

23 AUGUST 1989–2019 – THIRTY YEARS FROM THE BALTIC WAY¹

The Baltic Way² (in Estonian: *Balti kett* (Baltic Chain), in Latvian: *Baltijas ceļš* (Baltic Way); in Lithuanian: *Baltijos kelias* (Baltic Way)) was the joint political mass demonstration organised on 23 August 1989 in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in order to show to the world the wish of the Baltic States to become free and to draw attention to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed between the U.S.S.R. and Germany half a century ago with secret protocols which led to the occupation and annexation of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union. Approximately 2 million people, i.e. 25% of the population of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania at that time participated in the demonstration. The people of the Baltic States lined up to form a continuous human chain spanning more than 600 km, joining Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius.³

The Baltic Way and the Baltic Appeal and the Hirve Park (Deer Park) meeting in Tallinn before it prepared with the legal emphasis of their claims the restoration of the Republic of Estonia on the basis of legal continuity on 20 August 1991.⁴

Also, the undersigned participated in the Baltic Way, standing in line, holding hands with fellow citizens on Toompea in Tallinn, on the corner of the Hirve Park on the crossroads of the Falgi Road, Komandandi Road and Toompea Street. Everybody felt elated and united. Complete strangers were extremely friendly and optimistic about the future. My parents (mother Salme and father Arved) travelled about 50-60 km from Tallinn towards Riga and stood there in the Baltic Way. The undersigned decided to participate in Tallinn as I had promised and was obliged to deliver lectures in Russian about Estonia, its history (incl. the Soviet occupation, etc.), people, culture, etc. to tourists/holiday-makers (mainly from Russia and Ukraine) in Võru, the Kubija Tourist Home, the next day.⁵

After the end of the Baltic Way I hurried to the Tallinn Bus Station to take a Tallinn-Võru intercity bus to Võru to be ready for the lectures the next day. The trip by bus was wonderful – many people, fellow passengers, who had also been standing in the Baltic Way, were happy and kind. It was becoming dark halfway during the trip and it was nice to see candles burning on the windows of the farmhouses and country homes at the sides the Tallinn-Tartu-Võru road – surely to celebrate the Baltic Way. This sight was

¹ Inspired by and written according to the personal emotions and experience of the undersigned

² This article has been written to commemorate (and is also inspired by) our wonderful colleague Professor Dr Kostel Gerndorf who unexpectedly left our midst on 27.06.2019 and was sent off with respect on 04.07.2019 from the main building of the Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech) (this footnote is from 12 July 2019).

³ Internet (Google) materials used.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The proposal for lectures had come from the management of the Tourist Home as I had been a business trainee there earlier as a student and had also delivered lectures there and worked for them successfully for several years as a hiking instructor and tour guide.

exhilarating and heart-warming, I still vividly remember it! I reached the Tourist Home already in the dark, after midnight. The weather, however, was still fine and warm.

As there were many tourists and they were present at different times (some people stayed there, others went hiking or on tours, new people arrived), I delivered lectures for a week, 1 or 2 lectures every day. I certainly informed people of the Baltic Way that had just taken place – I was a live example, a participant, after all.

As I had held such lectures at the Kubija Tourist Home for several years already (and did it also in the following years), some people in the audience already heard my presentation already for the second or third time (they had visited us for two or three successive summers!). They admitted that there were constant political developments in Estonia and things were moving on in an interesting way. Many questions were asked – they all received replies.

Lectures and replies to questions were mostly received well although the tourist community could be divided into three groups:

- the people (the largest group) who had a quite understanding and positive attitude towards our situation and developments (we had separate discussions with them and replied to their questions after the lectures – they were surprisingly very much interested!);
- the people who were indifferent towards our events (there were enough of these people as well);
- the people (the lowest number but with loudest voices!) who had a negative and antagonistic attitude towards our matters. However, the opinions and objections of these people were explained and rejected with important historical, cultural and economic facts.

It was interesting that above all those who approved of our trends and goals and even some indifferent people were on my side (i.e. on the side of Estonia) and started to attack the opponents, contradict them. It was wonderful to listen and observe to that, adding my thoughts from time to time.

It was very interesting, even intensely exciting!

The Baltic Way was certainly a wonderful and historic event and participating in it and delivering lectures at Võru-Kubija (also elsewhere in Estonia during these years) was a wonderful personal and positive experience for the undersigned!

On the morning of 28 April 2019
12 July 2019

At Pirita-Kose in Tallinn

Chief Editor
Matti Raudjärv