage of the Baltic Way in the International register of UNESCO program ‘Memory of the World’.

### **40.**

The UNESCO program “Memory of the World” was established in 1992 in order to preserve the documentary heritage of the world, facilitate its accessibility and promote the studies and cognition of different documentary objects regardless of their place of origin, medium or

kind. The program promotes study of this heritage, conservation and protection of it as well as its availability and recognition all over the world.

Documentary heritage is part of the cultural heritage of humanity. It reflects the diversity of languages, peoples and cultures. It is the mirror of the world and its memory. But this memory is fragile, destruction of such heritage would also mean the loss of a source of memories of humanity. However every day, irreplaceable parts of this memory disappear forever.

In order to facilitate the preservation, proper protection, diverse study and evaluation of this heritage an international register was created in 1995 within the framework of the UNESCO programme "Memory of the World". This register therefore presents and reflects the documentary evidence that is important for the whole world. Presently 158 items of documentary heritage from all over the world are included in this register. For example the negatives of the movie "Metropolis" (1927) by Fritz Lang, the Qing Dynasty Yangshi Lei archives from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, Russian posters collection of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Phoenical alphabet of Lebanon etc.

#### 41.

Only the most important documents on the organization and course of the Baltic Way have been selected for the nomination. The selection criteria for the documents were the significance of the document in disclosing the making of the historic decisions and the unique emotional state of the Baltic Way.

The nomination of the Baltic Way includes:

- 7 documents from the National archives of Estonia,
- 8 documents from the Museum of the Popular Front of Latvia,
- 23 documents from the Central State archive of Lithuania..

Among others the nominated documents include:

- The Baltic Council Pärnu Communiqué, 15 July 1989, Pärnu, Estonia (currently in the Museum of the Popular Front in Latvia);
- audio recordings of the meeting of the Lithuanian Sajūdis Saeimas Council on July 25 (currently in Lithuanian Central State Archive) and August 15, Vilnius, Lithuania,
- video recording of the Newsreel "Eesti Kroonika" (Estonian Chronicle) No. 18, 1989 - "The Baltic Way" (currently in Lithuanian Central State Archive),
- a poster made by the participants of the Baltic Way and other documents.

#### 42.

In this slide you can see reproductions of the documents included in the nomination „*The Baltic Way – Human Chain Linking Three States in Their Drive for Freedom*”. In the website [www.balticway.net](http://www.balticway.net) one can acquaint with all documents of the nomination.

#### 44.

“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 Stone Bridge was crowded We stood with our hands joined and risen above our heads and foreign tourists that 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.”

– Zenta Denisova, participant of the Baltic Way. // Latvijas Avīze, 2004.gada 28.augusts

#### 46.

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."

– Sandra Kalniete, one of the organizers of the Baltic Way. // *Diena*, 2004.gada 23.augusts.

#### 51.

Dedication to the 25th Anniversary of the Baltic Way – the project "The Baltic Way Stories".

The project's objective is to provide public awareness regarding the Baltic Way events by means of a living history – through stories of the inhabitants of the Baltic countries collected in collaboration with museums, schools, libraries, and other participating institutions. These narratives are available on the website [www.thebalticway.eu](http://www.thebalticway.eu).

Project target audience includes partners of the National Commissions for UNESCO in the Baltic States, users of different social networks and society in general. A variety of institutions will be invited to participate in the project's activities: educational institutions, libraries, museums and archives, organizations cooperating with diaspora, and individuals.

Until October 2014, everyone interested in the project "The Baltic Way Stories" will be given an opportunity to participate in a campaign for gathering the Baltic Way stories. The stories collected will be available both on the internet platform [www.thebalticway.eu](http://www.thebalticway.eu), and in collections of museums. This way a broad audience will be able to get acquainted with the collection established during the campaign. In addition, on the occasion of Baltic Way anniversary a number of international meetings, informative seminars, as well as educational activities will be organized.

For more information on the project, please visit [www.thebalticway.eu](http://www.thebalticway.eu). There you can download the story form that should be sent to [programmas@unesco.lv](mailto:programmas@unesco.lv) or via mail (Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, Pils laukums 4-206, Riga, Latvia, LV 1050).

#### 52.

The presentation is prepared on the basis of the presentation on Baltic Way's 20th Anniversary. Informative resources: Latvian National Commission for UNESCO and the Museum of Occupation of Latvia.

Following sources were used:

- the nomination file "The Baltic Way – human chain linking three states in their drive for freedom" for the International Register of "Memory of the World" Programme;
- reproductions of the collections of Museum of the Popular Front of Latvia,
- photos of the travelling photo exhibition "Baltic Way that Moved the World"

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