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**Latvia in the Baltic Freedom Way Through Singing Revolutions  
Towards the Restoration of Independence from the Soviet Russian Empire**

A qualitative peace study and conflict analysis of books, academic articles,  
documentary archives, museum visits, and informal interviews

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Master's thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation studies [SVF-3901], May 2022



## Abstract

The aim of this master's thesis research paper has been to reflect on the conceptual and theoretical framework of peace studies and practice research through examining the context behind the late 1980s Baltic states independence movements also known as "The Baltic Freedom Way" and "Singing Revolutions".

The chosen and compiled conceptual and theoretical framework representing selected peace studies perspective in this paper is based on theories and works by J. Galtung, Webel, J.P. Lederach, Levinger, Ho-Won Jeong, Lynch, and McGoldrick, among others. As a result, the selected goals of conflict analysis have been set to investigate the origins and development of conflicts, consider various root causes, differentiate various phases and levels of conflict, examine various players and their perspectives, interests, and intentions, and focus on and consider human experiences, allowing an evaluation of how conflict has been or could be addressed to achieve meaningful, nonviolent, and productive compromises.

The qualitative data and information analysis was conducted by close reading and making notes of a variety of primary and secondary documents and sources such as relevant books, academic papers, informative brochures, news articles, informative websites, museum visits, and some informal talks with my parents, grandparents, and their friends who were involved in various forms of political and social activism throughout Latvia's independence movements – and then analysing the results according to the set criteria.

The Baltic Freedom Way case study exemplifies effective nonviolent action aimed at achieving political goals, drawing attention to injustices, and spreading ideas through societal activities, political engagement, and international support. This demonstration became one of the biggest demonstrations in the Soviet Union, drawing international attention to three nations' public solidarity and desire for self-determination, laying the groundwork for subsequent efforts to expand self-determination demands and, ultimately, leading to the restoration of Baltic state independence.

Because of the author's background and the selection of sources, the research has mainly focused on the perspective of Latvian historical experiences (while also considering multiple perspectives for greater objectivity) by examining and selecting various Latvian, English, and Russian language source materials).

Keywords: peace studies, conflict analysis, civil disobedience, non-violent resistance, Baltic Way, independence movements

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## Introduction

This is a research paper for my master's thesis, and the purpose is to demonstrate how to investigate and analyse the late 1980s Baltic Way demonstrations and Baltic independence movements utilizing conceptual and theoretical concepts from peace studies and conflict analysis. It is a historical example of non-violent disobedience political activism that has led to successful results of reinstating and internationally recognised independence. Methods of research are a desk work case study from a variety of sources including books, academic research articles, museum exhibitions, informative booklets, documentary films, and some informal interviews, to consider and analyse the findings from a peace studies perspective, and to draw conclusions to be able to conduct similar future research and case studies. That way, I'll be able to reflect on, practice, and articulate what I've learned over the last few years.

Regarding the case study of The Baltic Freedom Way, while studying at Master programme for Peace and Conflict Transformation studies the University of Tromsø, I recognized that researching the Baltic republics' independence struggles would undoubtedly be a valuable topic to study and discuss. I have not come across any case studies on the Baltic Way or Baltic independence movements that focus specifically on peace and conflict studies views and make a clear connection to peace and conflict studies theoretical perspectives, thus indicating a possible research gap. It would be beneficial to conduct more such in-depth theoretical analysis of the various levels of conflict and to gain a better understanding of the broader historical and social context, as well as the factors that may contribute to addressing, explaining, and attempting to resolve conflicts between people. Such similar analysis could also be used to investigate, compare, and attempt to resolve other conflicts and cases. And in this case, to help me to better understand the value and criteria for peace research and conflict analysis and to practice it in a relevant case study.

Moreover, better understanding the context of the Soviet Union's formation, the conflict context leading up to World War II and the subsequent destruction and suffering, decades of repressions and colonial rule attempts, as well as the long-term ramifications in Europe and post-soviet space, is an important topic. It is especially relevant now that the Russian Federation's government and military have become increasingly belligerent, initiating, and escalating to a full-scale invasion and war in Ukraine, not to mention previous ongoing conflicts in Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh, Transnistria, Syria, protests in Belarus, clashes in Kyrgyzstan cities in 2010, and so many other instances of political and military interference around the world, harmful business practices such as weapons smuggling, etc. The ongoing study into the research context has led me to carefully evaluate the centuries-old imperialistic

objectives and brutal tactics of Russian imperialism, contextualizing the Soviet Union's expansive, colonialist and chauvinist ambitions and oppressive policies, suppression of opposition, and how they have influenced and continue to infect realities in Europe and post-Soviet countries.

As a Latvian, I learned about these key historical events in history and geography classes in school, as well as by further reading various news articles and reports, by reading books, by visiting museums, and by hearing stories from my parents and grandparents about participating in Latvian independence campaigns and about my grandfather's family being deported to Siberia after the war when Baltic states fell back under Soviet Union influence. While conducting research for my studies, this has provided me with an excellent opportunity to reflect on and better understand my family and the country in which I was born, grew up, and now reside. As these research topics also hold personal and emotional significance for me, I have made a lot of effort to take it seriously, examine it properly and try to do it objectively. Furthermore, it is critical for my own education that I better understand this historical context, the democratic struggle for independence of the country where I was born and raised, and the consequences of historical developments.

The Baltic Way independence movements are an important part of history that have been extensively documented in Latvian and Baltic sources, drew significant international attention at the time, and can undoubtedly be further studied and discussed as a successful example of peaceful transformation for regaining independence characterised by nonviolent activities, demonstrations, democratic and diplomatic initiatives, activism, and creative events aimed at drawing attention to historical injustices and people's discontent characterized these social and political movements for independence. However, from perspective of Communist Party in power, the participants in the opposition and independence movements were labelled as radicals and extremists and intimidated because of the oppressive and violent response. In discussions with some of my study colleagues, even in peace studies circles, many are unfamiliar with this case and good example of nonviolent civil resistance to imperial force that effectively came independent because of their efforts but also of international support various factors that successfully came together, and I could further share lessons of this research with them and larger audiences.

My hypothesis for this research is that by considering various criteria and suggestions by the literature of peace studies and conflict analysis, I will be able to better examine, understand and present the context of why Baltic Way demonstration happened and why independence movements were formed.

The guiding research questions of this study have been the following: *What are some of the main identified criteria for conflict analysis and understanding context of conflicts relevant for peace studies? How can conflict analysis criteria help to better examine the context behind Baltic Way demonstrations and independence movements? What are the main competing perspectives and narratives and identified to be the core causes of conflict?*

Following from that, the derived goals were to answer first question about the relevant criteria and formulate conceptual framework of peace studies, I have investigated recognised and selected useful core literature in relation to peace studies and conflict analysis principles, that has been described in Chapter 1 - theoretical literature and conceptual framework. Then, to find answers to my other research questions regarding the context and competing narratives behind Baltic Way independence movements, I examined informational sources, the methodology of which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. The research has mostly consisted of desk work and examining of various materials such as books, documentary films, and brochures, with some trips to relevant museums and informal conversations with relatives who were personally involved in several independence demonstrations and events. Thus, mixed methods were used in total, and then gathered selected relevant information was selected and described in this paper. Further, analysis and discussion chapter combine and describes the selected findings with conflict analysis criteria and draws conclusions about core causes, main actors, dynamics of conflicts, etc.

The Baltic Freedom Way demonstration became one of the most notable and visible parts of the independence movements, alongside singing of songs and cultural events, as well as the use of national symbols, national clothing, and the flag of independent Latvia, while still part of Soviet Union and under the control of communist party regime, Soviet army being stationed across Baltic lands and security organisations operating with focus to crush any form of decent. Nevertheless, people persisted to show their unhappiness with the situation and time to time organising activism of civil disobedience.

On August 23, 1989, almost 2 million individuals formed a 600-kilometer-long continuous human chain connecting the roads between Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian capital cities. The Baltic Way was a nonviolent and peaceful protest and civil disobedience demonstration planned and organized two weeks



Figure 1: [The Baltic Way](#)

in advance by the local political parties Sajudis in Lithuania, Rahvarinne in Estonia, and Popular Front in Latvia, which largely consisted of ethnically indigenous and national background political activists and was intended to form a sort-of opposition to the Communist party during the period of economic and political transformation. This mass nonviolent demonstration, dubbed 'The Baltic Way,' grew to be one of the largest in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This display of solidarity and cooperation drew international attention and prompted the Baltic people, as well as those of other Soviet republics, who had previously expressed their dissatisfaction through various acts of rebellion and disobedience, to take further steps toward greater self-governance, eventually leading to the restoration of Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, and other then Soviet republics' national independence, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Despite the nonviolent path to freedom, it was not an easy journey, with many obstacles, fierce opposition, and even human casualties. Following the demonstrations, a local political opposition to the Communist party in local representation was formed, which went on to win a majority in subsequent local elections, allowing for greater local autonomy and independence-supporting representatives to be represented. Strong political pressure resulted in official recognition of the illegality of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The highest councils in Baltic states declared independence, arguing that such planned collaboration between Soviet and Nazi leadership resulted in the occupation of Eastern Europe, prompting Moscow Soviet leadership's opposition to such developments. Hardliner supporters of Soviet imperial influence attempted to overthrow newly elected governments in Lithuania and later Latvia through military coups, which were met with significant civilian resistance in the form of built barricades to protect strategic buildings and local people guarding them, tragically resulting in deaths of several resisters but ultimately resulting in the victory of ordinary civilian resistance and resilience. Following another failed coup attempt in Moscow in support of democratisation, new political representation emerged, resulting in new attempts to form and develop new international relationships between former soviet republics.

## 1. Theoretical and conceptual framework of peace and conflict transformation studies

Throughout my graduate studies in peace and conflict transformation at the University of Tromsø in northern Norway,<sup>1</sup> I studied a variety of relevant literature and supplementary resources that has given ideas and helped to develop the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study and to better understand of how conflict contexts should be assessed. Given the abundance of literature on the subject and the years of research that have gone into developing concepts and values criteria for conflict analysis, it's been difficult to condense this information, but the theories I've chosen to discuss, represent concepts and criteria that are critical to understanding how my perspective was formed and to a better understanding of the context of the formation of Baltic Freedom Way independence movements.

Peace studies is a relatively recent academic discipline, having been formally formed in late 1959 with the establishment of the Oslo Peace Research Institute,<sup>2</sup> and since, several additional academic institutions around the world with the goal of studying how to address and deal with social problems with a focus on peaceful, constructive methods have been established. Such issues had previously been addressed in a variety of smaller study classes and debating groups,<sup>3</sup> as well as in a variety of historical documents, artworks, legislation, and other historical and cultural artefacts, documents, and literature throughout documented human history,<sup>4</sup> but they had not yet been formally established as a separate academic research discipline. Various academic methods are used for peace studies, with a focus on values and attempts to expose, study, and strive to eliminate various forms of violent action and conditions, which has resulted in increased participation from more people but also criticism that peace studies lack a distinct focus and clear, robust normative approaches for how it is to be done.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, to attempt to narrow the scope of considerations, I've chosen to focus on conflict analysis in this paper, which brings me to the expressed initial perspectives of Johan Galtung, a key contributor and one of the core contributors who helped to establish the academic discipline of peace studies... who has stated that initially in his considerations, he saw violence as a disease that needed to be diagnosed and treated, which appears to me to be similar to the principles of conflict analysis approaches.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Centre for Peace Studies, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway, <https://en.uit.no/enhet/peace>.

<sup>2</sup> The Peace Research Institute Oslo, [www.prio.org](http://www.prio.org), <https://www.prio.org/news/2416>.

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, January 29, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace\\_and\\_conflict\\_studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_and_conflict_studies).

<sup>4</sup> Oliver P. Richmond, *Peace: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Lawler, *A Question of Values: Johan Galtung's Peace Research* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Al McKay, "Interview with Johan Galtung", May 27, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/27/interview-johan-galtung/>.



In general, there are at least three levels and ways to distinguish different states of peace: 1) as a personal and internal state of mind characterised by stability, comfort, and certainty; 2) as the *absence of* active violence in one's immediate surroundings - **negative peace**; or 3) as a social condition characterised by sustained *presence of* mutual respect, cooperation, and understanding - **positive peace**.<sup>7</sup> Positive peace is eventually widely perceived as the aim to ideally strive for, to continue working to develop mutually beneficial connections within society and with individuals when overt violence is absent and the possibility of it is contained. **Conflict**<sup>8</sup> is defined as a condition or situation of disagreement or contradiction between opposing sides or parties. Conflicts and disagreements are not inherently bad; however, how they are handled determines whether they lead to violent, aggressive, and destructive attitudes and approaches that are clearly and should be widely perceived as a problem in our lives, or whether they are handled by a genuine willingness to seek solutions, make concessions, and constructively seek to improve relations to improve the situation<sup>9</sup>. Obviously, the latter should be preferred, but understanding and developing relationships require will, persistence, and effort, whereas disrespect and ill intentions can quickly cause long-term damage and resentment, but unfortunately, may be in some people's interests or perceived as the appropriate way to proceed, depending on their conditions, values and intended benefits. Different **levels and complexity** of conflict can exist on an individual, interpersonal, local, regional, or international scale, while they can also overlap and affect one another.<sup>10</sup> Certain negative attitudes, for example, expressed or experienced publicly in other parts of the world through media of communication can influence our own personal experiences and attitudes. Personal injustices and real or perceived threats, on the other hand, can influence our interpersonal or local attitudes and actions toward others, particularly towards strangers deemed or presented by others as dangerous or undesirable. Thus, our more individual everyday peace on a more interpersonal level,<sup>11</sup> can also be affected by external experiences, contentious topics such as hearing the news or reading a story, or negative experiences in other situations that can lead to the introduction of small conflicts among family members, friends, or other fellow humans, or induce an internal sense of anxiety, depression, or apathy about unfortunate social conditions. In further research, more focus will be on regional and international scale, while also considering interplay of various levels.

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<sup>7</sup> Johan Galtung in Peace and Conflict Studies, ed. Charles Webel and Jørgen Johansen (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012).pp. 75-79.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution* (London: Sage, 2007), pp.12-16.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, "Guide to Conflict Analysis," November 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/media/96581/file/Guide-to-Conflict-Analysis.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Brahm, "Conflict Stages," July 6, 2016, [https://beyondintractability.org/essay/conflict\\_stages](https://beyondintractability.org/essay/conflict_stages).

<sup>11</sup> Roger Mac Ginty, "Everyday Peace: Bottom-up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies," *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 6 (November 10, 2014): 548–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614550899>.

While conflicts might be problematic and instead raise issues that could be fixed with a willingness to do so, instead, **violence**<sup>12</sup> in various forms (physical, psychological, structural, or cultural) is to be viewed as a problem that can tragically affect people's lives and surrounding environments and quality of lives, and spiral into long-lasting cycles of violence and resentment, if not addressed properly, that is unwelcome in the grand scheme of things. Also, violence frequently results in costly, destructive, and disruptive social conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Quality of life and, the needs of various conflicting sides that consist of individuals or groups of **participants, actors, or parties**<sup>14</sup> are different and is what forms attitudes and behaviours to turn violent or compassionate over different contradictory interests. The main adversaries and sides of conflict can be individuals, or groups with leaders and other supporting constituents including larger support groups in society, also certain external third parties need to be considered that might influence the direction and development of conflict as supporting certain sides or mediating to deescalate and seek concessions acting as facilitators or dividers, and we must not to forget to consider and have compassion towards affected people if they become victims of violence and destruction. To keep a direction, the research focus should be on positive developments, concessions and beneficial solutions and denouncing the use of violence and destruction of relations, considering what could be fair and just for involved parties and their experienced realities. **Different perspectives** or positions of parties make understanding conflict situations more difficult. The competing behaviours and attitudes are influenced by the conflicting sides and participant subjective interests, values, and experiences, and more over the stated positions may not necessarily reflect true needs but instead represent desires sometimes exaggerated of how they would like to position or present themselves, or even as straight-out lies reach personal goals. Also, their access to information and how it is perceived by various actors can differ. Additionally, deceptive emotional exaggeration, or manipulative lying might be used to, which might be complex to evaluate and assert but also needs to be considered.<sup>15</sup> From theoretical perspective such various layers of positions of how participants present their selves and interests and is attempted to be represented by conflict onion model<sup>16</sup> in a comparison allegory – that whatever is presented needs to be considered by their conditions and experiences. For example, In fact, certain **actors** in conflicts may not necessarily seek positive resolutions or

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 30),

<sup>13</sup> StudySmarter, "War and Conflict: Meaning & Causes," <https://www.studysmarter.de/en/explanations/social-studies/global-development/war-and-conflict/>.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), p.16)

<sup>15</sup> Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, *Peace Journalism*. (Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 2005), pp. 44-47; 114-122.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Levinger, *Conflict Analysis: Understanding Causes, Unlocking Solutions* (Washington, D.C. United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013), pp 119-133.

fair outcome mutually for all affected sides, that might be individuals or parties who may derive benefits from such conflict situations, whether in terms of gaining or using their power, influence, financial gain, political gain, or in the pursuit of some other purpose or perhaps ideological values, but instead attempting to win over the opponents and result in asymmetrical balance of what can also be referred to as victors peace - when more powerful dictates conditions and victors peace, uneven or asymmetric balance of power could further lead to unfair, repressive relations, when weaker party might experience unjust treatment or resentment, especially if previous aggressive attitudes had persisted. Such experiences and sense injustice and contradictions could lead to further unhappiness, negative attitudes and reignited violence, or a systematic violence and disregarding the needs of the weaker side that has been forced to give in and concede.

There are several approaches to **addressing, responding and overcoming**<sup>17</sup> the conflicts on international level resolution, including approaches like conflict *management* by allowing the conflict to continue while establishing certain rules, conditions and boundaries to limit further violence (comparable to competitive sports or even physically violent martial arts, but within a controlled setting that nevertheless also could lead to terrible outcomes for members, their families, and close associates); conflict *settlement* by limiting violence by signing peace agreements between political leaders seen as an important for active conflict termination to reach negative peace but not as the final act; *peacebuilding* - a complex and extensive process of organising efforts and helping the society to recover by restoring and building trust and communication between different parties, *mediation* - process of promoting dialogue between parties facilitated by common or external members, *peacekeeping* – need to enforcement actions in case of active conflict resolution and establish negative peace with use of policing force, and *transformation* - addressing the various causes of the conflict and changing the unfavourable conditions by addressing the core issues. Various reasons and **core causes**<sup>18</sup> for conflicts such value differences and power disparities over control of resources and influence Motivations for conflict can range from personal interests of gaining resources or influence of certain conflict parties to promotion of justice of historical wrongdoings, Actions can range of intensity in conflicts can range from full scale war with no rules to, low intensity conflicts with somewhat managed and contained violence, to non-violent struggles, to disagreements, etc. Numerous approaches and theories<sup>19</sup> rely on examining specific conditions and

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<sup>17</sup> Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution the Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts* (Cambridge, UK Malden, MA Polity Press, 2016), pp. 31- 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ho-Won Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011). p.18

<sup>19</sup> Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, *Peace Journalism*. (Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 2005).

participant perspectives to identify the fundamental causes and grounds for conflict's emergence and evolution. Miscommunication theory, for example, holds that conflict is caused by mutual mistrust because of a lack of information and understanding, and that the focus for improving the situation should be on increasing understanding of the other party through stereotype elimination, cultural exploration, and improved communication. According to human needs theory, conflicts develop because of unsatisfied human needs and desires for certain contested resources or conflicting demands that necessitate explaining the parties' genuine intents and bringing them to a mutually beneficial solution. According to identity theory, conflicts arise because of threatened identities, possibly because of unresolved past experiences of injustice, and that to achieve some measure of reconciliation and relationship improvement, identities of various sides must be recognised, considered, and respected. Overall, most disagreements are caused by contradictions in values and power and influence, though misconception and miscommunication also play a role in the escalation of confrontational relationships.

Further, disparities in **power relations** and representation need to be considered. The ways for unequally or asymmetrically weaker parties might be to contend by preparing for defence, to gain more influence by seeking **allies and additional support**<sup>20</sup>, by communicating injustices thus shifting the balance of power. Even preparation for defensive violence, if necessary, can be a morally justifiable action if facing or threatened of violent attacks.<sup>21</sup> However, such a security dilemma increases the likelihood of retaliatory violence. However, even non-violent techniques, such as voicing grievances, discussing issues, undermining, or refusing to cooperate, may be viewed as threatening.

Conflicts development can be recognised several conflict stages – initiation, escalation, entrapment or stalemate, active violence, de-escalation, termination presented by Curve of conflict.<sup>22</sup> However, various factors affect development of conflicts and the events and developments are not necessary as clear to ascertain, as, for example, in phase of de-escalation, some other events might occur that might again ignite the conflict or as in case of public demonstration while perceive by one party as non-violent and reasonable act of communicating grievances publicly might be perceived or communicated as provocative and escalating by other side. With developments over time, the situation and perception of

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<sup>20</sup> Ho-Won Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), p. 198

<sup>21</sup> Charles Weibel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/handbook-of-peace-and-conflict-studies.pdf>, p. 8-10

<sup>22</sup> Eric Brahm, "Conflict Stages," July 6, 2016, [https://beyonddetractability.org/essay/conflict\\_stages](https://beyonddetractability.org/essay/conflict_stages).

various conflict sides might also change<sup>23</sup> due to various circumstances and developments, either by certain actions of escalation or de-escalation and peacebuilding, or by learning new information possibly by efforts to build understanding and take other side perspectives in mind or change of situation like or change of key actors.

When circumstances and attitudes change, resolutions can be sought, such as yielding or submitting to the other party (often in the face of overwhelming force or if the stakes of the conflict are low); avoiding interactions with the other side and hoping that the problems would go away; contending and challenging to escalate the situation in the interest of better conditions, or ideally to come up with creative approaches to issues and transcend to more positive and improved conditions.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, various aspects and levels of conflict development, as well as participant perspectives, must be considered to better understand interconnected holistic contexts or various levels<sup>25</sup> or viewed through various lenses and frames<sup>26</sup> can be viewed as necessity considering various frames and lenses to get a complete picture of various levels ranging from micro - personal and interpersonal to group meta and international macro levels, conflict. Peace research and consideration of the situation and context. Consideration various perspectives, seek for common ground. Positive and fair approaches to find solutions, with good intentions. While we can learn from historical experiences and examples, they are not all the same, conditions differ and change, only to consider and take lessons, appreciate efforts people have taken to improve lives of us and others.

To conclude this review of narrative literature analysis, I intend to examine and consider the long-term context, dynamics, and direction of conflict. In historical narrative I will try to determine different phases of violence, of negative peace and attempts to lead towards conflict transformation, and the situations and approaches towards conflict resolution. Through collecting the information I will focus on noting key actors, their perspectives and actions. To understand why conflict has emerged I will attempt to consider underlying causes and reasons for the emergence of conflict situations. And to note the variety of approaches to de-escalation, changing situation and relationship improvement that have been the context of conflicts surrounding the formation of independence movements in Baltic states.

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<sup>23</sup> Ho-Won Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), p. 218

<sup>24</sup> Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, *Peace Journalism*. (Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 2005), pp 40-41

<sup>25</sup> Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), pp 3-34.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, Pa: Good Books, 2003).

As stated at the outset, this is a condensed and selected material that must be regarded in how I acquired necessary information for empirical research and how I attempt to analyse the context of more interrelated and holistic aspects of examined conflicts in chapter 4.

## 2. Methodology of the study: how was the study designed and carried out?

I chose to investigate the Baltic Way independence movements in greater depth because it seems to be a highly relevant case study and historical example of nonviolent political activism and civilian resistance against oppressive imperial military and political forces that were asymmetrically stronger. As a research paper for my master's thesis, the purpose of this study is to reflect on peace studies lessons through the lens of previously studied and chosen theoretical and conceptual concepts, criteria, techniques, and approaches by collecting and presenting relevant data and reflecting on it by practising examined criteria conflict analysis.

During my research on the Baltic Freedom Way, I discovered that some key individuals in Latvian political activists had formed and considered approaches and practises that influenced Baltic independence movements by considering Gandhi's values and practises, encouraging them to resist a militarily and politically stronger and oppressive force in nonviolent ways by exposing injustice, the desire for freedom and independence, and worldview differences, as stated by Maija Kūle in book *Baltic Freedom Way*.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, a substantial proportion of these groups and practises adhered to values that are also important to be considered in peace studies. Moreover, it ultimately proven to be an efficient means of resistance. During discussions of our research topics, some of my study colleagues expressed a want to learn more about the Baltic Freedom Way example and independence movements in Baltic states, and they frequently voiced a desire to learn more about it. Even among peace studies scholars, not everyone is familiar with the Baltic Way and Baltic independence movements, less alone their historical relevance in comparison to more known examples of activism by Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, the Suffragettes, Gandhi, and others.

Prior to starting this research, I was familiar with the Baltic Way demonstrations, as well as to some extent with the Latvian and Baltic States freedom movements and hardships, through our school's history lectures and personal stories from my parents, grandparents,

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<sup>27</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Inteliģences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p55-62.

relatives, and their friends. I was born in October of 1991, already in internationally recognised independent Latvia, little more than nine months since the barricades were set up to defend against the attempted Soviet army coup after the declaration of independence in Latvia. I have been informed that there indeed had been a link between the energetic and hopeful attitudes of those times. Thus, it is an interesting subject to study not only to gain a better understanding of the history of my home country, but also to gain a better understanding of the stories and experiences of my parents and grandparents of participating in these demonstrations, independence movements and activism. Furthermore, researching this case would teach me about history and help me improve my ability to analyse conflict. The research gap I have identified and addressed in this work is that such a case study with a direct link to theoretical literature on peace studies and conflict analysis, particularly in the case study of Baltic independence movements, has not been discovered in the manner envisioned in this dissertation. Peace studies, in my opinion, would need to place a greater emphasis on in-depth theoretical analysis of the various levels of conflict by examining the diverse perspectives, contexts, and intentions of various actors, as well as the broader historical and social context and the factors that may contribute to addressing, explaining, and attempting to resolve grievances or irreconcilable contradictions between people. Additionally, it improves the ability to analyse effective techniques and implementations, which can be applied to various other case studies and analytical work of understanding and explaining conflict contexts. Furthermore, I would be more effective in communicating and explaining it to others, including my classmates, peers, friends, and other students. It would also help me organize and make sense of my own understanding of Eastern Europe's historical and contemporary social dynamics.

The selected case study will highlight the significance of the Baltic Way independence struggle as a successful and outstanding example of large-scale civil resistance. A case study and conflict analysis are used to demonstrate how ideas from peace studies, as well as other case studies, can be put into practice by examining various case studies based on publicly available and confirmed secondary data by some level cross checking and additional testing as in my case examining various sources, visiting museums, and discussing with family members that had personal experiences

My hypothesis for this research is that by considering various criteria and suggestions by the literature of peace studies and conflict analysis, I will be able to better examine, understand and present the context of why Baltic Way demonstration happened and how and why independence movements were formed.

A series of research questions serves as a guide for the study's methodology:

- What criteria are important to address for performing conflict context analyses and developing techniques for conflict transformation? What are relevant sources of information to learn more about the case of Baltic Way? • How and why was The Baltic Way protest organized and how did it fit into the larger context of independence movements? • What was the broader holistic background relevant for conflict analysis at various levels? • How does the case study of the Baltic independence movements relate to examined literature conflict and peace studies?

Thus, a set of goals have been formulated:

- to find relevant sources of information as books, booklets, websites by online search , such visit museums, talk with people who have participated; • research, collect and select the most relevant information and data, • to describe relevant information in research paper; to analyse the results using pertinent selected criteria, such as the timeline of the conflict, the core causes leading to conflicts, involvement, and positions of various actors, how majority of regular people have been affected and to evaluate several views perspectives

The considerations of epistemology and ontology are guided by reflecting based on the suggested literature considering the methodological approaches for social studies suggests that valid knowledge needs to be governed by epistemological<sup>28</sup> considerations of the nature, origin, and boundaries of human knowledge. Reflecting on this, I've identified my methods as more closely relating to the critical realism sub-division, in which I attempt to focus on knowledge regarding observed events, actions, and facts derived from trustworthy published data from books and academic papers written by other researchers, while also considering different possible influences of why and how it could be interpreted. Qualitative data analysis<sup>29</sup> of information sources such as books, articles, brochures, documents, online and printed archives, documentary videos were used to compile the study's findings, while considering their reliability and relevance. Insufficient or inaccurate data would inevitably lead to inaccuracies thus additional information would need to be examined or shortcoming should be clearly noted if identified. My examined secondary sources<sup>30</sup> were supplemented and cross-checked with information and data from a variety of other sources and

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<sup>28</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Russell K Schutt, *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc, 2019), pp397-405.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 310-313; 545-569.



perspectives, such as published accounts of individuals who participated, writings of acknowledged researchers from reputable publishers, and mainly openly published written narratives that correspond to other examined sources, as well as my own experiences by visiting museums, where I gained realistic personal experiences by viewing visual material, artefacts, and other artefacts and from informal interviews of some of primary sources – my relatives who had personal experiences relating to this topic.

Next, to address the ontological considerations<sup>31</sup> of the research, which is concerned with how information is interpreted by an individual in terms of what constitutes a fact - what we understand to be reality and reliable. Constructivist and interpretivist positions state that the knowledge of reality is contingent on how information sources have been formed. To be more objective, pragmatic, and scientific, it is necessary to evaluate multiple views and probable motivations while considering and noting added subjectivity and bias. Multiple perspectives reflected demonstrate the range of viewpoints as well as contradictions (or might signify term on which sides might seek agreement). Objective realities can be experienced, created social realities are becoming real through communal recognition of structures, and interpreted perceptions are influenced by individual access to information and intentions for how it is viewed. Considering the social world's actualities, power impacts, goals, and dependability, it is necessary to analyse sources and my own positionality. Numerous conditions of human comprehension are socially constructed, such as economic, political, and religious systems.<sup>32</sup> Some of these conditions and systems can only become a reality, if people agree collectively on ideas, stories, various myths, and explanations why systematic cooperation does and should work certain way. That allows for groups of people to cooperate and create systems that become real and came be experienced, such as, monetary transactions and exchange of products for determined value, political systems, and power relations, religious or ideological beliefs, etc.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, in research, I need to focus also on explaining and understanding a wider interrelated and holistic context by considering information from various sources and positions, evaluate credibility of information, cross-check with variety of other sources and, consider the possible intentions of authors. For most credibility, I have tried to mostly focus on information coming from individuals or perspectives that have themselves taken part, and openly published written narratives. Therefore, in such way might strive to some objectivity, while the way I interpret would certainly to some way have a level of subjectivity due to my

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-45

<sup>32</sup> Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, *Peace Journalism*. (Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 2005), pp 46-47

<sup>33</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Random House UK, 2019).

background of negative experiences of imperial ambitions coming from centred in Moscow Kremlin, that my family members and ancestors have directly suffered from.

### **Ethical considerations and positioning of the author**

In practical terms, there is no particularly sensitive topics I would be addressing in this paper, as I am primarily dealing with and analysing already publicly available data and conducting a conflict analysis based on previously identified values and criteria. I've also conducted some informal interviews with members of my family and their friends, and it has further built up my understanding, helped me to evaluate the relevance and credibility of analysed data, which, however, are not directly cited within the written part of this paper. All the interviews have happened with consent, and they have not revealed anything sensitive or immediately harmful because of their statement.

However, it all depends on the perspective and subjective judgement. My main reservation regarding objectivity, however, is that, according to the Russian government's current perspective and narrative, everything that does not adhere to the interests or narratives of the governing elite is always simply labelled generally as Russophobia, fabricated, or faulty, or called now in a more 'modern way' – as fake news. Regrettably, this pattern appears to be continuing, currently with little optimism for the future improvements. The Kremlin government have even enacted legislation prohibiting any public criticism of their military actions, mentioning, and discussing historical abuses committed by soviet military. it has become especially dire following the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022, an invasion following the occupation of lands in southern and eastern Ukraine already since year 2014. Much of Russia's official history and reality have been deliberately concealed and whitewashed.<sup>34</sup> While their forefathers were occasionally referred to as liberators and heroes, many people in post-war Soviet-controlled territories saw them as occupiers and oppressors, despite their undeniable contribution to the defeat of the Nazi German army as after the war the Soviet forces chose to continue to military and politically occupy many of these "liberated countries" for decades, aggressively restricting and oppressing numerous ethnicities and peoples' freedom and rights to self-government. Many people were killed or displaced because of Soviet actions, while others were relocated and assimilated as Russians and Russian speakers to repopulate the territories, permanently altering the demographic landscape in territories under Soviet control. Minorities, their right

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Role in World War II: Realities and Myths," Davis Center, May 18, 2020, <https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/insights/soviet-role-world-war-ii-realities-and-myths>

to self-determination, and any form of dissent were largely oppressed by the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and continued in the Russian Federation. For most of the times the territories of Russia and under the control of Moscow Kremlin or St Petersburg Winter Palace inhabitants were harsh rulers of a prosperous aristocracy or autocracy. Given the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, such concerns have grown even more.

I was born and raised in Latvia, studied history in school, and continue to conduct research through books and articles during my free time. By delving deeper into this topic, I hope to reflect on my academic lessons and educate myself about the history of my ancestors, as well as conduct additional research. My grandfather and his family were exiled to Siberia in 1949, and I've heard several stories about their experiences, which he has also documented in a book he wrote. My grandfather while in exile in Russian territory later met my grandmother, and the two eventually moved to Latvia with my mother and her younger sister. As a child, I spent a lot of time with all my relatives, including my grandmother, and learned Russian from her, but it was also difficult to maintain connections within the family due to her strong Russian identity, which resulted in highly conflicting views obtained from Russian media networks prior to the Ukraine crisis, resulting in disagreements about political opinions. Therefore, I have had some insider positionality but from consideration

Considering and noting all this, I try to preserve objectivity and to consider opposing opinions. Thus, while some subjective opinions will inevitably exist, I will attempt to balance them out with more objective perspectives, including official testimonials. Additionally, my sources document the positions of the Soviet Communist Party, which dominated politics at the time. Therefore, some insider perspective but try to have a detached look on analytical examination of events.

**The research process** of my study consisted mainly of desk work and analysis of literature and sources of information. Initially, realising the significance of this study was a somewhat inductive, intuitional and mixed process because of drawing together of my various previous experiences of recognising this case study as relevant; however, now that I am describing the context in relation to peace studies perspectives to better explain it, I am inverting it to a more structured and inductive manner - by considering theory first and then reflecting on my findings, to present it to readers in a more organised manner. Honestly, the research writing process was far more chaotic, evolving, and changing than later described here; several other topics were re-evaluated and changed before deciding to research write about Baltic independence movements and the Soviet Union's collapse. Most of the work was

done intuitively at first, and then it was attempted to be articulated in writing, linking with researched materials. I recognize that I am still a student, not an expert, and that I am only learning and practicing, experiencing imposter syndrome at times - that perhaps I should not be discussing and addressing such complex and complicated topics as social issues that have seriously affected the lives of thousands and millions of people, but on the other hand, I am also aware that there are many more less compliant and ill-intentioned people who see no problem with publicly expressing their views, and this case and good example of historic nonviolent resistance to oppressive regimes is a study worth revisiting and expanding on, and reflected especially in the wake of current and recent aggression from the Russian state towards neighbouring countries and people. The writing process has been overthought, overthought, and rewritten several times.

The first step was to search online archives by using search engines such as Google, Duck Duck Go, or others. News articles, museum websites, online library archives, various electronic format books, scientific articles, documentary films, and informative videos have mostly been freely accessed, apart from the academic magazine articles that have largely been hiding behind the paywall. In my I online search I focused to find relevant information sources by using various combinations of keywords such as 'Baltic Way,' 'Singing Revolution,' 'Baltic Independence Movements,' and other related terms, along with keywords as 'peace studies', 'conflict analysis', and so on, to find more relevant sources of information. I also searched the university library online network Oria for relevant research papers using similar methods. Most of the sources examined were in Latvian, but also in English, Russian, and some Lithuanian and Estonian (with whom I used Google Translate). Most of the sources studied and chosen were Latvian, English, and some Russian.

Second, I visited some local libraries in Latvia and Tromso University, where I checked out books and collected materials to gather more relevant information and data, as well as to cross-check various sources. Books are a good source because they represent long-term research, are reviewed by many people before they are published and spread to more people, and public reviews are available after more people have read them, giving their take and opinions. Some books that seemed more important and that I would need for a longer period were also purchased through online stores.

Third, I went to several museums in Latvia, including Gdansk, as well as been to war museums in London, Berlin, and other cities. And, as previously stated, I had some background from my history lessons in school that needed to be refreshed. I also planned to

return to Latvia to finish the research, take some more photographs and videos of relevant museum exhibitions and artifacts, and to re-evaluate the material I have acquired and studied.

Fourth, I have spoken with family members - my parents and grandparents - who have lived through these times and have also taken part in independence movements and events such as the Baltic Way demonstrations and the Barricades against the attempted Soviet army coup following the announcement of Latvia's re-established independence. It additionally helped to tie it all together, to hear their stories and experiences, and to confirm that my research information was valid based on their experiences. I have discussed it with my grandfather, who has also written a book about his experiences of being deported to Siberia as a child, his younger sister - my aunt. With my mother and father, what they did at the time of independence movements. Such discussions yet did not necessarily happen as the last stage, and happened several times, whenever I needed some clarification or confirmation about the information investigated.

Research has concentrated on collecting and describing relevant data based on identified criteria — for comprehending root causes, points of view, and reasoning, examining perspectives and actions of various key actors, most significant developments regarding the context and development of long-term conflict situations, approaches to addressing such issues, and so on. Notably, tried to evaluate the sources are investigative, documentary, non-fiction, informative and credible, which must be evaluated considering the authors' objectives, research techniques, and personal experiences, as well as the publishers' fact-checking. When written properly, books are frequently the result of extensive research that takes a significant amount of time and effort. Books about the Baltic Way and the Baltic independence movements have been extremely beneficial. However, books are more difficult to locate and obtain, particularly those translated into English. I am fluent in multiple languages and can translate and examining a variety of sources. However, I examined primarily sources written in Latvian and English. Russian sources have been used less frequently, and more difficult to ascertain the trustworthy because of wide examples of whitewashing of history to fit their needs and intentions that often have been to delegitimise perspectives that are no corresponding to official government positions.

Overall, cross checking and gathering information from various sources should provide a rather complete picture, considering multiple narratives and perspectives. It certainly has helped me to gain better understanding of the context, to evaluate it from peace and conflict studies perspective. In the next chapter of empirical research, the gathered findings and

information of historical developments will be described in a linear narrated fashion. References, that can be further researched will be also provided throughout the referenced facts.

The analysis, reflection, and discussion sections are then based on the framework for peace studies and conflict analysis established previously for analysing study findings after close reading of books, academic articles, informative websites, booklets and news articles and viewing of documentary films, with emphasis on key details and references, then it has been, noting important data and facts with highlighting or making notes, then Assessed in light of peace studies and conflict analysis principles and criteria examined previously.

After gaining some clarity on what I wanted to present and how I wanted to deliver it, the writing process proved to be the most challenging; it took an extremely long time to properly articulate coherently to present and explain to readers. This proved to be a challenging and at times frustrating process. A strategy that proved to be highly productive and efficient was to just start writing in small bursts, to enjoy the pleasant feelings of small progress, to begin using Microsoft Word's dictate option how I was able to formulate my thoughts much more readily and quickly put them on writing. Additionally, I discovered that sometimes the notes I took, and very brief sentences could be expanded more eloquently by utilizing online essay writing tools such as Quillbot in expanding, forming written sentences, paraphrasing, and formulating ideas and sentences and further reviewing the written work myself. The entire process was then re-read and re-written, thought over and over-thought multiple times.

### 3. Empirical research findings

This chapter will provide some discovered relevant context and sources for further research. Starting with the complex formation of Baltic and national Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian national identities throughout history, and the t he difficult position in midst of several imperial larger powers competing for regional influence. Following the Great War and WW1, declared independence as a balancing act between various European powers. The Baltics gained 20 years of independence, which increased prosperity and national identity. In the meantime, Ukraine, and Belarus, as well as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, had also briefly declared independence, while many other regions attempted to form some form of self-governance and representation, but were soon enticed to join the Soviet Union through

a combination of ideological persuasion, economic dependence, and military coercion... Then came the Soviet-Nazi act of nonaggression, which prompted the Nazis to attack Poland, which was followed two weeks later by Soviet occupation, resulting in the start of WW2 in Europe, which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of people and widespread destruction. Following the war, several peace conferences decided on the post-war order in Europe, which the Soviets pressed to maintain influence in Eastern Europe, but which was not accepted by other powers, resulting in long-term unrest and the Cold War. People were subjugated under Soviet occupation, and human rights violations occurred in the Baltics as part of Soviet terror to intimidate locals into subjugation, such as arrests, deportations, and restrictions on national identity expression. The change came in the late 1980s with glasnost policies, which gave people more freedom to speak up and form movements for increased regional autonomy, which eventually grew into successful independence movements.

### The long and hard road to independence of Baltic peoples

The Baltics and other Eastern European countries have historically been contested places that have witnessed and suffered from multiple historical confrontations between regional imperial powers, especially from larger neighbouring nations such as Germans, Swedes, and Russians...<sup>35</sup> It is impossible to give the entire historical backdrop in a restricted article and with the limited resources of a single researcher; however, some of the most crucial parts will be discussed to provide important context.

The history of Baltic territories and the people inhabiting these nowadays territories of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia has been a very long and complex process, stretching back to 4100-2000 BC when the first Baltic ancestor settlers arrived.<sup>36</sup> The first documented written sources of people in Baltic region are from the 1st century Roman civilisation, who came to trade amber and other goods. Later came closer contacts with Scandinavian Vikings, both peaceful and violent, over the Baltic Sea, and by exploring fishing, travelling, trading, and pillaging routes, including through navigable rivers via Slavic areas all the way to the Black Sea and the Byzantine empire. At earlier times the ancient Baltic tribes mostly believed in and praised natural forces and some superstitions but then, in the 12th century, came the 'spread of western European civilisation' and the introduction of Christianity largely by Germanic peoples and crusaders, which occurred both peacefully through trade and relations

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<sup>35</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993), pp 49-67

<sup>36</sup> National History Museum of Latvia, [http://lnvm.lv/en/?page\\_id=53](http://lnvm.lv/en/?page_id=53), accessed 2022

and violently through armed fighting, including oppressive actions aimed at subjugating the local population that resisted.<sup>37</sup> More Germanic people eventually settled and established important villages and trading ports, such as Riga. Eventually, from the mid-16th to the early 18th century Latvia and Lithuania were then incorporated into the Swedish empire region of Livonia, but Lithuania merged with Poland.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the 18th century, the Russian Empire's growing expansionism resulted in annexing the entirety of Latvia following the Northern War with Sweden for influence over territories, and Germanic landowners were able to maintain their influence in Latvia. Most of the local native population in Baltic lands ruled by foreign imperial powers was reduced to peasants or serfs who largely worked for Germanic landowners who paid taxes to Russian tsar tax collectors. Serfs were recognised as people with human rights and respect, but they were mostly treated as lower-class servants.<sup>39</sup> In comparison to neighbouring countries like Germany, Russia, Sweden that have steadily expanded, assimilated, and conquered other neighbouring populations, the Baltic original population has always been comparatively small, estimated at around 2 million people, while being ethnic majorities in their inhabited lands. Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians evolved over time from various tribes to form major ethnic groups with similar identities in their respective lands, as well as distinct local ethnic and national identities, dialects, customs, and histories. Furthermore, various ethnic minorities, including Slavic, Germanic, Jewish, Roma, and Swedish people, have lived in or migrated to these lands for centuries, resulting in population admixture. Even though people in these regions share common experiences and characteristics, their languages, cultures, and identities are often diverse, especially across languages and cultural elements.<sup>40</sup> The very close similarities between Lithuanian and Latvian languages and Sanskrit - one of the world's oldest languages, demonstrate a well-preserved historical inheritance and long-term settlement in the region. Prussians who spoke a Baltic language became extinct because of historical Germanisation and overtake of their culture and territories. Estonian language, on the other hand, is of Finno-Ugric origin and is akin to Finnish. Notably, none of these languages are identical to Russian, German, Swedish, or Polish, though some similarities may exist due to long-term subjugation and influences.<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly, despite decades of subjective policies these indigenous peoples have kept their identity, language, and culture. This was most likely because many locals historically had

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<sup>37</sup> Embassy of the Republic of Latvia to the United States of America, ed., "History of Latvia: A Brief Synopsis," [www2.mfa.gov.lv](http://www2.mfa.gov.lv), 2014, <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/usa/usa/culture/history-of-latvia-a-brief-synopsis>.

<sup>38</sup> Augustinas Žemaitis, "History of Latvia: Complete, yet Brief," 2018, <https://www.onlatvia.com/topics/history-and-today/history-of-latvia>.

<sup>39</sup> National History Museum of Latvia, "Territory of Latvia and Its Inhabitants in the 16th – 18th Century," accessed May 12, 2022, [http://lnvm.lv/en/?page\\_id=943](http://lnvm.lv/en/?page_id=943).

<sup>40</sup> Arnold Spekke et al., "Latvia - History," ed. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Latvia/History>.

<sup>41</sup> Vytautas J. Mažiulis, "Baltic Languages," 1999, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baltic-languages>.



little interaction with the ruling classes. Those who were able to obtain higher education and status were often assimilated or able to balance their ethnic identity with that of larger, more powerful nations. Latvian national identity evolved gradually over time as a result of some better-off individuals seeking education, working on personal development such as farming practises, international trade, getting involved in historical, social research, literature, and study, and activism to gain more civil rights grew significantly in the early twentieth century, emphasising the importance of education, development of literature and art works, and fostering personal growth and a deeper sense of identity in order to increase personal and national well-being.<sup>42</sup>

From 1914 to 1918 in the times of Great War that became known as World War 1, many Baltic residents, particularly peasants, were recruited to fight for the Russian Empire against other imperial forces, mainly against the German Wehrmacht army who battled for control in these territories.<sup>43</sup> The war caused significant destruction and tragedy for many people and resulted in the decline of empires, creating a power vacuum that many smaller ethnicities used to organise self-governance and national representation. Many Latvian military conscripts who supported the ideas of communist revolution, joined Bolshevik revolutionaries in their attempt to overthrow the Russian empire's tsarist regime, also in hopes that their lands would gain independence as the result. Furthermore, the Latvian Red Rifles became a notably significant armed faction that after later in the war joined Bolshevik forces and formed significant part of Bolshevik security services.

Following the Bolshevik revolution to overthrow tsarist regime in St. Petersburg in 1917, the Russian Empire disintegrated and continued in civil war between Bolshevik Soviet Communists (and the armed faction - red army) and Tsar loyalists (and the white army). The communists named this civil war a revolution. A range of large-scale brutal tactics as arrests, assassinations, deportations to forced labour camps, dismissal from employment, family member intimidation, and property destruction were all used against all potential or alleged opponents of the regime, including wealthy and/or well-educated individuals, ethnic minorities with independence sentiments, and others. The ideological justification for these brutally repressive acts was that they were revolutionary battles against purported elites or bourgeoisie who had managed to improve their standard of living under imperial tsarist regime while the rest of peasant and working class was exploited. These wars spanned

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<sup>42</sup> Vitolds Muižnieks and Jānis Ciglis, *On the Road to Becoming Latvian*, ed. Latvijas Nacionālais Vēstures Muzejs (Riga, 2016), <https://emuzejs.lnvm.lv/books/Cela-uz-latviesu-tautu/>.

<sup>43</sup> The Great War, "The Baltic States in World War 1," *YouTube*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6WXtDtZRCI>.

borders into former empire territories, as the White army loyal to the tsar retreated to neighbouring territories.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, German army also kept attacking and advancing in territories, including in the Baltic region. The national armies and governing forces that had started forming for newly formed states, had to fight against all the opposing sides and decide on what alliances might be made in these complex circumstances. Soviet Bolshevik forces weakened by the civil wars and could not resist German ongoing fight. As a result, Brest-Litovsk treaty was signed on March 3, 1918, between Russian Soviet-Bolshevik-Communist representatives and Wehrmacht German forces.<sup>45</sup> However, the overly expanded German army also met fierce resistance from various sides, including national forces in regions seeking independence and Allied powers fighting against them. As it became clear that they would not be able to win the war, German representatives began to support the independence of the Baltic region from Russia if it remained under some degree of German influence. According to the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia had to recognise independence of Ukraine, Georgia, and Finland; cede Poland and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to Germany and Austria-Hungary; and to cede territories of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to Turkey. World War I ended with German and Central Powers capitulation and the deaths of millions of people, as well as the destruction of cities, people's homes, and lives.<sup>46</sup>

#### The independence of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, interwar period

Within all this complex infighting and imperial forces significantly weakened in power, with allied forces eventually gaining influence, Lithuania had declared independence already on February 16, 1918, and Estonia on February 24, 1918, both of which were strong statements but had not yet gained international recognition. At the same time, the armed war for independence continued, with imperial Russian, Bolshevik, and German forces still pursuing influence in the Baltics, and additional international recognition was on the way.<sup>47</sup> Latvia and the Baltic nations started establishing self-governmental representation and forming diplomatic connections with other countries. Zigfrid Meirovic, a very notable man in Latvian history, became the country's first foreign ambassador through his efforts to travel to London, attempt to meet with UK officials on a small budget, and received verbal support

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<sup>44</sup> Crashcourse, "Russian Revolution and Civil War," 2018, <https://youtu.be/U6KR4cLLVzQ>.

<sup>45</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Treaties of Brest-Litovsk | 1918," February, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/treaties-of-Brest-Litovsk>.

<sup>46</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, ed., "World War I - the End of the German War," 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/The-end-of-the-German-war>.

<sup>47</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), pp28-45

that UK recognised Latvia claim to independence from UK foreign minister A J. Balfur on 23 October, and then written confirmation on 11 November, 1918,<sup>48</sup> at the day when Germans officially signed their surrender to the Antante allied forces<sup>49</sup>. Latvia declared independence officially a few days later, on November 18.

Because the Germans still desired a degree of control in the region, Britain's and other allied nations' recognition was crucial, as increased international interest in the region's involvement resulted in a more diversified balance of powers in the region, allowing for the formation and maintenance of alliances while not having anyone wielding overwhelming power. Meanwhile military clashes and fighting still raged on,<sup>50</sup> especially the civil war between communist Bolshevik Red army forces and tsarist imperial White army loyalists was fought on multiple fronts, frequently extending into neighbouring territories. Surely, it was hard also for the Soviet Bolshevik forces to fight on multiple fronts, so they began negotiating peace treaties with other nearby powers, including Baltic states, especially following the defeat of the Soviet Red Army in Warsaw and when the Polish army launched a counterattack, advanced, and took control of territories that are now part of Belarus and Lithuania,<sup>51</sup> it pushed the Soviets to sign an armistice with Poland and to consolidate their power with Baltic countries. Therefore, around 1920, the and the Soviet Russia negotiated and signed peace treaties with Poland and Baltic States and these governments gained recognition for independence from Bolshevik government.<sup>52, 53</sup> Thus, The Soviet-Communist-Bolshevik focus shifted from winning with military power instead on establishment of allied communist governments in surrounding lands, especially establishing control mainly in Slavic lands.

In the early 1920s, the three Baltic states joined the League of Nations. The Entente Supreme Council then recognised Latvia's independence on January 26, 1921. Many more countries gained independence after WWI, when many empires were weakened by the war and much more national and ethnic self-governance was possible in the power vacuum. What separates Baltic states from other republics that also had come under the Soviet Union, were the comparatively longer independence years of 1920 to 1940, the inter-war years, Latvia and the other Baltic states chose to take a different route – democratic and more

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<sup>48</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Intelīgences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp 20-21

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/world-war-i-ends>

<sup>50</sup> Valters Nollendorfs (Museum of Occupation, Latvian Institute, 2010), <https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/history-of-latvia.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> The Great War, "The Baltic States in World War 1," August 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6WXtDtzRcI>.

<sup>52</sup> Judīte Čunka, "100 Years since Signing of Latvian-Russian Peace Treaty," eng.lsm.lv, August 11, 2020,

<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/history/100-years-since-signing-of-latvian-russian-peace-treaty.a370053/>.

<sup>53</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, ed., "Peace Treaty between Latvia and Russia," www2.mfa.gov.lv, n.d., <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/bilateral-relations/peace-treaty-between-latvia-and-russia-august-11-1920>.

European, for some time but after 1934 coup became authoritarian, like many countries in Europe at the time.<sup>54</sup> However, the independence in the interwar period improved trade and international relations, leading to growth of industrialisation, rising surge in levels of income, and wellbeing, organisation of cultural events, better education and leading to increased sense of national identity and patriotic sentiments.<sup>55</sup>

### The tragic formation of Soviet Union

In the ongoing Russian Civil wars, communist movements took control of several countries that had also recently declared independence, changed governments which lead to the formation of the Soviet Union of Socialist Republics (USSR), starting in 1922. The first republics to have such faith were itself Russia, but also Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. These latter former Russian Empire countries had also tried to form some national associations, and some even declared brief independence but were unable to stabilise. When compared to briefly established independent forces, the armed faction supporting the Bolshevik communist movement, also known as the Red Army, was also more overwhelming in size and military strength.

Under Lenin's leadership, the USSR constitution and legislation initially claimed to recognise the right to national territory, indigenous-language schools, and cultural organisations, while also attempting to impose socialist concepts and practises on the populace. Perhaps multinational movement was the actual intention at the time, or it arose as a strategy to limit resistance of people wishing national independence. Communism was presented as a global and international movement closely associated with Marxist ideology based on the theory of class conflict (primarily, the elites or bourgeoisie vs. the working class or proletariat). During times of social conflict, several revolutionaries led by Lenin and others aspired to drastically change the situation, overthrowing imperial tsarist power, urbanising society through the establishment of factories and developing manufacturing industry and massively increasing employment, even though most of the population in those lands was agrarian. Promoting well-being was an idealistic and utopian goal that, on the surface and in theory, appeared compelling to people and thus received some popular support. Surely, it was up to communist ideology representatives to decide who were the new power elite and

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<sup>54</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas Ep18: '15th of May, 1934, Authoritarian Coup' with English Subtitles," May 7, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/416181718>.

<sup>55</sup> Jānis Taurēns, "Latvijas Republika Starpkaru Periodā," Enciklopedija.lv, 2018, <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/54765-Latvijas-Republika-starpkaru-period%C4%81>.

formed a single party system; decision-making was largely centralised in Moscow in the Soviet council with subordinated local governments.

When Lenin died on January 21, 1924, and when Stalin gained an advantage over other communist party leaders in a power struggle, the situation then deteriorated dramatically, with deeper and more widespread repressions following. Following that, the Soviet Union devolved even further into a totalitarian communist state, establishing an even stricter one-party system, and increasing repressions against communist opponents. Also, the minority status of self-government and identity changed, and Russian became the dominant and official language - lingua franca - in the Soviet Union, implementing various political and cultural russification policies, such as prohibiting the use of national and indigenous cultural symbols, closing indigenous national schools, censoring literature, forbidding public events or exhibitions, and moving hundreds of thousands of people to controlled territories as industrial workers or as military personnel, and so on, who often found themselves in quite a privileged position in comparison to locals.<sup>56</sup> Prisons for real or alleged opposition frequently became overcrowded. Much of Siberia's vast territories to exploit various resources required additional labour to collect resources and then, mass deportations were organised from borderland republics. The formation of massive agricultural communes known as kolkhoz also began. As a result, the Soviet authorities forced peasants to give up a portion of their land to the state, and instead of working on their own land, they were forced to join specialised cooperative farms. Naturally, there was much opposition because the local peasants did not want to give up their lands and become a cheap and exploited workforce.

Peasant resistance, nationalist sentiments, or simply the existence of anyone deemed a threat to communist power resulted in a variety of repressions, ranging from mock trials to arrests, confiscation of property, deportation, and executions. The regime was ruthless. Throughout the Soviet Union's formation, there were numerous significant purges and repressions. As previously stated, the country was in a state of civil war. The communist party sought out any potential or actual resistance, as well as anyone with ties to the previous Russian administration, and targeted so-called Kulaks, or relatively wealthy landowners, either by killing them or imprisoning them for show trials. In addition to murdering their target populations, such as the Kulaks, the Soviet government deported or resettled large populations of ethnic minorities and ethnic groups from borderland republics such as Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus to remote areas of Siberia, or sent them to Gulags, or

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<sup>56</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), pp149-173

forced labour camps. The resettlement of people of Russian ancestry or from other Soviet republics drastically altered the ethnic composition, with long-term consequences that are still felt today. Furthermore, mass starvation was used as a political tactic, with uncooperative peasants harassed and their food seized before they could effectively struggle or starve, especially during the colder winter months, resulting in the deaths of millions of people in Ukraine's territories in 1932-1933, as well as the oppression and deportation of Crimean Tatars and Chechen territories...<sup>57</sup>

Given all of this, the Soviet Union's establishment during a period of widespread civil war was unquestionably tragic and repressive. It was a different era, when international and social communication and access to information were significantly more limited, documents and proof were scarce, and records were more easily destroyed; however, there are numerous recordings and proof for these crimes available. For example, in Kyiv, Ukraine, there is a Holodomor Museum; in Latvia, there are Soviet Occupation and KGB repression museums; and in Gdansk, Poland, there is a World War II Museum that shows crimes committed by Nazi and Soviet forces, which I have personally visited, as well as books like *Bloodlands* that show the brutality that people caught between these brutal regimes had to face...

It's astounding, given how long acknowledging Soviet totalitarian crimes against humanity was prohibited within the Soviet Union, with much evidence concealed and history erased during the Soviet era and in Russia for decades.<sup>58</sup> Even after regaining independence, many people in post-Soviet countries tried to avoid direct confrontation with Russia because of its global influence, supply of various resources, and so on. Only a few places have preserved and publicly conveyed collective traumas and tragedies through museums, commemorative plaques, monuments, books and documentaries, and additional research... Things have changed now that Russia's imperialist leadership has revealed its true nature by invading and attacking Ukraine. New tragedies have also exposed old wounds, allowing for more difficult conversations.

The formation of the Soviet Union was only the beginning of the twentieth century's greatest geopolitical tragedies, which were followed by the failure to contain Nazi Germany's imperial ambitions through violent actions, and the subsequent Soviet collaboration with Nazi leadership, allowing Nazi Germany to start war with other European powers and peoples, resulting in massive grave hostilities.

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<sup>57</sup> Ranjani Chakraborty, "What Was the Holodomor? The History of Ukraine's Man-Made Famine, Explained.," March 25, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/videos/2022/3/25/22996165/ukraine-holodomor-famine-russia-cover-up>.

<sup>58</sup> Communist Crimes, ed., accessed 2022, <https://communistcrimes.org/en/countries>.

## The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact

Another tragic chapter in history of Europe came with the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Now it is widely regarded as one of the main reasons why Eastern European countries, particularly the Baltic republics, were drawn into the conflicts between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, both of whose governments had growing imperialistic and expansive ambitions.

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were developing belligerent feelings because of a growing desire for imperial dominance and resentment over the situation they found themselves in after the Great War, or WW1, having suffered significant losses and experiencing political and/or economic instability. While fascism and communism had significant competing and ideological differences and claims against one another, both Nazi and Communist ideologies were imperially expansive - the Germans desired more land on which to settle and farm their people, which they called lebensraum, whereas the Russians and some former residents of the Russian Empire sought to restore or expand their former Russian imperialistic influence, as well as to spread communist ideas on a global scale. With the passage of time, industrialization increased, and the economy improved, and it also resulted in increased militarization, with Germans attempting to go around limitations and sanctions by seeking militarization in and through other countries, including Russia.<sup>59</sup> The Nazis and Communists deliberated and negotiated had disagreements concerning contested regions and differences in ideologies that nevertheless both were growingly cruel and despotic.

The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1939,<sup>60</sup> ultimately in effect led to illegal division of Eastern Europe into spheres of influence, and the Baltic States and a huge portion of Eastern Europe to be both militarily and politically submitted to Soviet Union, which in fact can be viewed as a form of reinstated Russian Empire. It established neutrality between Nazis and Soviets for the time being, and secured Germany on its Eastern flank. On September 1, 1939, German troops invaded Poland, and two weeks later September 17, 1939, Russia attacked the country's east. Many Russian historians and other people looking for excuses why Soviets had to make a deal with the Nazis also often mention that many European powers failed to contain German aggression by allowing concessions in

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<sup>59</sup> Corum, James S., "Devil's Bargain: Germany and Russia before WWII," HistoryNet, March 8, 2018, <https://www.historynet.com/devils-bargain-germany-and-russia-before-wwii/>.

<sup>60</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Intelligences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp 43-48

Munich agreements,<sup>61</sup> saying that therefore, Soviets had no chance, when in fact they kept their options open by juggling two sets of negotiations. However, other perspectives state that it was perfectly useful and beneficial for Soviets to push other European powers to fight within each other and when they would be significantly weakened to take them over with force in the aftermath. Seems that 'the Soviet Union leadership calculated that it was more suitable and beneficial to make a deal with Nazis, let them attack Poland, the let the British and the French to fight the Germans, and later join in the fight themselves, when adversaries would be weakened.<sup>62</sup> It was a temporary alliance of convenience.<sup>63</sup> Communists and Nazis even held joint military parade in Brest-Litovsk.<sup>64, 65</sup>

### The Baltic States occupation and annexation by the Soviet Union

Following the Soviet and Nazi attack on Poland, the Soviets began pressuring Baltic states, supposedly for security concerns. Estonia was the first to be pressed, with simulated threats that if they would not be able to guarantee safety around their waters, then Polish submarines might sink Soviet ships.<sup>66</sup> Thus, they demanded that they be allowed to station Soviet army garrisons in their ports and then territories, as if to protect the Soviets and Estonia. The Soviet Union also began stationing their armies near borders, then requested that forces be allowed in, that land, navy, and aerial bases be established, and forced on signed agreements with Estonia on September 28th, Latvia on October 5th, and Lithuania on October 10th, 1939.<sup>67</sup> In these agreements the Soviets pretended to respect independence, but in reality, it was a prelude to planned occupation. The alternative to Soviet demands was resistance and going to war, which was clearly stated and threatened in some cases. As a result of the asymmetrically smaller forces and the massive number of casualties, Baltic government leaders decided to yield and cooperate with the demands.

What further proves the real intentions of the Soviet empire's expansionist goals was the further incitement for an attack on neighbouring Finland. In the Russian Empire the territories of Finland had also been historically suppressed by Russian forces, after previously

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<sup>61</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), p51

<sup>62</sup> Viktor Suvorov, *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?* (London: H. Hamilton, 1990).

<sup>63</sup> [https://www.rferl.org/a/MolotovRibbentrop\\_The\\_Night\\_Stalin\\_And\\_Hitler\\_Redrew\\_The\\_Map\\_Of\\_Europe/1804154.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/MolotovRibbentrop_The_Night_Stalin_And_Hitler_Redrew_The_Map_Of_Europe/1804154.html)

<sup>64</sup> [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/German%E2%80%93Soviet\\_military\\_parade\\_in\\_Brest-Litovsk](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/German%E2%80%93Soviet_military_parade_in_Brest-Litovsk)

<sup>65</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage Books, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Inteliģences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), p 23

<sup>67</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993), p 59



Swedish-controlled territories were lost during the Finnish war, similarly as Latvian and Estonian lands. After end of WW1, Finland also had declared and gained independence, declared itself neutral at the outbreak of World War II, but it was not enough for Soviets, and they demanded concessions. Then, following a series of ultimatums Finland paused, taking advantage of the opportunity to mobilize its army and seek assistance from Sweden and the Western Allies, but with little success. The Soviet Union invaded on November 30, 1939, using a fabricated border incident as if the Soviet soldiers were shot at and attacked by Finnish side. When a following investigation was offered, Soviets refused to it and instead attacked Finland on November 30, 1939, starting what's now known as the Winter War.<sup>68</sup> While the Soviet Union appeared to have an overwhelming advantage, they were not adequately prepared, lacked equipment, couldn't handle harsh winter weather, experienced fierce resistance of Finnish soldiers, in particular camouflaged snipers in woods, and suffered heavy losses, forcing them to make concessions. After months of battles, Finland managed to keep its independence although losing a portion of their land. However, later they felt to make alliances with the Axis, to gain armament support, and to be able to defend themselves against the Soviets further on, if necessary. Despite their sympathies for Finland, the Baltic states remained quiet and had to reconcile with the Russian bases on their territory.

The Soviets decided to ultimately make their move to attack the Baltic states after the Nazi German army attacked Belgium, Holland, and France. First, Lithuania was accused of capturing some Soviet soldiers to obtain and force military secrets from them, and on June 15, a request for an ultimatum to form a new government in Lithuania was made while the Soviets provoked an attack on Latvian border guards and issued a surrender ultimatum to Latvia on June 16, 1940. Considering that overwhelming amount of Soviet army was already stationed on the lands from months before, the governments of Baltic states decided not to use military force in the event of a declaration of war because the division of power was extremely asymmetrical, and because the strongest possible allies and supporters, such as France and the United Kingdom, had already been weakened by war with Nazi Germany. With military and political pressures, and armies vastly outnumbering local defence forces, there was simply no way to resist; otherwise, the outcome would be even more tragic. The Latvian government was forced to flee. Soon after, less than a month left later, **falsified elections** were organised to take place month later July 15.<sup>69</sup> Only one party was an option

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<sup>68</sup> John Graham Royde-Smith and Thomas A Hughes, "World War II - the Baltic States and the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-40," December 30, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II/The-Baltic-states-and-the-Russo-Finnish-War-1939-40>.

<sup>69</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Inteligences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp 26-28

with selected candidates and the results were announced hours before the votes had been counted. After a few days, on July 21 – the new parliament issued a request to be taken into USSR, which was finalised on August 5.<sup>70</sup> The local governments became a subordinate executive power while all the main decisions regarding the national and international policies were decided by the Communist Party in Moscow. And the former independent government was ultimately captured and exiled to political labour camps in Siberia where many of them met their end.

Soviet terror tactics were used also in Baltic territories to fight against national resistance and political opposition. On June 13-14, 1941, the Soviets deported 15 443 people to Siberian prisons and labour camps.<sup>71, 72</sup> These brutal, violent repressions happened weeks before the Soviet war with Nazi Germany had even started. The Soviet or Russian narrative would almost certainly claim that these actions were a political act of self-defence aimed at deterring potential collaborators with the advancing Nazi forces. Nonetheless, the deportations, executions, arrests, and other intimidating and oppressive policies occurred prior to the start of the Nazi war with the Soviet Union before their country or even the regions over which they claimed authority were attacked.<sup>73</sup> Communist forces, on the other hand, chose to slaughter, forcibly arrest, and relocate thousands of people, many of whom died soon after in Siberia's harsh terrain's prisons and concentration camps known as gulags. The assertion that all these individuals posed a threat to Russian sovereignty is unfounded, and such tactics are consistent with Stalin's systematic persecution and genocide of minorities and dissent within Russian and Soviet borders.<sup>74</sup> The Soviet and later Russian governments continued to deny that these were massive genocide and human rights violations, and they worked tirelessly to conceal, deny, and destroy various facts about inconvenient truths.<sup>75</sup> It has been made illegal in Russia to consider and compare Nazi war crimes to those of Soviet Communists.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas Ep22: 'Occupation of Latvia in 1940'", June 15, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/429380933>.

<sup>71</sup> Valters Nollendorfs et al., ed. Latvian Museum of Occupation, 2005, <https://okupacijasmuzejs.lv/en/history/1-soviet-occupation/>.

<sup>72</sup> eng.lsm.lv (Latvian Public Broadcasting), "Baltic Deportation Remembrance Comes with Modern Echo," March 25, 2022,

<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/history/baltic-deportation-remembrance-comes-with-modern-echo.a449522/>.

<sup>73</sup> Latvijas Okupācijas Muzeja Izglītības nodaļa, "Deportations: Two Nights, One Crime," June 3, 2021,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fai0joBJ\\_oI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fai0joBJ_oI).

<sup>74</sup> James H. Bater et al., "Latvia - the Soviet Occupation and Incorporation," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019,

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Latvia/The-Soviet-occupation-and-incorporation>.

<sup>75</sup> Liivoja Rain, *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trials*, ed. Kevin Jon Heller and Gerry J Simpson (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199671144.001.0001/acprof-9780199671144-chapter-12>.

<sup>76</sup> Jacob Bentley-York, "Putin Makes It ILLEGAL to Compare Soviets to the Nazis in Bizarre New Law," The US Sun, July 2, 2021,

<https://www.the-sun.com/news/3204992/putin-illegal-compare-soviets-nazis-bizarre-new-law/>.

## The devastation of World War II

The turning point in history occurred when the Nazis chose to double-cross the Soviets. It began on June 22, 1941, with the start of Operation Barbarossa, in which Nazi Germany chose to surprise attack the Soviet Union, with whom they had previously collaborated,<sup>77</sup> divided territories between them and traded various goods such as food and even military weapons.<sup>78</sup>

The German advances were swift, and the Baltics and Latvia were occupied in June 1941. Following the harsh experiences of the Soviet regime, some mistakenly viewed the German army as liberators from the communist regime, and some even greeted tanks and soldiers with flowers to drive out the Red Army, hoping for a less repressive future. Unfortunately, that was not the case. However, it soon became clear that German forces had no intention of liberating, and many repressive additional policies followed - suspected collaborators were killed, minorities were purged and killed. Holocaust and oppression against minorities and political opponents followed, and labour and extermination camps were built in Latvia and the Baltics.<sup>79</sup> Because Germans forced and conscripted people to fight in their army, there were instances of brothers fighting on opposing sides.

They continued their march and expansion to the east, attacking the Russian territories. From the viewpoint of the Soviets, this is a critical turning point in the war. Their lands, cities, and people were now under attack, and the fight became known as the Great Patriotic War. Previously, Soviets have been occupying lands to turn them to communism and limit the influence of imperialism and oppression of people from the elites, but it has now been made clear that they were occupying those lands to protect them ahead of time from the coming Nazi Germany, in most cases months or even years in advance. Unfortunately, that preparatory Soviet 'protection' often came at a tragic cost in terms of massive destruction and human lives by clearing of suspected opposition. Given the Soviet Union's lead-up to increased militarization and planned expansive and imperial policies of spreading communist ideology and influence around the world, it's possible that Stalin planned such traitorous attacks himself but was outmatched by Hitler (Viktor Suvorov, 1990). The most significant attacks on Russian territory were on cities, such as today's St Peterburg, then known as Leningrad, which was surrounded, blockaded, and sieged, resulting in famine. Volgograd,

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<sup>77</sup> Viktor Suvorov, *Icebreaker: Who Started the Second World War?* (London: H. Hamilton, 1990).

<sup>78</sup> <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2015/03/02/soviet-german-cooperation/>  
and <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2020/03/05/soviet-german-cooperation-2/>

<sup>79</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage Books, 2011).

then known as Stalingrad, was also subjected to brutal urban battles of close combat and tragic destruction huge losses of human lives.

The war with Russia lasted much longer than Germans anticipated, and planning was insufficient - they could not cover supply lines, were not prepared for brutal winter. Fierce resistance of people who were defending their lands, involvement of everyone, also, women took part in war effort, which at the time was surprising. Possibly, they underestimated Soviets because of the losses they had suffered against Finland. However, they were fighting on home soil, had large civilian reserves, where all population contributed to resistance, and received support from the United Kingdom and United States of America to counter German attacks.<sup>80</sup> Also, overextended Nazi forces faced trouble with supplies and logistics, were not prepared for harsh winter weather conditions, fierce resistance of locals, gathered soldiers from other regions, eventually Nazis were defeated at Stalingrad and the Soviets began to force them slowly back across Europe. It took a long time and millions of deaths, but the Soviets eventually pushed Hitler's forces all the way back to Germany. After suffering heavy losses, the Nazi German army was forced to begin withdrawing.

On June 18, 1944, the Soviet army pushed back Nazi Germany's army and re-entered Latvia. This time, Soviet army forces (formed of soldiers from various Soviet Union-controlled territories) could legitimately claim to be liberators, having driven the Nazis out of several territories. Many territories, however, did not warmly welcome the Soviet forces' return, recalling the repressions they had carried out prior to the start of the German attacks. However, in a few isolated areas that did not have to deal with the long-term aftermath of Soviet liberation, such as Finnmark in northern Norway, liberation did occur. After chasing out the Germans from the east, the Soviets withdrew from Norway, while the United Kingdom and other allied forces attacked them from the west. Perhaps it was because Norway was close to the United Kingdom, had mountainous, difficult terrain, and a harsh climate, and had not yet discovered significant resources. Also, the Soviets needed manpower to shift their focus away from the push and offensive towards Berlin, so they actually withdrew from Northern Norway.

From various sides German forces were encircled by Western Allies and the Soviet armies, thus Germans retreated and suffered losses. When war came close to Berlin, Hitler and other members of Nazi leadership committed suicide in bunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945. Germans surrendered to the Western Allies, including Britain and the U.S., on May 8,

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<sup>80</sup> <https://ru.usembassy.gov/world-war-ii-allies-u-s-lend-lease-to-the-soviet-union-1941-1945/>

and a separate surrender took place on May 9 in Russia. In the East, the war ended when Japan surrendered unconditionally on Aug. 14, 1945, signing their surrender on Sept. 2. The Japanese surrender occurred after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on Aug. 6 and 9, respectively.

As decided and discussed in the following chapter, the Soviets ultimately chose to maintain their presence in most territories they pushed the Nazis out of and took control of, controlling Eastern Europe for decades, and have widely celebrated German forces' capitulation on May 9 as a Victory Day. Other countries, however, do not regard it as a victory or liberation because the Soviet occupation persisted. These wars have caused widespread devastation, millions of casualties all around, and unfathomable tragedy and suffering.<sup>81</sup> In wars, no one wins; everyone loses, while certainly some were more affected than others, with those in positions of power who did not suffer personal losses suffering the least. Everyone suffered losses, though some suffered more than others.

#### Post-war talks between allied forces resulting in a forced negative peace

Series of significant post-war conferences were held between allied leaders to discuss and negotiate the faith of post-war Europe starting with Tehran, then Yalta conference, then Potsdam and San Francisco.<sup>82</sup> A series of post-war conferences were held to discuss rebuilding and reshaping the state of Europe after the wars to planned and discussed the future of German post-war government and reparations.

Already on November 28 to December 1, 1943, the leaders of the allied forces – President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin – met in Tehran on to discuss and establish a "second front" in Western Europe. While they largely agreed on the plan to subdue the German forces, they disagreed on Stalin's demands in return for the offensive on the eastern front, to to maintain control of the borders established by the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1939 and the Russo-Finnish Treaty of 1940, as well as control of East Prussia's Baltic coast. Roosevelt and Churchill were wary of making concessions on the Polish and Eastern European issues and did not come to any agreements.

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<sup>81</sup> John Graham Royde-Smith, "World War II - Costs of the War | Britannica," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II/Costs-of-the-war>.

<sup>82</sup> The Cold War, YouTube channel, "Potsdam 1945 - Where the Cold War Started," September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-8k1DZg0Lg>.

In the Yalta Conference, often referred to as the Crimea Conference and codenamed Argonaut, happened from February 4 to 11, 1945. The Yalta Agreement, signed by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin, provides the groundwork for the Soviet Union's occupation of Germany and the return of lands acquired by Germany and Japan to the Soviet Union.

Potsdam Conference. From July 17 to August 2, 1945, the Potsdam conference took place west of Berlin in Soviet-controlled territory. Reportedly, that's where the faith of Eastern Europe was decided after heated arguments, the Soviet Union, as the victor party, eventually pressured to keep Eastern European lands within its sphere of influence. Although the UK, US, and other allied forces were exhausted and weakened by the war, they resisted officially recognising the Soviet claims on these lands. United Nations was formed in 1945, April 25 in San Francisco and the parties of Security council were decided.<sup>83, 84</sup>

The end of global conflict came later with Japan's capitulation formally on September 2, following the American military bombardment and deployment of two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, respectively, resulting in tremendous destruction and fatalities.

The uneasy situation of post-war negotiations signalled the start of the negative peace and unstable balance that grew into Cold War. The Western powers recognised the belligerent, expansive and imperialistic nature of the communist regime and posing threat to future Europe. Also, the US, UK and many other Western countries never accepted the occupation of the Baltic states, Poland but after the could not do much about it. There were also significant refugee populations and diasporas of Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and other emigrants in the United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries who actively lobbied their host governments not to cave into Soviet demands. While Western leaders protested and never acknowledged the Baltic nations' admission to the Soviet Union, but they were also varying and unwilling to risk further escalation after enormous fatalities and destruction caused by WW2.

Therefore, Churchill stated the famous phrase that 'an iron curtain had descended across the European continent'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> United Nations, "History of the United Nations," United Nations, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un>.

<sup>84</sup> UN GENEVA CONFERENCES, "United Nations Conference on International Organization, San Francisco Conference, 1945 - YouTube," 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fdiMrKChA>.

<sup>85</sup> History.com Editors, "Churchill Delivers Iron Curtain Speech," HISTORY, March 4, 2019, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/churchill-delivers-iron-curtain-speech>.

## Soviet times and Cold War

After the Soviet army had taken control of the lands in Eastern Europe by pushing out Nazi armies and high-level negotiations at post-war meetings and conferences, the Soviets eventually gained control of Eastern Europe. However, not everyone accepted it, resulting in years of local opposition, public dissent, including limited military resistance. Some people in Latvia and Estonia, for example, sought refuge in the forests and waged guerrilla warfare against the Soviet state, hoping that the Western Allies would soon launch a liberation campaign. It never arrived. Eventually they were defeated, but they became a well-known part of national history as the Forest Brothers, a symbol of tenacious resistance.<sup>86, 87</sup> Unfortunately, the active opposition to Soviet rule also led to further decades of harsh measures by communist regimes centred in Moscow aimed at weakening people's resistance strength. Guerrilla fighter / partisan armed resistance movement - Forest Brothers – had retreated into woods, still hoped for assistance from allied states, hoped for liberation of Soviet rule and at times attacked soviet forces, but their hopes did not come into reality...

Stalin regime ruthlessly retaliated with further repressions and another wave of arrests and deportations of people by sending many to gulag labour camps and resettling them to remote areas of Siberia in spring of 1949, in operations 'Spring' and 'Priboi'. The reasons for deportations were partly because of ongoing guerrilla resistance after war but mostly to intimidate the local population of repercussions in case of not cooperating. Most deportees were from rural areas intended to intimidate people from resisting to collectivisation, especially what were perceived as more wealthy landowners. Some were even chosen randomly to fulfil set quotas of how many people need to be deported, not because of any actual non-cooperation.<sup>88, 89</sup> My grandfather's family also fell victim to these brutal acts of Soviet terror. His father, my great-grandfather was arrested under suspicion of delivering food to some local Forest Brothers, as he was working as a driver for the local milk factory shortly after the war. After his arrest, in the middle of the night, armed guards came in, told the people in house to start packing and to follow them, while also searching for and taking some jewellery in the process. They were taken to a railway station, put in train carriages meant to transport livestock and over course of few days sent to desolate village in middle of

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<sup>86</sup> The Cold War, YouTube channel, "Forest Brothers - Anti-Soviet Guerilla War in the Baltics," November 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRD54bWyAfc>.

<sup>87</sup> NATO, "Forest Brothers - Fight for the Baltics," July 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5rQFp7FF9c>.

<sup>88</sup> Latvijas Okupācijas Muzeja Izglītības nodaļa, "Deportations: Two Nights, One Crime," June 3, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fai0joBJ\\_oI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fai0joBJ_oI).

<sup>89</sup> eng.lsm.lv (Latvian Public Broadcasting), "Baltic Deportation Remembrance Comes with Modern Echo," March 25, 2022, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/history/baltic-deportation-remembrance-comes-with-modern-echo.a449522/>.

Siberia, north of Tomsk, where they struggled, tried to survive and then to live, for years and decades.

During Soviet times, the communist rule continued, subordinated under the central party in Moscow. Propaganda and communist indoctrination were pushed in schools. Russian language was made the official language in all official communications. Mandatory inscription into Soviet army – soldiers were often dislocated to other regions. Private property was eliminated, either by simply taken away by force of soldiers or with high taxation.

In the Western Europe, considering the Soviet Union's belligerence and expansive ambitions, Western European and North American states formed NATO in 1949. Its mission was to secure European peace, promote cooperation among its members, and protect their freedom, all while countering the threat posed by the Soviet Union at the time.<sup>90</sup> Following the use of nuclear weapons by the United States against Japan in 1945, the Soviet Union also attempted to develop a nuclear bomb in 1949, including to gain the know-how by spying, and information leaked to the Soviets was a critical factor in making it possible. Some chose to collaborate for a variety of reasons, including that the American government had decided to use of it in Japan at the end of the World War 2, and such ability posed a significant threat to the pursuit of world dominance through force. Certain people believed that such power, which had shown a callous disregard for the suffering of thousands of people, deserved to be counterbalanced.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, in reality, however, the Soviet Union was far from idealistic and peaceful force, despite how they tried to present themselves to international audiences, nor towards people under their control, nor towards the safety of the rest of the world... In fact, them being able to produce and successfully test the nuclear weapons further led to even more armament, and the threatening nuclear and military arms race and the Cold War begun... which in the worst-case scenario could lead to destruction of the whole world and life on earth, and still has that capability.

In 1953, a great deal changed. On March 5th, the Stalin finally died by suffered a brain stroke, which was discovered after a lengthy delay due to his guards and subordinates' fear of disturbing him. Thus, also medical treatment was delayed, and he died over five days of suffering. Thereafter, a fight for power ensued, culminating in the election of the next party head - N. Khrushchev. Policies shifted to some extent during Khrushchev's presidency<sup>92</sup> - repressions were eased, and the Soviet Union even made some economic and social progress,

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<sup>90</sup> NATO, "Why Was NATO Founded?," 2017, <https://www.nato.int/wearenato/why-was-nato-founded.html>.

<sup>91</sup> History.com Editors, "Soviets Explode Atomic Bomb," February 25, 2019, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/soviets-explode-atomic-bomb>.

<sup>92</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas\_ep7: 'Khrushchev's Thaw' with English Subtitles," February 28, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/394399915>.



living houses were built, and agriculture was improved yet on the other hand, political governance remained highly concentrated and primarily authoritarian, centred in Moscow with subordinate governments in other republics and regions. Land was increasingly being Sovietized, and massive collective farms (kolhoz) were being constructed.<sup>93</sup> People were also relocated to government-designated regions, and many of the new Soviet republics or occupied territories, such as the Baltic States and Ukraine, received an influx of foreign population and labour to work on new farms and factories. However, not everyone was able to return yet, only a few of the smallest children that were deported to foreign lands who had relatives in their homelands were able to return, albeit at their own expense, which most lacked. People over the age of 15 were frequently required to sign a form acknowledging their resettlement and inability to relocate for the next 25 years. As a result, most people were effectively denied the right to return. Even those who returned home frequently found themselves with nothing because their possessions had been confiscated or destroyed.

Instead, people from all over the Soviet Union were sent out wherever it was determined that more labour was required. They either did not have much choice or went to find a better life in regions that offered work. Thus, after people were killed and deported in wars and purges in the Eastern Europe, when the Soviet Union was formed, during the great wars of WW1 and WW2 in Europe and rest of the world, and during the Soviet repressions after the war... a large amount of people of other Russian speaking regions were resettled there to be an additional workforce due to growing industrialisation and militarisation. As a result, the demographic pool has been significantly altered in the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and elsewhere, especially in Border lands or places with better infrastructure. Russian was made an official language in public life and education. Still, however, many deported people were not yet allowed to return to their homes and lands of origin until further easing of political repressions<sup>94</sup> ...as was also in the case of my grandfather and his family.

Overall, a variety of Russification policies were implemented in the Soviet Union, aimed at suppression of ethnic nationalities, cultures, and languages - Russian became the official language throughout the Soviet Union, used in education, in higher management, many local national symbols such as flags or the use of traditional festive clothing, and public singing of national songs were prohibited, etc.<sup>95, 96, 97</sup> Furthermore, the Cold War mentality persisted,

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<sup>93</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas\_ep43: 'Kolkhozes' with English Subtitles," October 25, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/472007461>.

<sup>94</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Inteliģences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp31-37

<sup>95</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas\_ep13: 'Russification' with English Subtitles," April 12, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/406913224>.

with communists attempting to maintain authority and expand their imperialistic influence and militarization was escalating. To counter NATO's growing power, the Soviets advocated for the formation of an allied military union of states under their control or aligned with them – and the Warsaw Pact was formed in 1955,<sup>98</sup> with Soviet and their satellite countries as members. With growing militarisation, many people, mostly men, had to go through obligatory service, which meant that often they were deployed to serve wherever deemed necessary.

Regarding other satellite states, maintaining control over people did not come with problems, such as examples of civil protests, such as revolt in Hungary in 1956 which was brutally military suppressed under Khrushchev's orders. In 1961 – the Berlin Wall was built, in efforts to restrict the efforts of people trying to flee territories under Soviet Control to Western Europe, which was experiencing post-war economic recovery, largely thanks to Marshal Plan financial support and policies focusing on cooperation, limiting restrictions on international trade, laying groundwork for formation of European Union. Later already under Brezhnev's rule another revolt in Czechoslovakia 1968 was suppressed with military force, etc, then also, under Brezhnev a war in Afghanistan was started in 1980s to try to change the regime and support communist governance. The arrival of foreign Soviet troops unsurprisingly led to local resistance formation and among it to religious radicalisation, also catalysed by support of CIA to radical guerrilla fighters. Sadly, that further had led to a well-known tragic backlash in future, among list of controversial policies that governments with imperialistic intentions often commit.

Internally, under Brezhnev's governance, from 1964 to 1982, the Soviet Union was largely experiencing a significant economic and political stagnation,<sup>99</sup> as well as long-term mismanagement. There were several significant issues that needed to be addressed. The growing foreign debt was the first major source of concern. Contrary to popular belief, the Soviet Union was not completely self-sufficient. Revenues from the sale of oil, gas, and raw materials, for example, were used to cover the import of certain foreign products, including grain imports from USA, to alleviate some food shortages, and higher-ranking party officials also desired some foreign and more luxurious goods. As a result, the Soviets needed some

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<sup>96</sup> The Cold War, YouTube channel, "Was Russian Language Dominant in the Soviet Union?" February 5, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4HLLTGQH0E&t=3s>.

<sup>97</sup> The Cold War, YouTube channel, "Did the Soviet Union Russify Other Nationalities?" January 29, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynA-8oW3b3g>.

<sup>98</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/us/natohq/declassified\\_138294.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/us/natohq/declassified_138294.htm)

<sup>99</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), pp 61-74

level of foreign trade but frequently lacked experience trading according to capitalist principles, resulting in an increase in foreign debt. Revenues from the sale of oil, gas, and raw materials, for example, were used to cover the import of certain foreign products. Furthermore, there was a lack of a healthy internal economic system that rewarded people for their work efforts, as well as a lack of innovation and modernization in the economic structure. People had become apathetic; why should they work harder or innovate if it would not improve their situation? The government was supposed to provide necessities, but it rarely rewarded people's efforts. Furthermore, middle-level management intended to game the system to demonstrate slow but steady improvements over long periods of time. Significant enhancements would be counterproductive because they would make future follow-up more difficult. As a result, given the chance people frequently made efforts to organize ways of obtaining more personal gains, given the chance, leading to minor corruption and bribery becoming more common, particularly among people in certain positions of power.<sup>100</sup>

#### Policies of perestroika and glasnost - the path to transformation?

The time for more eased policies and some level of freedom of expression came with the implementation of economic and political reforms in Soviet Union. When Mikhail Gorbachev became Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985, he instituted the long-necessary Perestroika and Glasnost.<sup>101</sup> Although, some intentions for reforms were already initiated by Andropov and Chernenko guidance, the short-lasting leaders before Gorbachev.

Perestroika and Glasnost economic and political reforms, which were necessary following decades of mismanagement, economic concerns, and attempts by the USSR to cooperate with Western countries. Perestroika sought to rehabilitate the economy, whereas Glasnost sought to remove political constraints on raising concerns about a broad variety of social issues, allowing for greater freedom of expression.<sup>102</sup> Previously, civil disobedience actions had been suppressed for decades, resulting in organizers being arrested, declared insane and committed to mental asylum, losing jobs, or having a range of negative consequences for family members, or even in the person's disappearance or sudden death.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was precipitated by a variety of internal issues and mismanagement of the Soviet administration, including selling oil for wheat, large scale

<sup>100</sup> Пивоваров Алексей and Редакция, "Гибель империи," November 7, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQy15S5-bMo>.

<sup>101</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas Ep6: 'Perestroika' with English Subtitles," Vimeo, February 20, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/392829074>.

<sup>102</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), pp 74-97

corruption and indifference, and imperial chauvinism<sup>103</sup> that experienced resistance in territories experiencing subjugation.<sup>104</sup> The new direction resulted in a sense of hope and a relaxation or lessening of oppressive limitations, control, and a move toward greater freedom of speech and advancement. Then, further adding to the list of problems, the Chernobyl tragedy occurred in 1986, under Gorbachev's presidency. Initially, the problem and the disaster's true magnitude were concealed and not communicated. Numerous conscripts and volunteers from the surrounding districts were sent to deal with the aftermath, endangering their lives and health; numerous people died or suffered major health consequences as a result. It is a complicated story that exposed the political system's flaws, which were frequently manipulated by middle managers to make the situation appear better than it was, often resulting in disillusionment, lack of communication and honest feedback between power levels and hierarchies. I have found that the reported general sentiment of the people at the time was that while many people at the time might have felt the government's massive deception and hypocrisy but often saw no purpose to protest, to openly speak out against it, knowing the repercussions would be serious. The Soviet regime's decades-long repressive measures had made a huge portion of the people lethargic and inert.

To address the numerous systemic difficulties listed, Gorbachev appointed Alexander Yakovlev as the Glasnost program's primary architect.<sup>105</sup> Thus, such policies reflected a shift in the Soviet political trajectory toward greater human rights freedoms, easing repressions, and allowing for some freedom of expression, allowing citizens to express their concerns about ecology, economics, and other issues on a more official level, albeit to a limited extent. It was designed to demonstrate a commitment to reform, modernize, and broaden its horizons, intended to more cooperation and to attract financial investment and aid from the West. Significant milestones in international relations and the significance towards recognition of human rights were the participation of Soviet and Western representatives in international conferences and discussions, such as the Helsinki conference and signing of the Helsinki Accords,<sup>106</sup> which emphasized the recognition and the value of human rights and identity.<sup>107</sup>

In response to and inspired by such developments in international relations, further local activism started organising, among the first in Latvia being the Helsinki-86 group was formed

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<sup>103</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), p149

<sup>104</sup> ПивоваровАлексей and Редакция, "Тибель империи," November 7, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQy15S5-bMo>.

<sup>105</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993), p 31

<sup>106</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, ed., "Helsinki Accords | International Relations | Britannica," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Helsinki-Accords>.

<sup>107</sup> Sylvia Babus Woodby, *Gorbachev and the Decline of Ideology in Soviet Foreign Policy*. (London, San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989).

in Liepāja.<sup>108</sup> That started local activism, and led to organised laying of flowers on 14 July in remembrance of commemoration to the mass deportations at the Freedom Monument. Freedom monument is a central location in Riga (that had such meaning in national understanding of ethnic Latvians), while in Soviet Union was interpreted to symbolise the unity of three Baltic states within Soviet Union.–The use of national symbols such as flags, national costumes, singing of songs was forbidden, so many of the activists were harassed or arrested. However, the sentiment in the minds of people had changed. More cases of civil disobedience emerged. Also, civil resistance by students, environmental activists, religious representatives, and various experts of cultural or economic issues started to voice their opinions and form local political representation to try to counter Soviet communist rule.

Significant and prominent initiatives also began with raising environmental concerns and organizing protests in the Baltic republics. with Dainis Īvāns, a prominent Baltic independence activist, began his struggle in 1986 by publishing an article with Arturs Snips opposing the construction of another hydroelectric dam on the central river Daugava.<sup>109</sup> They contended that it would result in huge ecological disaster by flooding the surrounding regions, submerging numerous agricultural grounds, and destroying a significant portion of the river's natural beauty as it winds over steep terrain. It resulted in widespread protests, halting the construction process, and ultimately the hydroelectric station was never built there. Movement against building Daugavpils HES meant active work in collecting signatures against it, which also led to networking and grouping people who had similar opinions that politically many reforms are needed, and such opinions need to be raised. Initially, nature topics and ecological issues were considered as a neutral subject, not perceived as threatening act of rebellion against the status quo. It was only a beginning of voicing opinions, concerns and forming larger opposition movements.<sup>110</sup>

Another notable act of civil disobedience occurred during the Estonia phosphorite demonstrations in 1987<sup>111</sup>, in response to ecological concerns that the substance would significantly pollute the surrounding environment. There were also concerns about the influx of additional foreign workers from Russia and other Soviet republics, which would imply that between 30 and 40 thousand foreign-speaking migrants would enter Estonia with their families. Furthermore, Estonians' share of the population, which had fallen for 30% since 1940 to 62 % in 1987, and would have continued to fall, thus Estonians would have

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<sup>109</sup> VFS FILMS, “Atslegas\_ep40: ‘the Daugavpils HEPS Protest Campaigns,’” October 20, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/470381075>.

<sup>110</sup> Baiba Kuške, “Raksts, Kas 1986. Gada Apturēja Daugavpils HES Celtniecību,” March 4, 2020, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/dzive--stils/vesture/raksts-kas-1986-gada-aptureja-daugavpils-hes-celtniecibu.a350470/>.

<sup>111</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993), p70

become a minority in their homeland. Similar sentiments prevailed in Latvia during major protests over the construction of the Riga Metro and the influx of foreign workers from other Soviet regions. Proportion of ethnic Latvians in lands of Latvia has dropped sharply after Soviet occupation to only 52% of population.<sup>112</sup> In Lithuania the demographic situation was slightly better but still concerns about were raised also there.

People were the further mastered encouragement to express their dissatisfaction with past historical injustices on notable calendar days. National symbols such as the national flag were used more frequently to express dissatisfaction, national songs were sung, and traditional attire and apparel were worn, actions what had been made illegal in Soviet times as radical and calling for separatism. A folklore festival was organized, where songs were sung, and indigenous culture was praised and celebrated. Civil disobedience became more prevalent, especially around significant anniversaries, as on November 11 (the end of WW1), November 18 (declaration of independence of Latvia), June 14 (first wave of deportations in 1941), June 17 (day of Soviet occupation), March 25 (in commemoration of deportations in 1949), ...

People from artistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds started forming large public discussions in groups with similar interests and creative unions, that further lead to evolution towards political activism opposition groups, organizations, and strategies to oppose the communist party's established rule. And so, on June 1–2, 1988, at the Plenum of Creative Unions of the Latvian SSR, the idea was created of creating organizations supporting Perestroika. Such an organization was the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL)<sup>113</sup>, the constituent congress of which was held on October 8, 1988. The June 1988 Plenary of Creative Unions was organized in Riga which lead to public discussions about a variety of topics, such as expressing opposition to the communist party's mismanagement, the destruction of Latvian land and environmental concerns, concerns over the fact that Latvians faced a possibility of becoming a minority in their own country, as their population share had dropped to 52 percent, and the influx of migrants, and discussing the fact that Latvia had in fact been occupied by the Russian-led Soviet military prior to and during World War II. M. Vulfsons, a journalist and lecturer at the State Academy of Arts, argued that Latvia experienced a military occupation contrary to the stated Soviet Union position that Latvia requested joining Soviet Union voluntarily after a socialist revolution in 1940. Discussing such topics publicly was a brave stand for free expression because it could have been interpreted as radical by power

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<sup>112</sup> Timothy Heliak, "Latvia Looks West, but Legacy of Soviets Remains," migrationpolicy.org, February 2006, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/latvia-looks-west-legacy-soviets-remains>.

<sup>113</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas Ep38: 'Popular Front of Latvia', with English Subtitles," October 7, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/465959751>.

structures, resulting in prison sentences. Many prominent local public figures publicly announced their support for increased autonomy for Latvia.<sup>114</sup>

It was a resounding achievement for free thinking and expression, but for some it was not enough the will for more self-determination needed to be continued by organising movements in wider segments of nation. The next step was to commit to establishing a People's Front, which would be included in the Congress of Creative Unions' resolution. Considering that similar measures had already been taken in Estonia, the proposal was formed on April 13 and formally founded in Congress on October 1, 1988. Estonians were the first to take the lead, forming and planning financial reforms. Following the establishment of the Latvian Popular Front, modelled after the Estonian support movement *Rahvarinne*, by the poet and publicist Viktors Avotins proposal to form the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL) in a forum for Latvian Popular front was formally established on October, 1988. Lithuania soon followed suit by forming *Sajudis* (reformation movement) on June 3, 1988.

Many events were held, national and cultural significance, these movements became national in nature, garnered support, people joined political organisation and collectives in relation to popular front, in high numbers, local elections. Decentralised role of local municipality representation was very relevant in crisis situations and organising mobilisation and forming.

Mikhail Gorbachev's strategy aimed at improving relations between the USSR and Western countries, which had an difficult impact on how the Baltic issue was considered, while the Western interest in the Baltics grew and there was more attention drawn to their desire for self-identity and self-determination, but Western leaders, fearful that the USSR's rapid demise would lead to global instability and nuclear proliferation, backed Gorbachev, and the Baltic and other state issues regarding requests for more autonomy, which could eventually lead to national independence and self-determination, were thus postponed and under looked.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, there were also large populations of Latvian refugees and diaspora that kept lobbying their host country governments by organising various events and demonstrations to draw attention to the ongoing issues of Baltic occupation.

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<sup>114</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslegas \_ep20 'Latvian Creative Unions Plenary 1988', with English Subtitles," May 14, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/418668278>.

<sup>115</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), p24.

Moreover, civil dissatisfaction and various events leading to dissolution of Soviet Union had happened and continued to happen in many regions with growing national movements. April 9, 1989: Soviet Crackdown in Tbilisi against protests for more autonomy and independence from Soviet Union. It turned deadly and in attacks from Soviet forces more than 20 people died and hundreds were injured.<sup>116</sup>

These events prompted Moscow's communist leadership for ideas to revise the constitution, making it necessary for states to requiring majority votes from all Soviet member states for significant change of amendments. The initiative failed, as the Popular Front rejected such suggestions as constitutional modifications to the new Soviet Union pact.

In May 1989, following political pressure, the decision was made to reinstate Latvian as a state language, while Russian remained the official language at the international level and in politics.<sup>117</sup>

### The Baltic Freedom Way

On August 23, 1989, approximately 2 million people joined hands and stood on roads connecting the capital cities of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania via a 670-kilometer-long human chain.<sup>118</sup> The Baltic Way was an impressive nonviolent and peaceful protest and civil disobedience demonstration (Ēlerte, Īvāns, Zeibārte, Gaisa, & Inga Bika, 2019). The number of participants is difficult to ascertain and range from reported from to around 2 million people. This nonviolent mass demonstration, named 'The Baltic Way,' became one of the largest in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Such visible large-scale act of solidarity and collaboration also gained significant international attention and prompted the Baltic people, as well as the peoples of other then-Soviet republics, who had previously expressed protests, acts of rebellion, and disobedience, to take additional steps toward increased self-governance, eventually leading to the restoration of national independence.

The demonstrations were planned and organised only two weeks in advance by local political activist groups Sajudis in Lithuania, Rahvarinne in Estonia, and Popular Front in Latvia. The popular front movements originated as opposition and competing political activism force were largely composed of political activists from ethnically indigenous and national origins

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<sup>116</sup> Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, "April 9, 1989: Soviet Crackdown in Tbilisi," April 7, 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-soviet-demonstrations/25324233.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Barikadopēdijas Fonds, 2019, <https://www.barikadopedija.lv/raksti/043880>

<sup>118</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas Ep31: 'Baltic Way' -with English Subtitles," August 12, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/360468980>.



and were intended to act as a check on the Communist party during a period of economic and political transformation. During the Baltic Assembly gathering, members of Popular Front movements were present. The Baltic freedom way demonstration was planned as the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was approaching, providing an ideal opportunity to organise a demonstration expressing dissatisfaction with the facts and consequences of the Soviet communist regime's factual military and political subordination due to this pact between Soviet and Nazi leadership who in fact divided spheres of influence and led to the Nazi occupation of western Poland and Soviet occupation of eastern Poland two weeks later, starting World War 2 in Europe.

First ideas of human chain reportedly were voiced by the Estonian popular front, Rahvarinne, led by E. Savisaar.<sup>119</sup> Forming in a human chain throughout the Baltic capital cities, which would undoubtedly be noticeable as a big and noticeable symbol of unity, but also not an easy task. The Baltic freedom way demonstration was planned to mark the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which was rapidly approaching, in only two weeks.

Each region had its own designated location in the human chain, and radio communication was used to inform people about the organisation of the event. Local regional municipality representatives, many of whom had joined the popular front as members, assisted in the organising buses to transport people there.

The Baltic Way demonstration was set to culminate at 7 p.m., when participants in the human chain held hands for 15 minutes.

The video footage from helicopters and planes revealed that the human chain was indeed continuous, and that in some places, such as more densely populated areas in cities, multiple parallel chains had formed.

Widely photographed, filmed - documented and written about. Also, had a significant important was to get international attention of media Sarmite Elerte, Sandra Kalniete (Škapars & Latvijas Inteligences Apvienība, 2005, pp )

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<sup>119</sup> Askolds Saulītis, "Baltijas Brīvības Ceļš," *Ltv.lsm.lv*, August 23, 2014, <https://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/23.08.2014-baltijas-brivibas-cels.id34079>.

Later, on July 30, 2009, many of these documented photos, video recordings, and historical artefacts, which can now be seen in museums such as the Museum of the Popular Front of Latvia, were added to the UNESCO World Heritage Documentary Heritage List.<sup>120</sup>

Those who were unable to attend the main ceremony established hundreds of little links of solidarity. Stands of solidarity also happened in other cities around the world, such as

It was not only ethnic Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians participated in the protest, but also present were many Russians and people of other ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, it was not only people with national sentiments to protect their threatened identities and culture developed and inherited by ancestor. also, in general there were many people not agreeing with the communist policies of oppressive policing, long-time economic mismanagement, international aggressive isolationism, and other issues, that I will describe further in subchapter about negative peace of Soviet times.

One of the main goals assigned was to guarantee that the secret additions to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact were recognized as "legally baseless and illegal from the moment they were signed." This would allow an argument that, in accordance with international law, that the military occupation and political annexation of Baltic states was initially planned, in the context of spheres of influence partition between Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

The Soviets repressive forces were clearly losing power and influence and facing more resistance from local people from all sides, including internal strife within Communist party. People felt it was time to break from repressive imperial control that was trying to reform itself and trying to become more cooperative with other powers, less oppressive but also weaker, considering the historical injustices and practices of subordination.

People elsewhere were also protesting. In Hungary the border fence with Austria was cut, cutting a hole in Iron Curtain. In November of 1989 with fall of Berlin wall that led to reunification of German people. Although, it happened somewhat, happened because of a misunderstanding about easing the Soviet control in the region.<sup>121, 122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> UNESCO, "The Baltic Way," [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org), 2013, <https://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-3486>.

<sup>121</sup> BBC, "Soviet Union Timeline," October 31, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17858981>.

Few months later following political pressuring, the USSR's 2nd Congress of People's Deputies December 24, 1989, following a dramatic re-vote adopted a resolution on and Mikhail Gorbachev signed Yakovlev's commission's report denouncing the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact's secret protocols.

Additionally, in Baltics more people who had been inspired and even further mobilized for political activism decided to run in their countries' municipal elections. Allowing Popular Front to run provided some genuine opposition to the communist party, as local representation, part of political reforms. In February 1990, all three Baltic states had their first largely open democratic elections to the Supreme Soviets. The Popular Front support had grown in popularity and has been elected in a majority in the High Council of Soviet Republic of Latvia, showing that reforms were necessary and welcomed by local people.

Also, legislative and economic planning activities were pursued, such as drafting local laws and amendments, gathering signatures for petitions.<sup>123</sup>

#### Declarations of renewed independence of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia

After demonstrations, political activism movements, and national sentiments increased, hopes for increased autonomy and self-determination grew, the movements for more self-determination had split into one calling for more autonomy within Soviet Union and ones who started calling for independence.

which resulted in these movements participating in local elections against the Communist Party and, after being elected in large numbers, declaring independence for Lithuania, then Estonia, and Latvia, on the grounds that it was illegally lost due to planned partition and forceful push into the Soviet empire's sphere of influence. In the local Baltic parliament - Supreme Soviet – the Communist party lost its majority. The new coalition seeking for reforms could amend and change the constitution with a reached majority of two-thirds.

Less than seven months after the Baltic Way demonstration, the newly elected governments of the Baltic states declared the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact illegal, stating that it

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<sup>122</sup> Пивоваров Алексей and Редакция, “Гибель империи,” November 7, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQy15S5-bMo>.

<sup>123</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), pp 128-140

directly led to military occupation and a forceful push into the Soviet sphere of influence, and thus have decided to proclaim a re-establishment of independence. Lithuania declared restored independence - on March 11, 1990; Estonia followed - on March 30, 1990; and Latvia - on May 4, 1990. To this day every year 4 May is celebrated as the Day of the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia.<sup>124</sup>

Re-instating of independence May 4, 1990: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/dzive--stils/vesture/vesturiski-foto-latvijas-republikas-neatkaribas-atjaunosana-1990-gada-4-maija.a127722/>



These declarations were rejected by the Soviet Union, as it was against their imperial interests. Moscow's administration, led by Gorbachev, refused to recognize these facts. As a result, now, few real international changes occurred; aside from these being major political statements, a worldwide recognition of Baltic states' reinstated independence did not yet take place officially. The rest of the world, on the other hand, was paying close attention to what was going on. Independence campaigners were increasingly labelled as radicals, separatists, and so on by the Communist Party. Meanwhile, Western powers issued strong statements urging communist officials not to resort to violence and bloodshed in suppressing democratic nationalist secession movements.

#### Military coups and civilian resistance by building Barricades

Clearly dissatisfied with the mounting political pressures of the Soviet Union potentially disintegrating and losing power in the near abroad, the communist party and military hardliners planned to seize control and stage a coup.<sup>125</sup> Military units were sent to the Baltic states at the beginning of January under the guise of as to ensure the enlistment of young

<sup>124</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas\_ep16: '4th of May, 1990, Declaration of Independence' with English Subtitles," April 27, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/412337307>.

<sup>125</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993), pp 147-152

people in the Soviet army. The Lithuanian government was then given an ultimatum to repeal the Independence Act while also facing various economic sanctions and resource blockade. Then, on January 13, a decision by Soviet leadership was made to intervene militarily to take control of the Lithuanian parliament, radio, television, and other critical institutions.<sup>126</sup> Fourteen people were killed<sup>127</sup> while taking part in large-scale civil resistance to this attempted military coup.<sup>128</sup>

The events in Vilnius demonstrated that Riga could face a similar situation. D. Ivans, the Chairman of the Latvian Popular Front and after the Popular Front's triumph in the 1990 election, he became the deputy speaker of the Supreme Council of Latvia, spoke to the people on the radio at 4.45 p.m. on January 13th. Residents were urged to construct barricades to protect strategic sites such as the parliament building and the television and radio centre. People quickly mobilised as word spread. A half-million gathered near river Daugava banks in centre of Riga and marched in support of Lithuania and against the Soviet assault. Following the demonstration, many people went to Old Riga to start to assist in the construction of barricades, people from other regions started arriving. Agriculture and heavy machinery were arranged and driven there to block the roads and access, to protect the objects of political and strategic significance, makeshift roadblocks were built, and volunteers organised meals to those participating and guarding the barricades. It went on for few days, until January 27.

My mother said that those days they were gathering mostly around the television centre in Riga. My grandfather said that it depended on the day, as sometimes after work he went to the square near parliaments, and some days also near television centre.

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<sup>126</sup> Irt.lt, "January 13, 1991. The Night When Lithuania Faced Soviet Troops – through the Eyes of Ordinary People," January 12, 2021, <https://www.irt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1318363/january-13-1991-the-night-when-lithuania-faced-soviet-troops-through-the-eyes-of-ordinary-people>.

<sup>127</sup> Irt.lt, "Occupied but Not Silenced. January 13, 1991: The Night When Soviets Stormed LRT," January 12, 2020, <https://www.irt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1132182/occupied-but-not-silenced-january-13-1991-the-night-when-soviets-stormed-irt>.

<sup>128</sup> Tony Wesolowsky, "Thirty Years after Soviet Crackdown in Lithuania, Kremlin Accused of Rewriting History," January 12, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/lithuania-soviet-crackdown-1991-kremlin-rewriting-history/31043914.html>.

The Barricades of January 1991: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/dzive--stils/vesture/25-vesturiskas-a.f.i.-bildes-1991.gada-barikades.a264883/>



These attempted soviet military coups were resisted by large public resistance, and the planned government overtake eventually failed. Much of this civilian unarmed resistance to army and special forces can be seen in documentary archives, pictures, and films.<sup>129</sup> When assault on Ministry of Internal Affairs by Soviet special forces in Riga happened, 4 people were killed.<sup>130</sup>

#### International recognition after pro-Soviet coups

In the light of Soviet elites, politically, military and in state ‘security’ agencies, losing power and influence, the so-called hard-liners decided to act against the party leadership lead by Gorbachev, who they blamed for instability that had grown out of peoples’ ability to protest and due to eased systems of repression.

While Gorbachev was away from the capital in Crimea, the army had organised a coup in Moscow August 19, 1991.<sup>131</sup> Military was sent to take control of various politically significant location but themselves where mostly confused of what was happening and decided not to attack the local citizens that had come to resist the coup. The coup was not well organized, rushed and eventually failed. While the organisers tried to overthrow Gorbachev, instead it gave more power to Yeltsin, who represented the Russian Republic of Soviet Union and was in favour for more autonomy of republics. Boris Yeltsin, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (of territories that later became the Russian Federation), supported the right of Soviet republics to greater autonomy within the Soviet Union, and declared his support for a market economy and a multiparty system. In the wake of the events in Moscow, the Baltic states issued The

<sup>129</sup> <https://replay.lsm.lv/iv/ieraksts/ltv/209255/the-fortress-of-the-nation-30-years-since-the-barricades>  
<https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/barikadem-25-foto-video-un-atminu-stasti.a165088/>

<sup>130</sup> Museum of the Barricades of 1991, “Museum Virtual Tour,” accessed 2022, <http://barikades.lv/muzeja-virtuala-ture/>.

<sup>131</sup> VFS FILMS, “Atslēgas Ep33: ‘August 1991 Coup in Moscow’ with English Subtitles,” September 4, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/454755281>.

Constitutional Law “On the State Status of the Republic of Latvia” was adopted by the Supreme Council on 21 August.<sup>132</sup> Already on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, 1991, the Republic of Iceland became the first foreign country to officially recognise Latvia's restoration of independence.<sup>133</sup> The order signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin on 24 August, 1991 "On the Recognition of the Republic of Latvia's State Independence" was especially significant, as the USSR leadership of which Russian republic was still formally part of was hesitant. For these efforts Yeltsin has been respected in Baltic states and even was given the highest award of Latvia – Order of Three Stars in 2006.<sup>134</sup> Only few days after the US indicated its readiness to establish diplomatic relations with the Baltic States on September 2, 1991, the USSR State Council also resolved to recognize the Republic of Latvia's independence on September 6.

As a result, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania regained independence because of internal contradictions within the Soviet Union, but also the willingness to recognise historical injustices and the right to self-determination by international community.

Latvia's statehood was later further acknowledged in 1991 by 10 former Soviet republics - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, who also proclaimed independence. On September 17, 1991, Latvia was admitted to the United Nations as a full member. Prior to entering the UN, 74 countries recognized Latvia's independence, and additional 19 countries did so before the end of the year. Diplomatic connections with 22 nations were re-established in 1991, while contacts with 23 countries were formed. 48 countries have declared their intention to establish diplomatic ties in a formal statement.<sup>135</sup>

End of the USSR came in December when many of former Soviet states also declared independence, Gorbachev resigned end of December of 1991.

Global Non-Violent Action Database: <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/latvians-campaign-national-independence-1989-1991>

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<sup>133</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, “Foreign Minister: Latvia Will Never Forget That Iceland Was the First to Recognise the Restoration of Latvia’s Independence in 1991,” accessed 2022, <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/61813-foreign-minister-latvia-will-never-forget-that-iceland-was-the-first-to-recognise-the-restoration-of-latvia-s-independence-in-1991>.

<sup>134</sup> Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, “Latvia Gives Yeltsin Its Highest Award,” Summer 8, 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1070747.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Osvalds Zebriņš and Anna Ūdre, “Mājupeļš Brīvībā,” Delfi.lv, 2019, <https://www.delfi.lv/1989-majupcelis-briviba/>.

#### 4. Analysis and reflections peace and conflict transformation perspective

In this chapter, I sought to consider the most critical aspects of conflict thoroughly while trying to maintain a reasonably objective outsider perspective by adopting the analytical criteria of peace studies and conflict analysis, identifying core causes, identifying sides and actors, conflict dynamics and independence movement methods, considering results.

The main core causes of conflict have been identified as the contradictions between the Baltic peoples' demands for self-determination, the need for personal identification by use of native language and distinct culture, juxtaposed to Russia's leadership long-term policies of expansive imperialism and imposing their ways of life and interests. Russia in this power relation has historically benefited from asymmetrically larger power dynamics due to its larger population, heavier militarization, larger economy, access, and trade of necessary resources, and using physical and psychological intimidation or attacks leading enforcing assimilation and russification policies.<sup>136</sup> While, also on international level it has been a superpower competition where actions of Washington came continuously considered by Moscow, especially when starting to increasingly rely on foreign support.<sup>137</sup>

Throughout history, numerous regional and global forces with competing interests have sought to control Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, most notably the Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Russians; as a result, imperial and personal ambitions can arise from a variety of sources and various parties gaining power, including local politicians or businessmen controlling valuable resources. External powers such as the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and other European powers have acted as guarantors of independence in the region by maintaining a power balance, while certainly seeking certain benefits through economic and trade operations, but in more constructive ways through collaboration and mutual respect. There are many opinions and points of view today that various foreign influences are simply an extension of neo-imperialist practises to exploit national resources, labour, and indebted local people, but this is in no way comparable to the historically brutal and more direct injustices endured by many under the Soviet empire. It's worth noting that Russia's imperial ambitions have resurfaced and can be seen now in its brutal ways in the ongoing war in Ukraine.

I personally have identified the post-war Soviet era of control in Eastern Europe as a phase of negative victor peace in practice, when repression methods grew less blatantly

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<sup>136</sup> VFS FILMS, "Atslēgas\_ep13: 'Russification' with English Subtitles," April 12, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/406913224>.

<sup>137</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993), p 18.



violent and switched to structural and cultural subjugation, such as moving a bigger Russian population into controlled lands, controlling the government with loyal representatives, dictating the system of education practises, etc in regional level of controlled lands but also on international level by growing competition between world powers. Such long-term repressive control in Soviet Union resulted in the consolidation and stagnation of power, the absence of reliable feedback up the chain of command, lack of local innovation, and the build-up of dissatisfaction in a society that, while generally functioning, did not see much hope for progress, discontent was growing.<sup>138</sup>

The acknowledged and verified existence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which precipitated World War II, shows the fact of planned forceful, and fraudulent change of government and the incorporation of Baltic countries into the Soviet Union. The Latvian government officially recognises it as a military occupation because the territory was seized through armed force and coercion. Yet, because there was no active conflict, the Soviet government did not declare it an occupation but instead claimed it was a voluntary joining to the union, narrative that the Russian government still supports today. Regardless, there was undoubtedly a military pressure, a rigged election to which there is documented proof<sup>139</sup> that can also be viewed in various museums of collected historical artifacts, recorded eyewitness testimonies, documental archives.

- Regarding the intensity and various stages of conflict – undoubtedly, among the most violent stages in modern history have been the great wars - World War 1 and World War 2. Millions of people have died on all sides of conflict – attacking, defending. Another period of significant violence was repression by Soviet military and policing power, such as large-scale arrests, imprisonment, murders, and deportations throughout Soviet-controlled territories.

- The post-war conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam resulted in a negotiated negative peace in which Western allies refused to accept the incorporation of eastern European states into the Soviet sphere of influence, which further developed into the Cold War - a fragile state of negative peace in which violence frequently occurred in other regions outside of Europe via proxy conflicts. Eastern Europe was administered by the Soviet Union and subjected to subjugating policies, Russification, and autocratic top-down control and leadership by a communist party headquartered in Moscow. Eventually, the subjugated

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<sup>138</sup> Walter C Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (Houndmills Macmillan, 1993), pp 61-73

<sup>139</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Inteligences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp 19-30, 43-48.

civilization became largely hopeless and began to acknowledge foreign dominance and new realities, although dissatisfaction also lingered below the surface.

There was also structural and cultural oppression, as well as coercive assimilation policies, which resulted in significant demographic changes. The ethnic composition of Latvia and Estonia was on the verge of becoming a minority population in their own historical lands due to the overwhelming Russian ethnic population that had been sent in. Many people were killed, died, were arrested, and deported during historical wars and subjugation in return for a large number of Russian-speaking people being sent as military personnel, factory workers, and so on. Furthermore, not everyone who is presented as ethnically Russian is necessarily so; instead, they could have been a Russian speaker from another former Soviet republic who had been assimilated or presented in simplified way as such. It has significantly influenced ethnic composition throughout Soviet-subjugated territories and has socio-political complications to this day. Other issues of concern were ecological and cultural local issues, with no regard for negative effects on the local environment or significant sentimental values to people.

- What could be interpreted as leading up to the resolution and transformation stage began with Gorbachev's reform policies of perestroika and glasnost. By the late 1980s, the situation had devolved into a less oppressive state that was more open to collaboration, social, economic, and political reforms. The Soviet Union was in various stages of disarray at the time. As repressive policies were relaxed, many people began to speak out in favour of greater autonomy. And the result was a relatively peaceful resolution with some instances of one-sided state violence. After the dissolution of Soviet Union, the policies of Russia for some time seemed to be on the course becoming more democratic and cooperative internationally, unfortunately never quite got there...

Numerous actors of conflict could be identified on two sides: On one side of conflict was the Soviet government communist party, which had its headquarters in Moscow and was supported by local republic communist parties, the Soviet army, special forces, the state police, and the security police KGB, which were monitoring, investigating and intimidating political opposition and wider society, and some local public organisations, often largely consisting of Russian-speaking immigrant resettled workers.

On the other side, various civilian activist groups developed with the purpose of pursuing reforms and greater autonomy, which grew into calls for recognition of independence. Ultimately, developed into representation in The Latvian Supreme Council (made up of

candidates from both the Popular Front and the National Independence Movement of Latvia); Popular Front of Latvia (PFL); National Independence Movement of Latvia (NIML). However, even within people united in struggle to gain more rights for self-government from Moscow, there were disputes whether to operate more autonomously within Soviet Union or to go way towards full independence.. In addition, there was Western help and diaspora from the outside. In addition, other forces advocating greater personal autonomy in republics, such as other independence campaigners in republics, including Boris Yeltsin in the future. Moreover, numerous unofficial student and activist groups from the broader population.

I, as the author of research, have found the case very relevant and fits the conflict analysis that has been investigated, thus partially proving hypothesis. It has been interesting and relevant case to study and useful for practice investigating other topics, to reflect, to compare. Methodology might be further improved and used for studying and analysing other case studies. It is also a relevant case of non-violent resistance, using non-violent methods against asymmetrically stronger and more repressive force as the used methods of civil demonstrations and political activism were democratic, trying to share information and facts about injustices around the world, to reach international mass media such as newspapers, tv, and radio and build alliances of support. It was a different time, when internet did not yet exist on a public wide scale and communication was much more limited.

Regarding the largest demonstration – Baltic Way, similar methods have also been used in also, other cases - Hong-Kong, in support to protests in Belarus, Catalonia, Ukraine protests etc.<sup>140</sup> Since, the longest human chain has been formed in Bangladesh in 2004.<sup>141</sup>

The war in Ukraine has once again exposed Russia's imperialistic ambitions. Russia is still an imperial territory, with many indigenous peoples living inside territories with little capacity for self-government and the ability to preserve their ancient cultural identities in the face of expanding Russian influences. Tragically, Russia also has preserved and even celebrated aggressively militarised culture, especially since a certain new ruler came just before the new millennium, during the time of the second war against the Chechen peoples forces over control in their territories. Also, violent confrontations can be beneficial to some, like more powerful ruling elites for personal profiting from military industrial production or in the desire to maintain power with force. Military industrial enterprises have benefited from increased militarisation by receiving greater financial resources.

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<sup>140</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_chain\\_\(politics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_chain_(politics))

<sup>141</sup> [https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/longest-human-chain-\(length\)](https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/longest-human-chain-(length))

In recent years, the ruling elites in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as other Moscow-allied town and country leaders, have faced significant public opposition in large-scale public protests due to publicly exposed facts about large-scale corruption and mismanagement of economic and political resources. In return, to keep their power, more public attention was tried to be diverted to present an image of external enemies and to engage in military conflicts abroad, to create a crisis scenario while also use it also to wage attacks against socio-political opposition.

Ultimately, I also discovered this source that had provided a relevant attempt for a case study, that supports my perspective, identifying sides and actors, conflict dynamics and independence movement methods.<sup>142</sup> However, it is quite limited case research giving brief description but lacking more links to sources and documented examples. Therefore, I recognise that such examples are useful and in need to study and recognise more, especially about cases and methods of nonviolent civilian resistance that have been successful or analyse how they could have been improved. Therefore, works by George Lakey, Gene Sharp, and others on non-violent resistance examples would be useful to study more. Perhaps, based on these examples, that I found later in my research, a more detailed in-depth analysis and examples of various methods used, could be conducted further. Later on, I have also discovered an very relevant case study by Olgerts Eglitis which would have been very useful source to use as an example, and for relevant information.

## Conclusions

Conflict analysis has aided in guiding and directing attention, as well as in attempting to concentrate information collection on several essential criteria necessary for evaluating conflict in context and discussing it. Yet, acquiring necessary information is time-consuming and challenging, especially for a solo researcher with limited resources. In any case, this has been a fascinating and enlightening case study to learn more about, and I will continue my work on understanding such topics better.

Baltic Freedom Way movements is a good, relevant example, case study of peaceful transformation, democratic efforts, , seeking support from foreign allies that in the end turned out effective, thanks to range of factors such as many underlying socio-political issues on a wide scale across Soviet Union, unhappiness with the government, reduction of oppressive

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<sup>142</sup> Anthony Phalen and Max Rennebohm, "Latvians Campaign for National Independence, 1989-1991," ed. Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/latvians-campaign-national-independence-1989-1991>.

measures, and mostly by so many people who kept protesting, raising their voices and communicating issues, thinking of ways how to make it noticeable, planned political activism in lines with the set political system, building alliances and making support networks.

Baltic lands have historically been contested territories, mostly ruled by other imperial powers such as Russians, Germans, and Swedes who competed for influence while also oppressing and subjugating many local people. Despite their small population in comparison to other neighbouring nations, ethnic Balts populations have had a historical indigenous majority in these lands, according to ethnic background, archaeological and historical evidence.

Following the violence and years of large-scale destruction in Europe during World War II, a period of negative peace between allied countries was discussed and settled during which the Soviets gained control of Eastern Europe, but which led to conditions of decades of heightened tensions in world – the Cold War. The Baltic Way independence movements emerged during Perestroika and Glasnost - the reformation and transformation periods at the end of Soviet rule, ushering towards a period with hopes of leading to more positive peace and the establishment of more equitable international relations.

At the time of negative peace, many other countries and people had held demonstrations and protested in various ways throughout the negative peace of Soviet control, such as in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, divided Germany, Georgia, and others, but were suppressed by military might, intimidation of Soviet secret police - KGB forces. Or wider, in more neutral cases people simply came apathetic and often tried staying out of political issues just wanting to live their lives without unnecessary problems, or even possibly managed to gain some by adapting and fitting within the set Soviet system.

Even while non-violent confrontations are the ideal option, they aren't always attainable due to a variety of factors, such as one side benefiting from it or feeling more powerful, or heightened emotions taking control over reason. There are times when a combination of both non-violent and defence even with armed means is necessary, such as in Ukraine's ongoing battle against the Russian government, which believed it could frighten or overwhelm the Ukrainian side. Ordinary people are the ones how have suffered significantly because of this conflict. The world, alas, is not always fair and just.

Therefore, as members of foreign audiences and global population we need to also consider the power disparities and support the asymmetrically less powerful side, to give

fairer balance of power, to help and support in times of need, whatever ways we can – either by donations or by expressing support publicly and widely, to influence political strategies.

Unfortunately, I must admit that my own results of this project have fallen short of my expectations. I tried to take on far more material than I could adequately absorb and deliver. While attempting to comprehend broader, more complex historical narratives that people spend years researching and describing, I attempted to collect an excessive amount of relevant information and sources, much of which I was sadly unable to properly read or analyse.

I still believe that these are vital and relevant topics, that conflict analysis proposals are a wonderful method to better investigate conflict contexts, but I ended up working with an excessive quantity of material, considering varied opinions on complex problems. To do it properly, a substantial amount of trustworthy evidence and compelling proof is required, particularly in discussions of political movements and contentious historical events. I attempted to narrow my emphasis by focusing most of my secondary source conflict analysis on well-known, respectable, and trustworthy authors while balancing it with my own experiences.

If I were to do it all over again, I would certainly limit the scope of my work and what I am describing, while I also see the need of understanding and being able to explain the greater interrelated backdrop. However, completing what I intended would necessitate a larger team of people with more experience and resources. As evidenced by my references, it has previously been accomplished in a good way by others, albeit not in a way I had meant to handle it. However, ultimately, I was unable to properly describe all important facts, nor did I do so in sufficient detail. By attempting to present a broader framework, I became overly broad and was unable to clarify many aspects that should have been described more detailed, or to depict it coherently and cohesively enough. If I were to do it all over again, I would emphasise the relevance of historical context by explaining civil resistance strategies<sup>143</sup> in greater detail similar as presented in nonviolent action database,<sup>144</sup> by linking sources of examples from documented literature, videos, pictures, museum exhibitions or eyewitness testimonies. Alternatively, I might just debate and describe facts discussing core causes, actors, dynamics of conflicts presented in a more limited scope, such as analysing

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<sup>143</sup> Jānis Škapars and Latvijas Inteligences Apvienība, eds., *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Rīga: Zelta Grauds, 2005), pp 186-188

<sup>144</sup> Anthony Phalen and Max Rennebohm, “Latvians Campaign for National Independence, 1989-1991,” ed. Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/latvians-campaign-national-independence-1989-1991>.

described context in certain books or documentary video series not instead of using a large scope of materials to describe the context. For example, book 'Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire' also discussed some similar theories relating to conflict studies.<sup>145</sup>

Regardless, I was able to learn a great deal of knowledge, but I had difficulty putting it on paper and presenting it within the limits of a master's thesis. Still, at least, managed to write at least something to submit. In other words, I recognise there is room for improvement in my research methods and practise, but the research has been personally advantageous to have a deeper understanding of the historical background of conflicts in place of my origin and in history of my ancestors.

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<sup>145</sup> Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire*. (S.L.: Routledge, 1993).

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