



This information was prepared in co-operation with Latvian National Commission for UNESCO.

THE BALTIC WAY INCLUDED IN THE MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

On July 30, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) approved the nomination of the Baltic Way to be included in the Memory of the World Register in the 20th anniversary since the event took place.

President of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO Andris Vilks said: *“It is confirmation of the Baltic Way being a world-wide phenomenon. As it is known, the action in the Baltic States was followed by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic took place, and Eastern Europe peacefully got free from the enforced regime.”*

On 23 August 1939 foreign ministers of the USSR and Germany - Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop, as ordered by their superiors Stalin and Hitler, signed a treaty which affected the fate of Europe and the entire world. This pact, and the secret clauses it contained, divided the spheres of influence of the USSR and Germany and led to World War II, and to the occupation of the three Baltic States - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

50 years later, on 23 August 1989, the three nations living by the Baltic Sea surprised the world by taking hold of each other's hands and jointly demanding the disclosure of the secret clauses in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the re-establishment of the independence of the Baltic States. About **two million people of various ages and social, national, and religious backgrounds all joined hands to create a 600 km long human chain** from the foot of Toompea in Tallinn to the foot of the Gediminas Tower in Vilnius, crossing Riga and the River Daugava on its way, creating a synergy in the drive for freedom and democracy that united the three countries. The event proved the strong will of the three Baltic States to restore their independence.



On the Pskov highway, Latvia
Photo: Aivars Liepiņš (Latvia)



On Lenin (now Freedom) street, Riga, Latvia
Photo: Boriss Koļesņikovs (Latvia)

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

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 passed on March 11, 1990, in Lithuania, March 30, 1990, in Estonia and May 4, 1990, in Latvia.

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 cooperation with the respective national memory institutions in the Baltic countries and a number of documentary heritage experts already in 2005. The nomination jointly developed by all three Baltic States was handed in to the UNESCO Secretariat on March 31, 2008.

The Baltic Way is not only a human chain linking three states in their drive to freedom, it is also a strong symbol in the eyes of each and every Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. **It is a symbol of unity of the Baltic States, of common aspirations for restoring the independence, of spiritual unity to face the injustice of the past, and a historic symbol of the power of non – violent action.**

On July 31, the touring exhibition *The Baltic Way that moved the world* will be opened. The exposition contains 40 photographs and photo collages by Baltic photographers that are not only documentary testimony of the historic event but also reflect emotional experiences. Until 25 August, the exhibition will be displayed in Riga, in the lobby of the Foreign Ministry building, but at the end of the month it will move to Paris, to be presented at the events organised by the Senate of France and the Embassies of the Baltic States, as well as in Le Pont Neuf art gallery. After that, it will be shown in London and Stockholm.

About UNESCO Memory of the World Programme

The UNESCO program “Memory of the World” was established in 1992 aiming at preservation and dissemination of valuable archive holdings and library collections worldwide 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.

For further information, please, visit website of the Baltic Way nomination www.balticway.net. Virtual touring exhibition and presentation about the Baltic Way is found on www.latvia.lv.

THE LATVIAN INSTITUTE

The Latvian Institute (Latvijas institūts) was established by the Latvian state to provide a wide range of information about Latvia, its society, culture and history.

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