

destination on the Baltic Way, therefore they linked hands wherever they were at the time, thus creating rather symbolic branches from the main road. It is said that the human chain from Vilnius to Tallinn could be seen from space. “We have never been so big” — these were the poetic words of Justinas Marcinkevičius, confirming this truth.

On that same day, 23 August, *Sqjūdis* and the fronts announced a joint appeal to the peoples of the world. It stated: “Brothers and sisters in the East and West, we are prepared to forget about your double standards if you could find the courage within yourselves to demand the application of international legislation not only in Africa and Asia, but also in Europe”. This appeal was sent to the United Nations.



Monument in Estonia to commemorate the Baltic Way

Monument in Lithuania to commemorate the Baltic Way

Grim threats came from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. However, the reformist circles in Russia and the other USSR republics showed sympathy for the determination of the Baltic peoples. Moral support came from many other countries as well. It can be said that the Baltic Way accelerated the whole process of the decay of the Soviet system. On 9 November 1989, the infamous Berlin Wall collapsed, and by the end of the year, full sovereignty was regained by almost all of the so-called former Warsaw Pact countries, the Soviet satellite states. Finally, on 24 December 1989, the Second Congress of People’s Deputies recognized the existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop secret protocols, condemning them as a “legally invalid and void from the moment of their signing”. This way the Soviet Union formally distanced itself from the actions that were the basis for the 1940 occupation and annexation of the Baltic States. But the Soviet empire did not want to free the Baltic States, opposing this in every way until in the autumn of 1991 it collapsed itself.

A quarter of a century has passed since the Baltic Way. This action will remain in the history of mankind as one of the most impressive testimonies of how peace can overcome the most powerful machine of violence. Given the historical importance and uniqueness of the event, the Baltic Way is included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

Dr Česlovas Laurinavičius



Lithuanian Collectors Coins



COIN DEDICATED TO THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BALTIC WAY (FROM THE SERIES “LITHUANIA’S ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE”)

50 litas coin:
Silver Ag 925
Quality proof
Diameter 38.61 mm
Weight 28.28 g
Inscription on the edge of the coin:
EESTI LATVIJA LIETUVA
Mintage 4,000

25 litas coin:
Copper, aluminium, zinc and tin alloy
Cu/Al/Zn/Sn
Quality proof-like
Diameter 28.00 mm
Weight 10.00 g
The edge of the coin is rimmed
Mintage 25,000.

Issued in 2014

Designed by Eglė Ratkutė and Giedrius Paulauskis

Information is available at the Bank of Lithuania
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LIETUVOS MONETŲ KALVYKLĖ

The coin was minted at the UAB Lithuanian Mint
www.lithuanian-mint.lt

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COIN DEDICATED TO THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BALTIC WAY
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25th Anniversary of the Baltic Way



Ukmergė
highway near
Vilnius

The Baltic Way was a human chain of linked hands stretching from Vilnius to Tallinn, made up of the people of three small nations — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This peaceful mass demonstration was their silent reminder of themselves to the world — that they were prisoners, forgotten by all and imprisoned for 50 years. The Baltic Way was a triumph of democratic self-determination.

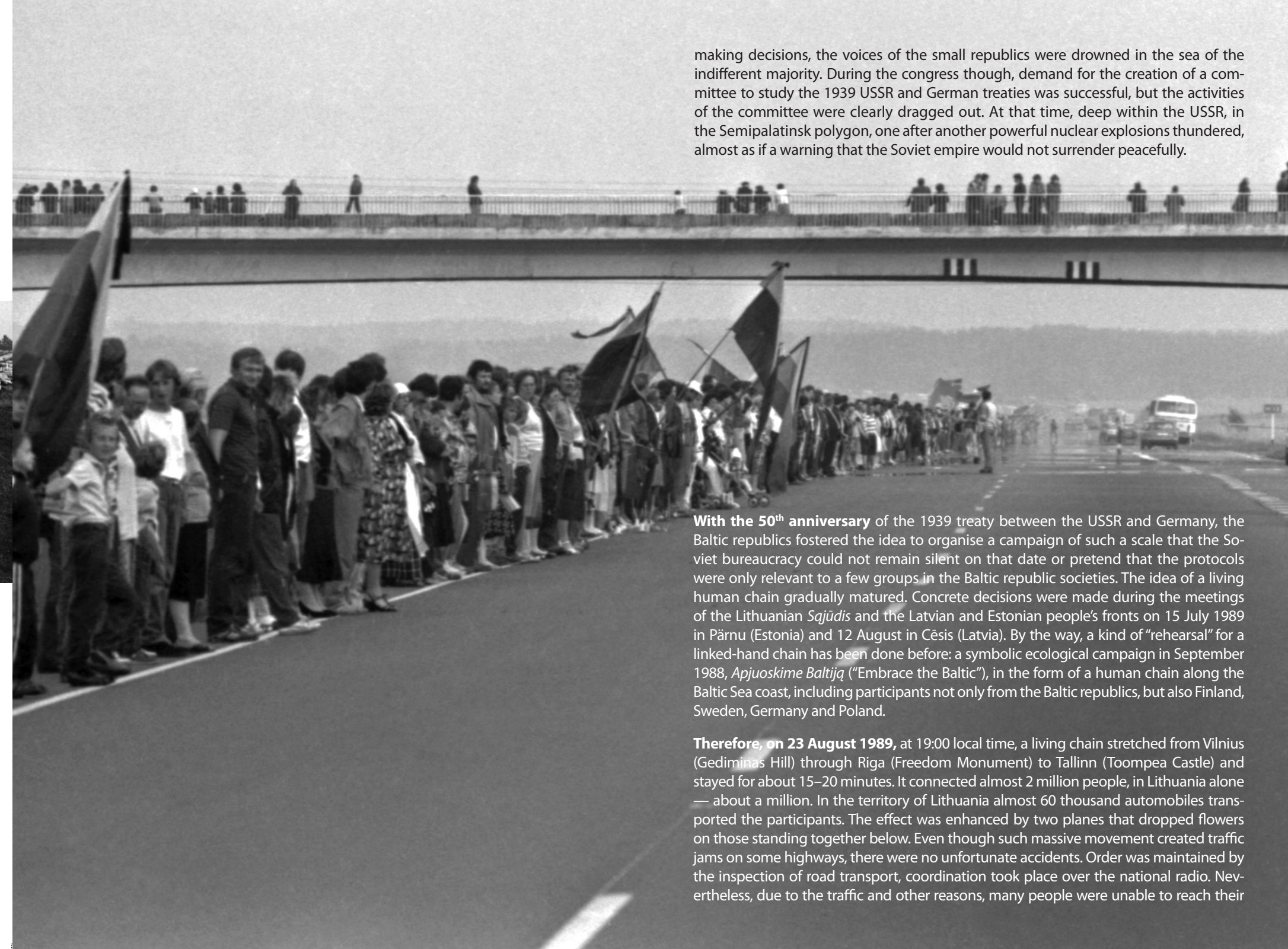
The fate of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, as independent states, was sealed on 23 August and 28 September 1939 in Moscow with the signing of treaties between Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union — the so-called Molotov-Ribentropp secret protocols, which established spheres of influence. These protocols created the basis for the occupation and annexation of the Baltic States in the summer of 1940 by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). To the international community the protocols were no secret, but the USSR firmly denied their existence for 50 years.



At the end of the 20th c. the Soviet Union experienced a deep crisis and the leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, decided on radical reforms, the so-called *perestroika*, i.e. democratisation of the totalitarian Soviet system. The Baltic nations were finally given the opportunity to speak out about their history and the deprivation of their sovereignty.

For the first time ever the secret protocols were spoken about in Vilnius on 23 August 1987 by small dissident groups. Exactly a year later, in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, large rallies were held: they were organised by newly-created democratic movements which united all segments of the population. In Lithuania — *Sąjūdis*, in Latvia and Estonia — people's fronts. This way the great secret of the problem of the Baltic countries was revealed. And the world noticed. But the bureaucratic machine of the USSR continued to deny the existence of the secret protocols.

In May–June 1989 Moscow held the Congress of People's Deputies; the election of its delegates was freer than had been before in the Soviet Union. The delegations of the Baltic republics were obligated by their voters to demand that the sovereignty of the nations be restored. However, at the meeting the demands of the Baltic delegations were ignored. In



making decisions, the voices of the small republics were drowned in the sea of the indifferent majority. During the congress though, demand for the creation of a committee to study the 1939 USSR and German treaties was successful, but the activities of the committee were clearly dragged out. At that time, deep within the USSR, in the Semipalatinsk polygon, one after another powerful nuclear explosions thundered, almost as if a warning that the Soviet empire would not surrender peacefully.

With the 50th anniversary of the 1939 treaty between the USSR and Germany, the Baltic republics fostered the idea to organise a campaign of such a scale that the Soviet bureaucracy could not remain silent on that date or pretend that the protocols were only relevant to a few groups in the Baltic republic societies. The idea of a living human chain gradually matured. Concrete decisions were made during the meetings of the Lithuanian *Sąjūdis* and the Latvian and Estonian people's fronts on 15 July 1989 in Pärnu (Estonia) and 12 August in Cēsis (Latvia). By the way, a kind of "rehearsal" for a linked-hand chain has been done before: a symbolic ecological campaign in September 1988, *Apjuoskime Baltiją* ("Embrace the Baltic"), in the form of a human chain along the Baltic Sea coast, including participants not only from the Baltic republics, but also Finland, Sweden, Germany and Poland.

Therefore, on 23 August 1989, at 19:00 local time, a living chain stretched from Vilnius (Gediminas Hill) through Riga (Freedom Monument) to Tallinn (Toompea Castle) and stayed for about 15–20 minutes. It connected almost 2 million people, in Lithuania alone — about a million. In the territory of Lithuania almost 60 thousand automobiles transported the participants. The effect was enhanced by two planes that dropped flowers on those standing together below. Even though such massive movement created traffic jams on some highways, there were no unfortunate accidents. Order was maintained by the inspection of road transport, coordination took place over the national radio. Nevertheless, due to the traffic and other reasons, many people were unable to reach their