

# Lithuanians, Estonians, and Latvians: setting the pace for glasnost and perestroika in Soviet historiography

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## Abstrakt | Abstract

*Litevci, Estonci a Lotyšši: udávání tempa glasnosti a perestrojky v sovětské historiografii*  
*Estonsko, Lotyšsko a Litva byly v důsledku paktu Ribbentrop-Molotov začleněny do Sovětského svazu, čímž se obyvatelé Pobaltí stali národnostními menšinami v rámci sovětského státu. Od druhé světové války bojovaly pobaltské národy proti sovětské hegemonii za zachování své národní identity a znovuzískání suverenity. V tomto boji hrálo stále větší roli připomínání historie, zejména pokud jde o roky 1939 a 1940. Od osmdesátých let 20. století umožnilo úsilí pobaltských zemí stále svobodnější historiografickou a politickou diskusi. Tyto debaty, prezentace a publikace ukázaly, jak procesy zdola mohou určovat trendy, ovlivňovat politické programy a položit základy pro osvobození jak svých pobaltských vlastí od sovětské hegemonie, tak sovětsko-ruské historiografie od totalitních direktiv. Litevci, Estonci a Lotyšši udávali tempo sovětské historiografii v gorbačovské éře. Našli svůj politický hlas a vydláždili cestu svobodné pobaltské budoucnosti.*

*Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were incorporated into the Soviet Union as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; thus, the Baltic inhabitants became national minorities within the Soviet state. Since World War II, the Baltic peoples have been struggling against Soviet hegemony to preserve their national identity and to regain sovereignty. The remembrance of history, especially concerning 1939 and 1940, played an increasing role in this struggle. Since the 1980s, the Baltic efforts have enabled an increasingly free historiographical and political discussion. These debates, demonstrations, and publications showed how bottom-up processes could set trends, influence political agendas and lay the foundations for the liberation of both their Baltic homelands from Soviet hegemony and Soviet-Russian historiography from totalitarian directives. Lithuanians, Estonians, and Latvians set the pace for Soviet historiography in the Gorbachev era. They found their political voice and paved the way for a free Baltic future.*

## **Klíčová slova | Keywords**

*Pakt Ribbentrop-Molotov; Estonsko; Litva; Lotyšsko; Sovětský svaz; historiografie; Michail Gorbačov*

*Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; Estonia, Lithuania; Latvia; Soviet Union; historiography; Mikhail Gorbachev*

## **Introduction**

Why is it worthwhile dealing with the Baltic discussion on the Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pact (MRP)? The MRP crucially influenced East-Central-Europe since 1939 and till today. It is a key issue of international politics during and after World War II and is still remaining a key issue of the contemporary politics of memory and of historiography in Europe. The historical debate in the 1980s during the late stage of the Soviet Union was perhaps the most influential counter-narrative with regard to historical consciousness in East-Central Europe. It has unified the Baltic struggle for leaving the Soviet Empire, for rebuilding their own memories and nation states, for restoring independence. It secured western support. It has proved fundamental difficulties of totalitarian historiography to react on historically based argumentation and thus has shown, how authoritarian or even totalitarian regimes try to handle fundamentally diverging memories and historical arguments till today. It already anticipated the decline of the Soviet empire which had annexed sovereign states, whose inhabitants still remembered independence. It has shown how Marxist-Leninist ideology depends on censored memory and history. It has proved the impossibility to reform a totalitarian, socialist regime by liberalizing public discussion because gaining public support in order to push reforms ahead means as well renouncing of censored historical memory. It has shown that once an empire is forced to loosen control it is risky to strike back by force to stop or slow down reforms.

Looking at the decisive years in the Soviet Baltic Republics helps to understand, how Balts managed to rebuild peacefully their nation states by using contacts to exiled politicians, by expanding bottom-up dissident movements to mass demonstrations, by choosing the “appropriate” historical arguments for gaining western support, by accelerating the reforms, by justifying their claims for more national sovereignty and thus being perfectly prepared for the crucial space of time, when it would be possible to leave the hegemony of the Union completely. In fact remembering the MRP characterized the nation-building years in the Baltic Republics as a historical region under late Soviet rule which was characterized not only by economic disaster but by an “explosion of ethnics”, too. Historical argumentation influenced the creation of a regional

political (and not only ethnical) identity and, at the same time, obstructed and rejected the Soviet-Russian identity. Once more Orwell was right: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past". Looking back, the Soviet Union delayed the national disintegration of the Russian Empire for more than 70 years only by force.

Why were the Balts able to leave the empire and rebuild their nation states peacefully? Because they were independent in the difficult but crucial years after World War I. Because only their complete states were forcefully integrated into the Soviet Union. Because only in the Baltic region was the remembrance of the national victims of Soviet terror so dominant and unifying. Because they clearly and openly rejected the communist past. Because they historically founded their nation-building in opposition to the socialist empire. Because they have clearly marked differences in historical memory and have stuck to these differences during the actual debate with Putin's Russia and the actual European debate about commemoration. Because they were able to reach a common (better) European future which was desirable for the (Russian) minorities as well. Because mainly the United States supported Baltic independence although Western powers showed strong and long consideration for Gorbachev and his plans of a reformed Union. In fact, the Balts managed to be the first to leave the empire and they never voted for any reformed Union as did for example Belarus or Ukraine and afterwards Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia.

Looking at the Baltic States, they obviously are a nearly perfect example for nationalisms characterized "as a triad linking national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external national "homelands" to which they belong"<sup>1</sup> This problematic situation actually can be seen in the complicated Russian-Baltic relationship. "The most important—and potentially the most dangerous—clash along this fault line today is between the nationalizing nationalisms of Soviet successor states and the homeland nationalism of Russia"<sup>2</sup>, but the Balts have avoided violence or even military events to this day<sup>3</sup>. "Nationalizing nationalisms involve claims made in

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1 Rogers BRUBAKER, *Nationalism reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge 1996, p. 4.

2 Ibidem, p. 108, cf. pp. 107-147: Russian homeland nationalism; Raivo VETIK, *Introduction: Estonian Nation-Building in the Double Context of Post-Communist Transformation and Globalization*, in: *Nation-Building in the Context of Post-Communist Transformation and Globalization. The Case of Estonia*, ed. ibidem, *Baltische Studien zur Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaft* 24, Frankfurt am Main – Berlin 2012, pp. 7–16: nation-building since 1991 via democratization and identity change.

3 Pål KOLSTØ (ed.), *National Integration and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies. The Cases of Estonia and Moldova*, Lanham – Boulder 2002, underlines the importance of ethnic nation-building and democratic state-building for avoiding violence.

the name of a 'core nation' or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms"<sup>4</sup>, somehow the Baltic historical debate can be seen in this way, but on the other hand it shows how nations are not overcome by nationhood but reconstruct it by changing memories. Were they able to use Soviet national policy under glasnost because "far from ruthlessly suppressing nationhood, the Soviet regime pervasively institutionalized it"<sup>5</sup>? Or did the Soviet leadership plan more obviously in Stalinist times and again in the 1970/1980s a Soviet or rather Russian nation instead, but merely did not exist long enough to succeed?<sup>6</sup> Was it a nationalizing empire by seriously influencing historical memory<sup>7</sup>, shaping thus a new Soviet identity by ideologically mutating history<sup>8</sup> and already creating a kind of social amnesia by censoring and obstructing memories<sup>9</sup> and forcing people into a "schizophrenic situation"<sup>10</sup> between official forbidden truth and propagated lies? The Soviet Union disappeared but Putin's Russia adopted and perpetuated Soviet guidelines for founding new Russian patriotism on political selected memory.<sup>11</sup> It is worthwhile remembering the Baltic-Soviet discussion.

The following article illustrates and completes or sometimes corrects the theoretical approaches to nation-building<sup>12</sup>. It stresses the importance of memory<sup>13</sup>. For exam-

4 R. BRUBAKER, *Nationalism*, p. 5.

5 Ibidem, pp. 17–18.

6 Eli PILVE, *Ideological Pressure in School Lessons in the Estonian SSR*, in: Historical Memory versus Communist Identity. Proceedings of the Conference "The Shaping of Identity and Personality under Communist Rule: History in the Service of Totalitarian Regimes in Eastern Europe, Tallinn, 9–10 June 2011", ed. Meelis Saueauk, Tartu 2014, pp. 46, 51, 61–63; Katrin BOECKH, *Das Konzept des „Sowjetvolks und die ukrainische Nation*, in: Die Ukraine. Prozesse der Nationsbildung, ed. Andreas Kappeler, Weimar – Wien 2001, pp. 349–60: strong russification of the Ukraine.

7 Raivo VETIK, *Estonian ethnic policy after regaining independence*, in: ibidem, Nation-Building, p. 21.

8 M. SAUEAUK, *Historical Memory*.

9 Sigrid RAUSING, *History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia. The End of a Collective Farm*, Oxford 2004, p. 93; Maria MÄLKSOO, *Introduction*, in: Historical Memory, p. 11, citing Anthony D. Smith: "no memory, no identity; no identity, no nation".

10 E. PILVE, *Ideological Pressure*, p. 60.

11 Lars KARL – Igor J. POLIANSKI (eds.), *Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur im neuen Russland*, Formen der Erinnerung 40, 2009.

12 Cf. as summary of the theoretical discussion: Pavel KOLÁŘ – Miloš ŘEZNÍK (eds.), *Historische Nationsforschung im geteilten Europa 1945–1989*, Kölner Beiträge zur Nationsforschung 10, 2012; esp. Stephanie ZLOCH, *Gibt es einen „osteuropäischen Nationalismus“? Anmerkungen zur Persistenz einer historischen Interpretationsfigur*, pp. 51–70; Rogers BRUBAKER, *Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism*, Annual Review of Sociology 35, 2009, pp. 21–42.

13 Bernd FAULENBACH – Franz-Josef JELICH (eds.), *„Transformationen“ der Erinnerungskulturen in Europa nach 1989*, Essen 2006 and Kilian GRAF, *Identität und Transformation: Die integrative Wirkung einer kollektiven Identität*, Hamburg 2010: reviews to memory-culture and collective identity; Maurice HALBWACHS, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt am Main 1991; Aleida ASSMANN, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, München 2006, pp. 29–43, 60.

ple, it is not always true that “the key actors in the drama of disintegration—besides the fragmented political and military elites of the center—were the institutionally empowered elites of the national republics”<sup>14</sup>. In the Baltic region historians and politicians in exile, small groups of dissidents, courageous teenagers were much more important initially. They pushed national restoration ahead because they acted in the right historical moment and focused on still surviving collective memory.<sup>15</sup> Focusing mainly on the historical-political debate in the 1980s, it seemed sensible and necessary to use printed material (including newspapers) which was known in those years and influenced the debate. Memoirs and some oral history statements in private letters are used as well. Additional archival sources are either still not accessible or did not really improve the general findings or would have been too specific for one or another Baltic country. For this article it seemed to be more important to give a common view in order to confront it with Soviet/Russian<sup>16</sup> interpretations.

### **1939–1985: Signing of the MRP and starting historiographical discussion**

In addition to the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, Foreign Ministers Viacheslav M. Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop signed a secret protocol on behalf of Josef V. Stalin and Adolf Hitler. It was dated 23 August 1939. A week before Hitler’s invasion of Poland, and thus before the start of World War II, Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union agreed on a territorial division of the sovereign states lying between them. This territorial arrangement violated international law. It was modified by further secret protocols and is usually referred to as the Hitler-Stalin or Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (MRP).<sup>17</sup> For Stalin it enabled the 1940 occupation and incorporation of the states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia into the Soviet Union through imposed contracts. It remained valid for the USSR after 1945 with *de facto* (not *de jure*) recognition by the Western states. The secret protocol was perhaps the most explosive docu-

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14 R. BRUBAKER, *Nationalism*, p. 41.

15 Cf. Marek TAMM, *Conflicting Communities of Memory. War Monuments and Monument Wars in Contemporary Estonia*, in: *Nation-Building*, pp. 45–46: five “major channels that mediate collective memory” according to Peter Burke (1997): oral, literary (e.g., memoirs), visual, performative (e.g., meetings, demonstrations), spatial channels.

16 Cf. concerning the (Soviet) Russian discussion: Jan LIPINSKY, *Reception and Historiography of the MRP in (Soviet) Russia – Historians and their Responsibility*, in: *The Baltic States and the End of the Cold War*, *Tartu Historical Studies* 6, 2018, pp. 27–64; idem, *Sechs Jahrzehnte Geheimes Zusatzprotokoll zum Hitler-Stalin-Pakt. Sowjetrussische Historiographie zwischen Leugnung und Wahrheit*, *Osteuropa* 50/10, 2000, pp. 1123–1148; Viktor KNOLL, *Abschied vom Sperrgebiet. Sergej Sluč über die sowjetische Außenpolitik vor 1941*, *Osteuropa* 59/7–8, 2009, pp. 307–311.

17 Cf. Dietmar MÜLLER – Stefan TROEBST, *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939 in der europäischen Geschichte und Erinnerung. Eine Einführung*, in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939 in den Erinnerungskulturen der Europäer*, ed. Anna Kaminsky – Dietmar Müller – Stefan Troebst, Göttingen 2011, p. 22.

ment of Soviet foreign policy. Since 1941, the Kremlin has negated any secret agreement and with this declared it taboo in historiography. Within the Soviet sphere of influence, it was not to be publicly discussed or even published: it reinforced the impression that Moscow significantly attributed the current borders to this protocol. For Soviet historians, the Baltic States as ancient Russian territory had to be protected from Hitler's aggression and contribute to the improved defence of the Soviet Union. They interpreted the events in 1940 not as an annexation but as spontaneous revolutions, free elections, and voluntary accession to the Union. These arguments provided the basis for the denial, cover-up, relativization or justification by the Communist Party and communist historians until the end of 1989 and, in Russia, up to the present day. This was especially so since contemporary historiography had to serve the totalitarian system of communist propaganda to legitimize current policy and thus lost its claim to scholarly independence.

Which did specific Baltic interplay between state politics and national minorities break this Stalinist taboo? Did the Baltic way differ from other Soviet republics? How was the Baltic local, regional and soon national struggle influenced by general policies, which tried to keep the minorities within the Russian dominated Soviet state? How did the Balts, formulating criticism from periphery-republics and acting against Soviet directives from the centre, become pacemakers for glasnost and perestroika in historiography because of a changing balance of power between majority and minority? Did they manage to break up the Soviet Union? Which pragmatic or historical solutions were found instead of implementing precisely official policies? Why is the Baltic historical struggle still relevant today? Taking into regard, how communist historians discussed the MRP in Soviet times, it becomes clear that the Balts put the MRP on the agenda of further scientific and political discussions in regard to the pan-soviet discourses on the Great Fatherland's War. Perhaps this bottom-up process of influencing remembrance policy is the most significant example of how a regional population resp. "minority" could have an impact on changes in history and remembrance policy in the Soviet Union.

Because of the protocols, the three Baltic States lost their independence and became part of the Soviet Union, became national minorities. Estonia and Latvia had to cede territory to the Soviet Union. Existing boundaries have since been found to be wrong. The ultimatums, terror and deportations associated with the occupation,



annexation and Sovietization impressed themselves in the collective memory.<sup>18</sup> Dissidents, writers, historians, politicians recognized the secret protocol increasingly as a means to delegitimize the political system and political status quo, to place in question being part of the Soviet Union, and by emphasizing Baltic victimhood to remind the West of its historical, moral and legal responsibility.<sup>19</sup> The taboo secret protocol became the battle cry of dissidence and wider opposition to the Kremlin.<sup>20</sup> Unlike during the inter-war period, after 1945 there was such a degree of Baltic unity that joint consideration of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is justified.<sup>21</sup> Their sorrowful fate after 1940 united their views on future political action. Differences, however, remained such as the speed, decisiveness and clarity in dealing with the Kremlin.

Many of the politicians who were active in 1939-40 and who were informed about the secret protocol, lost their lives through war and deportation. Stalinist terror endeavoured to limit national identities in the Baltic republics to a purely folkloric level.<sup>22</sup> However, the memory of the MRP as a trauma of the recent past, as well as of Soviet terror since 1940 remained alive<sup>23</sup> - as indicated by reports of security and party

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18 Cf. Olaf MERTELSMANN (ed.), *The Baltic States under Stalinist Rule*, Köln – Weimar 2016; David FEEST, *Ethnische Spaltung, nationale Konsolidierung. Die Folgen des Hitler-Stalin-Paktes im Baltikum*, Osteuropa 59/7–8, 2009, pp. 187–201; Karsten BRÜGEMANN, *Estland und das Ende der Sowjetunion: Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt als baltischer Erinnerungsort für die Singende Revolution?* in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939*, pp. 293–300.

19 Karsten BRÜGEMANN, 'One day we will win anyway': *The 'Singing Revolution' in the Soviet Baltic Republics*, in: *The Revolutions of 1989: A Handbook*, eds. Wolfgang Mueller – Michael Gehler – Arnold Suppan, Wien 2015, pp. 222, 237. The US House of Representatives already in 1954 published the Kersten-Report of its "Select Committee" and voted for the nonrecognition of the Baltic incorporation into the URSS. Afterwards western powers supported Baltic but not Moldovan or Romanian demands; cf. more detailed concerning the Western approach: Jan LIPINSKY, *Das Geheime Zusatzprotokoll zum deutsch-sowjetischen Nichtangriffsvertrag vom 23. August 1939 und seine Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von 1939 bis 1999*, Frankfurt am Main 2004; Igor MUNTEANU, *Social Multipolarity and Political Violence*, in: P. Kolstø, *National Integration*, p. 223; Kaarel PIIRIMAE, *Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Baltic Question. Allied Relations during the Second World War*, New York 2014, p. 161.

20 Cf. in general to the discussion of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in Eastern Europe: J. LIPINSKY, *Das Geheime Zusatzprotokoll*.

21 Olaf MERTELSMANN, *Stalinism and the Baltic States: A Very Brief Introduction*, in: *The Baltic States under Stalinist Rule*, p. 10.

22 Björn M. FELDER, *Stalinist National Bolshevism, Enemy Nations and Terror: Soviet Occupation of the Baltic States 1940–41*, in: *The Baltic States under Stalinist Rule*, p. 24.

23 Elena ZUBKOVA, *Sowjetische Vergangenheit der baltischen Staaten: Schwerpunkte und Kontroverse der kollektiven Erinnerung und Geschichtsschreibung*, in: *Geschichtspolitik im erweiterten Ostseeraum und ihre aktuellen Symptome. Historical Memory Culture in the enlarged Baltic Sea Region and its Symptoms today*, ed. Oliver Rathkolb – Imbi Sooman, Göttingen 2011, p. 99; K. BRÜGEMANN, *One day we will*, p. 238.

agencies. Thanks to surviving family eyewitnesses,<sup>24</sup> and despite forty years of aggressive Soviet propaganda<sup>25</sup>, which practiced an <organized forgetting><sup>26</sup> and did not stop at the destruction of unpleasant factual evidence, even young people knew that collective-individual memory and the official textbook view were radically different.<sup>27</sup> This nationwide officially suppressed memory united, motivated and supported the Baltic minorities against Soviet politics. In addition, the Balts benefited from an active exile releasing publications in the United States and later in Sweden with references to the protocol.<sup>28</sup> Additional sources of information were foreign radio broadcasts or Finnish television, which could be received and understood in Estonia. Exile efforts deliberately prompted the free world to support Baltic national concerns and at the same time kept the “dream of a Baltic independence alive”<sup>29</sup>. Hereby Balts in exile anticipated the decisive claims of their homelands remaining under Soviet domination.

Nonetheless, no one dared to go public with the existing information within the Soviet Union. The 30th anniversary of the signing of the protocol was only referenced in Western states and condemned in a statement by the joint (exile) Baltic-American Committee in 1969.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, in the Baltic republics the secret arrangement by the USSR Council of Ministers of 13 October 1978 increased Russianization and, however, the resistance<sup>31</sup>, which culminated in the “Baltic Appeal” on 23 August 1979 moving the discussion, on the one hand, from Baltic exiles to the USSR itself, and on the other hand, internationalizing it. It was published in Moscow by 38 Lithuanian, 4 Estonian and 3 Latvian dissidents and members of the Helsinki Group, and sent as an open letter to the governments of the Soviet Union, the two German states, the signatories

24 Mart LAAR, *Nationales Erwachen in Estland – damals und jetzt*, in: Nationalismus im spät- und postkommunistischen Europa 2: Nationalismus in den Nationalstaaten, ed. Egbert Jahn, Baden-Baden 2009, p. 189.

25 Imbi PAJU, *Estland! Wo bist du? Verdrängte Erinnerungen*, London – Berlin 2014, p. 148; Meelis SAUEAUK, *Foreword*, in: ibidem, *Historical Memory*, p. 7; cf. Klinta LOCMELE, *(Un)told Memories: Communicating the (Soviet) Past in Latvian Families*, in: M. Saueauk, *Historical Memory*, p. 139.

26 M. MÄLKSOO, *Introduction*, p. 12: referring to Harald Wydra (2007).

27 Meike WULF, *Theory Building: Dynamics of Collective Memory in Estonia*, Papers presented at the research seminar “Estonia-neighbouring Russia, partner with Sweden” 3–5 February 2000, Working-Papers 54, April 2000, pp. 30, 36, 40.

28 Kaarel R. PUSTA, *Estonia and her right to freedom*, *The Journal of Central European Affairs* 3, 1943–1944, pp. 270–294; Alfred BILMANIS (ed.), *Latvian-Russian relations. Documents*, Washington 1944; cf. Aleksandrs DRIZULIS, *Pamiatnaia zapiska Ministra inostrannykh del Latvii V. Muntersa o sovetsko-latviiskikh peregovorakh 1939 goda po povodu zakliucheniia pakta o vzaimopomoshchi, Otechestvennaia istoriia* 2, 1992, p. 176.

29 M. LAAR, *Nationales Erwachen*, p. 189.

30 Bronis J. KASLAS (ed.), *The USSR-German aggression against Lithuania*, New York 1973, p. 409.

31 M. LAAR, *Nationales Erwachen*, p. 190.



of the Atlantic Charter and the UN. For the first time Baltic representatives jointly signed an indictment of the political, territorial, cultural and linguistic dependence on the Soviet Union as a result of the pact. Herewith they initiated a new phase of the anti-Soviet movement in the Baltics, legally, politically and historically constructed, which aspired to have world-wide reverberation. Thanks to knowledge of the sources they demanded the publication and accurate representation of the secret protocols and their subsequent cancellation *ex tunc*. Not only did most of the signatories of this appeal come from Lithuania, but a further 35,000 Lithuanians later contributed their signatures. Even five Soviet dissidents, among them Andrei D. Sakharov, expressed solidarity with them. They popularized the outcry with more publicity, offered Russian underground channels to transmit the text within the Union and also in the Western press, and as important intra-Soviet moral authority noted resistance to any Russian chauvinist political expediency, to recover the territory of the Union with so-called historical justification. But as Western support was missing, Leonid I. Brezhnev's totalitarian Soviet Union set into motion large-scale raids and lawsuits against the signatories of the appeal who were thus condemned to the Gulag.

Nevertheless, the secret protocol remained implicitly, and more and more explicitly, on the political agenda. It was also printed in the Estonian samizdat in 1979. In addition, the wave of arrests sparked further protests of 19 Estonians and Lithuanians, who once again placed the secret agreement and Baltic criticism of it on record and prompted an indictment of Molotov as signatory to the protocol.<sup>32</sup> On 2 March 1980, on the occasion of the Olympic sailing regatta in Tallinn, which coincided with the 40th anniversary of the occupation, the most famous intellectuals as members of the *Action Group to restore the Estonian Olympic Committee* once more condemned the protocol in the international public sphere and criticized Moscow for not publishing it.<sup>33</sup> A similar open letter by 38 Balts was addressed to the Soviet Union and the Scandinavian countries on 10 October 1981.<sup>34</sup> The European Parliament followed the Baltic argument for the first time in its resolution of 13 January 1983. It condemned the pact on the basis of which the Soviet occupation had taken place. This proves that since 1979

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32 Dzintra BUNGS, *Joint political initiatives by Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians as reflected in Samizdat materials 1969–1987*, in: *Regional identity under Soviet rule: The case of the Baltic States*, ed. Dietrich André Loeber – V. Stanley Vardys, Hackettstown 1990, pp. 432, 455–56; Romuald J. MISIUNAS – Rein TAAGEPERA, *The Baltic States. Years of dependence 1940–1990*, London 1993, pp. 270–271.

33 Waldemar WACKMAN – Welf SCHRÖTER, *Nationale Unterdrückung und Opposition im Baltikum*, in: *Sozialistisches Osteuropakomitee: Osteuropa-Info 61/2*, 1985, p. 25.

34 D. BUNGS, *Joint political initiatives*, pp. 460–461.

the appeals had not gone unheard,<sup>35</sup> but rather gave exiles continued concrete reason to draw attention to the precarious Baltic situation.<sup>36</sup> However within the Soviet Union, this international moral backing still had little effect. Demands for the nullification of the protocol—which had already increased since August 1985 at smaller local rallies—were, in the spring of 1986 and, thus during the Gorbachev era, still punished by imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> To the growing internal Baltic criticism Moscow responded with repression, while Baltic exiles gathered on 23 August 1986 in several Western cities for commemorations and protest demonstrations.<sup>38</sup>

### 1986–1987: intensifying Baltic discussion

Nevertheless, the year 1986 marked a further intra-Baltic breakthrough: instead of petitions (in exile) the future was dominated by demonstrations (in the Baltics). Encouraged by the incipient glasnost begun under Gorbachev<sup>39</sup> a year ago, dissidents voicing demands for revision of the historical perspective in the Baltics itself became more and more relevant. In Riga the unofficial Latvian dissident group *Helsinki-86* was formed for the protection of human rights. They demanded the publication and nullification of the secret protocols and designed a program for joint Baltic demonstrations to simultaneously denounce the secret documents the following year, on 23 August 1987. These demonstrations were preceded in February 1987 by a visit from Gorbachev to Latvia in which he stressed, using the old Soviet form of diction, that 1940 had shown that no one can break the revolutionary will of the people.<sup>40</sup> But on 14 June Latvians responded with their understanding of perestroika, by holding the first major demonstration in honor of the Latvian victims of deportation. Subsequently, on 6 August and for the umpteenth time, the Helsinki Group asked the Presidium of the Latvian Supreme Soviet in the name of glasnost and ‘new thinking’ to publish the secret documents and not to interfere with the next demonstration

35 Cf. the Strasbourg resolutions by the European Parliament (15 October 1987 and 7 July 1988); Izidors VIZULIS, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. The Baltic Case*, New York – London 1990, pp. 143–144, Council of Europe Decision (15 May 1986).

36 Cf. for Estonia: *Estlands Kampf um die Freiheit* (Generalkonsulat von Estland): geschrieben von Ernst Jaakson, Generalkonsul von Estland, Geschäftsträger der Gesandtschaft, New York Juni 1988.

37 Abdurakhman A. AVTORKHANOV, *Imperiia Kremlia. Sovetskii tip kolonializma*, Vilnius 1990, p. 77.

38 Stefan TROEBST, *Der 23. August als euroatlantischer Gedenktag? Eine analytische Dokumentation*, in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939*, p. 89.

39 Cf. concerning Gorbachev’s hesitating and communist way of dealing with the MRP: J. LIPINSKY, *Das Geheime Zusatzprotokoll*; idem, *Reception*, pp. 4, 9–17; idem, *Sechs Jahrzehnte*, pp. 1131–1144; Boris CHAVKIN, *Zur Geschichte der Veröffentlichung der sowjetischen Texte der deutsch-sowjetischen Geheimdokumente von 1939–1941*, *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 10/2, 2006, pp. 169, 181.

40 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *One day we will*, pp. 225.

scheduled for August.<sup>41</sup> Thanks to exiles who were still active, 20 US senators gave the first open political and moral backing in a letter to Gorbachev and the party leaders in the Baltics.<sup>42</sup>

On 15 August the *Movement for the Release of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact* (Molotovi-Ribbentropi-Pakti Avalikumiste Eesti Grupp, MRP-AEG) was founded by seven Estonians—a little later than in Latvia, but more consistently in terms of the content—following the success of the June demonstration in Riga. The communists made their access to the media difficult, because among the founders were former political prisoners who, following the dissemination of the text of the protocol, had been sentenced to the Gulag for anti-Soviet activity and who were maintaining connections to exiled Estonians.<sup>43</sup> The MRP-AEG wrote a letter of request to the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences, the *Rahva Hääl* newspaper, and the *Aja Pulss* magazine to publish the pact. In Lithuania, the year 1987 also marked a turning point. *The League for Freedom of Lithuania* (Lietuvos Laisvės Lyga, LLL) established in 1978 used the samizdat press to call for demonstrations in Vilnius. On 23 August 1987 the first joint public-political rallies of the “singing revolution”, the first non-communist, unofficial rallies within the USSR took place and were initially viewed negatively by the leadership of the communist republics but quickly became part of Baltic history. They mobi-

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41 I. VIZULIS, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, pp. 83–84, 86–92; D. BUNGS, *Joint political initiatives*, p. 462.

42 I. VIZULIS, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, pp. 94–95; Tiit MADISSON, *Viis aastat Hirvepargi meelevaldusest*, in: *Eesti Tuld* Tagasi 25/44, 1992; M. LAAR, *Nationales Erwachen*, p. 193.

43 *Ibidem*, p. 194; Heiki LINDPERE, *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Challenging Soviet History*, Tallinn 2009, p. 17; I. VIZULIS, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 120; T. MADISSON, *Viis aastat Hirvepargi*; Bernd NIELSEN-STOKEBBY, *Baltische Erinnerungen. Estland, Lettland, Litauen zwischen Unterdrückung und Freiheit*, Bergisch-Gladbach 1990, p. 13; Csabu János KENÉZ (ed.), *Zur Unabhängigkeitsbewegung in Estland*, in: *Dokumentation Ostmitteleuropa* 16/3–4, 1990; Anatol LIEVEN, *The Baltic revolution. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the path to independence*, New Haven 1993, p. 222; Cf. however Stalinist criticism: Iurii V. EMEĻIANOV, *Bol'shaia igra. Stavki separatistov i sud'by narodov*, Moscow 1990, pp. 254–255.

lized about 13,000 Balts.<sup>44</sup> Speeches and posters addressed the secret protocols of 1939 officially silenced by Moscow, and the related Soviet occupation and annexation in 1940. They appealed to the signatory states or their successors (USSR, East Germany and West Germany) for ostracizing and cancellation of the pact and elimination of all its consequences. This decisive Baltic issue, the result of the protocols, was further moved into the spotlight. Lithuanians around the dissidents Antanas Terleckas, Nijolė Sadūnaitė, and Vytautas Bogušis even called for the restoration of their national freedom. Both Latvian and Lithuanian Local TV reported on the evening news. For the first time the Soviet media mentioned critical demonstrations of this kind across the Union, albeit negatively as “work of the west-bourgeois propaganda centers”. Thus, the historical discussion had finally escaped the small circles of dissidents in some marginal civil rights groups, and now engaged the governments of the communist republics<sup>45</sup>, party lines, historical institutions<sup>46</sup>, “round tables”, press organs and television, parliamentary commissions, indeed the entire population. The large demonstrative and commemorative anniversaries of the protocol’s negotiation that were held indicated the existing public concern about the preservation of national culture, an increasingly politicized, historically based<sup>47</sup> and argued nationalism. Together with the massive participation of the younger generation they simultaneously shaped the current Baltic historical consciousness, stressed the close link between the proto-

44 Riina R. KIONKA – Mart LAANEMÄE, *Hintergründe zum Entstehen der Volksfront in Estland. Ein kurzer Überblick*, Baltisches Jahrbuch 5, 1988, p. 9; Heiki AHONEN, *Wie sieht man den Molotow-Ribbentrop-Pakt in Estland?*, in: *Aufstand der Opfer. Verratene Völker zwischen Hitler und Stalin*, eds. Johannes Vollmer – Tilman Zülch, Göttingen – Wien 1989, p. 29; Lennart MERI, *Estland: Frühling im Herbst?*, Baltica. Die Vierteljahresschrift für baltische Kultur 1, 1989, p. 46; Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 26. 8. 1987, s. 3; Vincas BARTUSEVICHIUS, *Entwicklungen in Litauen, 1988–1989*, in: Litauisches Kulturinstitut. Jahrestagung 1988, Lampertheim 1989, p. 65; Alfred Erich SENN, *Perestroika in Lithuanian historiography: the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, *The Russian Review* 49/1, 1990, p. 45; Ansgar GRAW, *Der Freiheitskampf im Baltikum*, Erlangen 1991, p. 28; Katarina GUSSEW, *Wilno, Wilna, Vilnius – Hauptstadt Litauens*, in: *Die wiedergefundene Erinnerung. Verdrängte Geschichte in Osteuropa*, ed. Annette Leo, Berlin 1992, p. 222; Marianna BUTENSCHÖN, *Estland, Lettland, Litauen. Das Baltikum auf dem langen Weg in die Freiheit*, München 1992, p. 248; T. MADISSON, *Viis aastat Hirvepargi; Noorte Hääl*, 27 August 1987; *Rahva Hääl*, 18 September 1987.

45 Alexander JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe meines Jahrhunderts. Eine Autobiographie*, Leipzig 2003, p. 529: Justas Paleckis, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, emphasized in February 1990 at the Moscow Central Committee plenum, without perestroika and the reactions of the Baltic Communists they ‘had successfully established everything on sand’ and would ‘fall into the situation of Romania’.

46 Students from Riga University together with their assistant professors analyzed (historical) reasons for the demonstrations, cf. I. VIZULIS, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 118.

47 Meike WULF – Pertti GRÖNHOLM, *Generating Meaning Across Generations: The Role of Historians in the Codification of History in Soviet and Post-Soviet Estonia*, in: *Memory and Pluralism in the Baltic States*, ed. Eva-Clarita Pettai, London 2011, pp. 76–96: on the historical education of many Estonian politicians.

cols and the occupation and communicated through international press reports the total Baltic rejection of violently realized union membership. From the initial local opposition, to economic, social and cultural grievances—such as acute pollution—a national-political, Baltic-wide collective, anti-Soviet protest rapidly emerged which would lead to the 1989/1990 “memory wars”.<sup>48</sup> The growing number of participants revealed a significant drop in fear of political persecution, which was still a reality in 1988. This development corresponded to an amazing retention of the local communist leadership<sup>49</sup>. In the beginning the communists aimed at greater autonomy (IME) within the Union, initially together with the popular fronts, but soon saw themselves overtaken by radical demands and finally allowed for protests against the officially non-existent document.

The struggle for the disclosure of the pact, especially the officially taboo and hidden secret protocols, shifted these documents for the years 1987 to 1990 to the central object of Baltic memory, to the means of rediscovering Baltic history, to the main symbol of the immorality of totalitarian Stalinist power politics. The skilful initial focus on the secret protocols secured wider (moral) support in the West and greater sympathy, even within the Union, than was possible with an equally strong critique of Soviet occupation in 1940. Nevertheless, Soviet historiography barely treated the theme of Baltic annexation, or interpreted it according to the official line established in 1940. Moscow missed the chance to make up for past omissions. Instead, Balts from the periphery were able to start the internal Soviet discussion about the secret pact in central Moscow. They decisively determined and compelled discussions. At the time of perestroika, therefore, they became catalysts and leaders of the debate on the Second World War, on de-Stalinization and critical consideration of Soviet foreign policy. History “legitimized the belief in an independent future”<sup>50</sup>. Balts cleverly used Gorbachev’s new policy to jointly and publicly defy communist power, to deny before the entire world any Soviet legal claim to their home countries because of historical reasons, and to demand a revision of the previous history lies about the emergence of the Soviet Baltic republics and the “voluntary accession to the Union”. In this way, Lithuanians, Estonians and Latvians shook the foundations of the Soviet Union and finally demolished the Warsaw Pact.

As such, in 1987 they were well ahead of the discussion allowed in Moscow. The central Communist leadership feared a revision of history would bring about their

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48 Eadem, *Memory and Democratic Pluralism in the Baltic States: Rethinking the Relationship*, in: *Memory and Pluralism*, p. 1.

49 Cf. more details concerning Baltic communist reaction: J. LIPINSKY, *Das Geheime Zusatzprotokoll*, pp. 442–467.

50 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *One day we will*, p. 239.

own discrediting and delegitimization. They realized too slowly that dissatisfaction with the situation was already widespread and thus responded with historical misrepresentations. With formula turns dating from the sixties, Soviet historiography on behalf of the Kremlin tried to found the notion that Stalin had saved the Baltics by preventing “fascist occupation” and had used the current Baltic socialist revolutions at the time.<sup>51</sup> However, this was no longer sufficient to recover the leadership of opinion in the escalating debate. For example, immediately after the rally on 23 August the editors of *Rahva Hääl* asked Heino Arumäe, section head at the Institute of History of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, to write an article about the pact. The historian wanted to take this opportunity to publish the text of the secret protocol, and in return, was prepared to justify Stalin’s policies. As political repression had once again briefly gained the upper hand, the newspaper backtracked. However, on 17/18 September they were the first official licensed press organization within the Soviet Union to cite the protocol point concerning the Baltics.<sup>52</sup> Thus the Balts were over one year ahead of the Moscow led discussion. This margin influenced the following years, and established a crucial test for the Baltic Communists. Already in December 1987 the Moscow Central Committee sharply and in secret criticized its comrades on the Baltic Sea, as they had failed to prevent the “nationalist manifestations” in August.<sup>53</sup> However communist censorship still worked in the Baltic republics. Iuozas Urbshys, former Lithuanian Foreign Minister, in 1987 had already written his memoirs in order to prove the Soviet menacing pressure. But they got their publishing license only in September 1988.

### 1988: from Baltic to Soviet discussion

In 1988, actions were finally extended to the Soviet Union. Delegates from the newly founded Estonian Popular Front (Rahvarinne Perestroika Toetuseks)—which took over the aims of the *Movement for the publication of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*—were commissioned to work for the publication and condemnation of the secret protocols at the 19th Party Conference in Moscow from 28 June to 1 July. This took place against the background of a politically intensified situation, where on 2 February, the militia brutally dispersed a renewed rally to commemorate the secret protocols.<sup>54</sup> Instead of open discussion, the Soviet regime once more resorted to repressi-

51 *Lettland: Die Wahl, die zweimal getroffen wurde. 1917–1940. Dokumentarischer Bericht*, Moskau 1987, p. 50; *Litauen. Der Weg zur Unabhängigkeit 1917–1940. Dokumentarischer Bericht*, Moskau 1987, p. 6; *Estland vor der Entscheidung 1917–1940*, Moskau 1987.

52 Letter from Heino Arumäe in possession of the author.

53 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *One day we will*, p. 228.

54 Letter from Heino Arumäe in possession of the author.



on. But the Balts could no longer be intimidated. In Latvia on 1 June at the Riga plenum of the Latvian Writers' Union—the first time at an official mass-event within the USSR—Mavriks Vulfsons read out the first protocol point, criticizing the following Sovietization<sup>55</sup> and thus casting doubt over the official version of events in 1940. He spoke so openly about officially secret facts, that the Latvian Communist Party leader Boris K. Pugo—later Soviet interior minister and involved in the coup against Gorbachev in 1991—whispered that Vulfsons, “just destroyed Soviet Latvia”<sup>56</sup>. The final resolution of the plenary was the first document of an officially recognized organization within the USSR, to call for publication of the protocol. The contents of the secret documents should be made available to the 19th Party Conference and even to Gorbachev personally.

A few days later in Lithuania on 3 June the local political opposition formed the *Sajūdis Initiative Group* (Sajūdžio iniciatyvinė grupė; later *Reform Movement of Lithuania* (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sajūdis)) in support of Perestroika and immediately postulated that the truth about the past would promote moral and national rebirth. Five days later, the Latvian newspaper, *Skolotāju Avīze* (Teacher's Newspaper)—and the first officially authorized newspaper in the Soviet Union—published more excerpts from the secret protocols. At a demonstration on 14 June in Latvia Vulfsons repeated his remarks from the beginning of the month and announced that the “Republic Authorities” had reprimanded him for this.<sup>57</sup> The reaction of the Soviet party leadership to these Baltic demands is still unknown. However, it is not difficult to assume it was negative. Finally, a comparative view of the contemporary discussion within the rest of the Soviet Union discloses the continuing restrictive policy of the communists.<sup>58</sup> While the Kremlin distanced itself further and further from the contemporary historical reality, the Lithuanian opposition groups won increased public support. In its program on 3 July the *Lyga* described the cancellation of the MRP and its consequenc-

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55 Baltisches Jahrbuch 5, 1988, pp. 53–57; Mārtinsh BŪMANIS, *Die KP Lettlands und die nationale Frage im Zeichen der ‚Umgestaltung‘*, in: Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien 10, 1989, p. 33; Juris BALPUTNIS *Glasnost' in Lettland*, in: Auch wir sind Europa. Zur jüngeren Geschichte und aktuellen Entwicklung des Baltikums. Baltische Pressestimmen und Dokumente, ed. Ruth Kibelka, Berlin 1991, p. 101.

56 Wolfram von SCHELIHA, *Der Pakt und seine Fälscher. Der geschichtspolitische Machtkampf in Russland zum 70. Jahrestag des Hitler-Stalin-Pakts*, in: Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939, p. 178.

57 I. VIZULIS, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 123; Egil LEVITS, *Der politische Konflikt zwischen den Selbstbestimmungsbestrebungen und dem sowjetischen Herrschaftsanspruch in Lettland. Eine regionale Fallstudie zur sowjetischen Nationalitätenpolitik*, in: Dokumentation Ostmitteleuropa 14(38)/5–6, 1988, p. 71; Ernst BENZ (ed.), *50 Jahre danach. Dokumentation des Kampfes der Esten, Letten und Litauer um die Feststellung der historischen Wahrheit und die Beseitigung der Folgen des Hitler-Stalin-Pakts und der Zwangseingliederung in die Sowjetunion*, in: Acta Baltica 27, 1989, p. 9.

58 Cf. J. LIPINSKY, *Das Geheime Zusatzprotokoll*, pp. 396–404.

es as a priority objective. At the same time, through its electoral program the Popular Front of Latvia (*Latvijas Tautas fronte*) urged that the head Soviet authority of their republic declare the pact from 1939 null and void.

The confrontation became more intense and gathered speed. In Lithuania, the complete publication of the protocol on 5 August still remained limited to *Sajudžio žinios*, a newspaper of the Lithuanian Perestroika Movement *Sjūdis*. With the philosopher Bronius Kuzmickas taking responsibility, it printed Russian texts from a translation of Samizdat.<sup>59</sup> Their Estonian neighbors, on the other hand, had already taken an important step forward, as they used the party reshuffle of 16 June 1988—when Vaino Väljas took over the position as Chairman in the Communist Party from Karl Vaino and significantly diminished censorship and political pressure. *Rahva Hääl*, the newspaper of the Estonian Communist Party, was the first official press organ within the USSR which dared to print the full text of the protocol (the facsimile based on German copies) as part of an extensive article by Arumäe on the 10 and 11 August 1988. Thus the courageous editor-in-chief Toomas Leito now yielded to the pressure of the MRP-AEG and the Estonian Communist Party might have hoped to avoid mass demonstrations in connection with the 49th anniversary of the signing. An Estonian radio broadcast followed on 12 August. The newspaper article was published slightly shortened, and not always correctly translated a week later in Russian in the *Sovetskaia Estoniia*. It was now, on 17 August, available to wider Russian-speaking circles. This was the first complete Russian publication of the secret document in an officially licensed Russian-language newspaper in the USSR. With this, and the accompanying interpretation, the historian Arumäe was more than a year ahead of his Moscow colleagues. His article represented a “milestone in Soviet historiography”<sup>60</sup>. But the Kremlin, however, rejected further publication, still denied the existence of the protocol, stuck to the version of a ‘voluntary accession’ to the Soviet Union and the ‘re-establishment of Soviet power’ in the Baltics. These lies legitimized existing imperial claims, protected the prestige of the party and served imperatives of the state which wanted to prevent the collapse of the Soviet Union. Central Committee Secretary, Aleksandr N. Iakovlev, as a full member of the Politburo and a close advisor of Gorbachev, saw no possibility of publishing the controversial secret documents even during his visit to Vilnius from 11–14 August.<sup>61</sup> However, he contributed to the changeover of power inside the communist party; and at the Central Committee ple-

59 Cf. A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, p. 47: *Sajudžio žinios* 17.

60 Erwin OBERLÄNDER (ed.), *Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939. Das Ende Ostmitteleuropas?* Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 11.

61 Regina ZHIAPKAITE, *Evropa doživala poslednie mirnye dni*, in: *Novyi vzgliad na istoriiu Litvy*, ed. Alfonsas Eidintas, Kaunas 1991, p. 93.

nary session from 5–7 February 1990 for the preparation of the (last) 28<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress he was accused of promoting the collapse of the Soviet Union and of having ‘betrayed the Baltics’, although in Lithuania he had warned about separatism and advocated only the free development for all nationalities on a cultural level.<sup>62</sup>

The hesitant and unclear position of the Soviet Union government left the Baltic Communists without clear instructions and increasingly isolated. Therefore, the Lithuanian Central Committee published an article by Robertas Zhiugzhda in *Sovetskaia Litva* being more tendentious than Arumäe and based on Soviet guidelines before the anniversary, on 18 August. But this was no longer enough. Regina Zhepkaitė, historian at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, emphasized on 20 August in *Tiesa* that even without the original protocol there is enough evidence for the existence of the document. Without worrying about the continued denials from Moscow, the Latvian *Lauku Avize* and the Lithuanian *Vestnik Litovskogo Dvizheniia za Perestroiku* simultaneously published the protocol. It had now been printed in all three Baltic republics. The Estonian “Movement for the Release of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact” had lost its right to exist and logically became part of the *Estonian National Independence Party* (Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei) on 20 August. This party continued the tradition of its predecessor but with more determination. As their first political measure they demanded that the events of 1940 should be classified as Soviet occupation.<sup>63</sup> In the Baltic countries the Communist Party had lost control and leadership of public opinion. Here the Communists rapidly responded with more extensive concessions than the Union leadership in Moscow. They were more exposed to the increasing pressure of the population. They were caught in the balancing act between party discipline and political-national will to survive. Thus, in August 1988, officially authorized rallies on the anniversary of the protocol became possible for the first time without the Communists being able to restrain the then expressed demands. Ironically, there were once again demonstrations against a document, the existence of which, Moscow only officially acknowledged about a year later.

Russian reform historians like Iurii N. Afanas’ev used the freer atmosphere in the Baltic States to express clear criticism of Moscow’s delaying tactics and Soviet historical falsifications. The future Baltic cooperation with him on the commission of the Congress of People’s Deputies from June 1989 was already anticipated. After his speech, the people, gathered in Tallinn, demanded their government to send

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62 A. JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe*, pp. 527–529. Iakovlev sought a union as a democratic confederation but not a ‘dependent separatism’ with the disintegration of the Union; *ibidem*, 794, 805–806, 823–825: allegations 1991/1992 as well as rejection of an action brought by the Communist Party for ‘treason’.

63 R. J. MISIUNAS, *The Baltic States*, p. 319; A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, p. 49.

a commission to Germany to investigate the disputed documents and, furthermore, that Estonians should evaluate the pact and the consequences themselves.<sup>64</sup> Moscow's acknowledgements were no longer considered the measure of all things. Simultaneously, in Riga and Vilnius<sup>65</sup>, more than 100,000 protesters demanded the publication and annulment of the protocol. Lithuanians even heard a tape recording where the former Foreign Minister, Juozas Urbshys, the last survivor of the Soviet-Baltic negotiations in the autumn of 1939, described his meeting with Molotov at the time.<sup>66</sup> Now even Zhiugzhda basically gave up his partisan reserve from the previous week. At the same time, persisting with tendency of denial, the Latvian Foreign Minister Leonard Bartkevich rejected allegations in an interview for the news agency TASS that the secret protocols determined the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union.<sup>67</sup> With these words, he readily admitted its existence and then tried to limit the consequences of the acknowledgement, by separating the protocol from the following events. How far behind the discussion in Moscow comparatively remained was revealed by the 28 August proposal of the historian Aleksandr O. Chubar'ian that the Moscow Government publish a magazine article with an explanation and interpretation of the pact, without thereby acknowledging the authenticity of the protocol.<sup>68</sup> In the Baltic countries, however, the development in 1988 no longer gave preference to such fall-back positions coordinated with Moscow. The national opposition, particularly in Lithuania, allowed the leaderships of the Soviet communist republics

64 Sovetskaia Estoniia 196, 1988, p. 3; Moscow News (4 September 1988), p. 8. Overall, 300,000 people gathered in Estonia to mark the anniversary, approximately one third of all ethnic Estonians.

65 Cf. the Polish language organ of the Communist Party of Lithuania Czerwony Sztandar (24 December 1988) cited by The Warsaw Voice (15 January 1989), pp. 13; Vilius KAVALIAUSKAS, *O tainykh protokolakh 1939 goda*, in: Vilnius/Vil'nus. Ezhemesiachnyi zhurnal soiuzna pisatelei Litvy 8, 1989, p. 157; David M. CROWE, *The Baltic States and the Great Powers. Foreign relations, 1938–1940*, Boulder 1993, p. 180.

66 A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, pp. 49–51; Teddy J. ULDRICKS, *Evolving Soviet views of the Nazi-Soviet pact*, in: Labyrinth of nationalism. Complexities of diplomacy. Essays in honor of Charles and Barbara Jelavich, ed. Richard Frucht, Columbus 1992, p. 345; cf. Ernst BENZ, *Aus den Erinnerungen des ehemaligen litauischen Aussenministers Juozas Urbshys*, Acta Baltica 29–30, 1991–1992, p. 205; Vitautas KANCIAVICHUS, *1939 god. Dokumental'nye materialy o zakliuchenii dogovora o vzaimopomoshchi mezhdru SSSR i Litvoi*, in: Novyi vzgliad na istoriiu Litvy, ed. Alfonsas Eidintas, Kaunas 1991, p. 100; A. DRIZULIS, *Pamiatnaia zapiska*, p. 82: publishing license of the memoirs and advance copies in Lithuanian newspapers, e.g. Tiesa, 11 September 1988.

67 Neues Deutschland (25 August 1988), p. 5.

68 Mikhail PROZUMENSHCHIKOV, *The Revolutions of 1989 and the 'Archival Revolution' in the USSR*, in: The Revolutions of 1989, p. 514; cf. concerning Chubar'ian's politically dominated historiography: J. LIPINSKY, *Reception*, pp. 6–7, 12, 14, 23; idem, *Sechs Jahrzehnte*, pp. 1135, 1138–1139, 1143, 1147–1148. No wonder that Chubar'ian afterwards joined the *Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests*, founded on 20 May 2009 by the Russian President Dmitrij Medvedev.

no breathing space. As soon as the successful event in August was over, *The League for Freedom of Lithuania* announced on 8 September that they wanted to commemorate within 20 days the second German-Soviet treaty that granted Lithuania to the Soviet Union. Students of the Historical Institute of the Lithuanian Academy argued for the publication and condemnation of the documents by demanding research on German and Soviet foreign policy concerning Lithuania in 1939/1940.<sup>69</sup> The public confrontation between Baltic opposition and Soviet headquarters came to a head. To calm things down, the Institute of Military History in Moscow invited two representatives from each Baltic Republic to an open discussion at a “round table” on 21 September with the theme “The Soviet Union and the Baltic States, 1939-1940”.<sup>70</sup> Despite the orthodox interpretation of Vilnis Ja. Sipols the secret protocol took a central place. There was no doubt about its existence. The clear integration of Baltic historians in the discussions, as well the clearly signaled concessions, at least on a scientific level, came too late, however, and were not enough for the Balts.

In the Baltic States, the attitude of the communists remained ambiguous. To ensure their own survival and to compete for recognition in the country, the Estonian communists kept their distance from the Moscow party leadership. Their Lithuanian comrades who were close to the First Party Secretary Ringaudas Songaila, on the other hand, reacted to further protests at the end of September 1988 with violence and deployed military special forces.<sup>71</sup> They only drew back from violent protests through which the reform-minded Algirdas Brazauskas came to power on 20 October. Now the protocol was considered by everyone in the Baltic States as the key to understand Baltic contemporary history.<sup>72</sup> But Moscow still denied its existence and therefore continued to reject its publication also towards Baltic Communists: the protocol turned to an internal Soviet bomb. Afanas'ev again used the freer atmosphere in Estonia and spoke out as the first well known Soviet Russian historian in favor of acknowledging the authenticity of the pact and examination of its consequences.<sup>73</sup> In Riga, and a little later in Tallinn, the German professor of Eastern law Dietrich André Loeber used a discussion about his book to distribute copies of the protocol and to argue for its authenticity.<sup>74</sup> Against this background of a pan-Baltic urging for historical truth, in

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69 A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, p. 50.

70 Vechernii Tallinn 226 (30 September 1988), p. 1.

71 Kristian GERNER – Stefan HEDLUND, *The Baltic States and the end of the Soviet Empire*, London 1993, p. 92.

72 Ju. ANT, “Chego ne khvatilo dlia revoliucii?”, *Kommunist Estonii. Teoreticheskii i politicheskii zhurnal TsKKP Estonii* 10, 1988, p. 39.

73 Sovetskaia Estoniia 224 (29 September 1988), p. 3.

74 Gert v. PISTOHLKORS, *In der Wissenschaft sind die Weichen neu gestellt*, Baltica. Die Vierteljahresschrift für baltische Kultur 4, 1988, p. 26.

October Gorbachev asked German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Moscow about the secret protocols and continued to doubt their existence publicly. This refusal of the Moscow party headquarters to finally admit historical facts was answered at the Sajūdis Founding Congress by open calls for a historical revision, indeed, for the full restoration of independence that Lithuania had lost as a result of the protocol.<sup>75</sup>

In the fall of 1988 in the Baltic States, it was no longer possible for serious historians to question the protocol, as the Moscow *Pravda* did in the whole Soviet Union on 1 September. Estonian historians such as Kjullo Ar'jakas and Arumäe simultaneously supplemented knowledge about the missing documents.<sup>76</sup> Vilius Kavaliauskas, a Lithuanian journalist, was looking for the original protocol. Alfonsas Eidintas, deputy-chief of the Historical Institute, informed him about missing Soviet documents. The German Foreign Ministry offered its facsimile copies and *Tiesa* printed the results by quoting national witnesses like Urbshys und Vincas Kreve-Mickevichius, his successor in the Foreign Ministry.<sup>77</sup>

Scholars stressed that only Soviet historians were faced with the task of searching for and analyzing the texts. Their efforts probably helped the Estonian Supreme Soviet to pass the sovereignty declaration on 16 November. For the first time, a Soviet Republic made use of a right that was ensured by Article 72 of the Soviet Constitution, and placed Estonian law above Soviet law. Support for perestroika no longer meant support for the Soviet Union. Moscow reacted with even more rigorous resistance. But Arnold Rüütel, who was summoned as president of the Presidium of the Estonian Supreme Soviet to the Kremlin by Gorbachev on 18 November, remained firm.<sup>78</sup> To make the controversy accessible even to the Russian-speaking populations, Baltic articles were quickly translated. In December 1988, in accordance with the press law and disguised as an *Information Bulletin* the Latvian Popular Front even issued the "first and only officially approved journal in which openly oppositional opinions could

75 Cf. Neue Zürcher Zeitung (25 Oktober 1988), p. 2; A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, pp. 52–55, 56; K. GU-SSEW, *Wilno, Wilna*, p. 215.

76 Kjullo AR'IAKAS, *Vneshniaia politika Estonskoi respubliki v 1939 godu, I*, in: Raduga. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii ezheimesiachnik TsK/LKSM Estonii i Soiuza pisatelei Estonskoi SSR 11, 1988, p. 60; Chejno ARUMIAE, *Avgust 39-go: kak eto bylo? K voprosu o zakliuchenii sovetsko-germanskogo dogovora o nenapadenii i podpisanii ego sekret'nogo dopolnitel'nogo protokola*, in: Tallinn. Literaturno-chudozhestvennyj i obshchestvenno-politicheskij zhurnal Soiuza pisatelei ESSR i Gosudarstvennogo komiteta Estonskoi SSR po kul'ture, 1988, 6(63) [nojabr'-dekabr'], pp.93+96-108.

77 Czerwony Sztandar, 24 December 1988; Vilius KAVALIAUSKAS, *O tajnykh protokolakh 1939 goda*, in: Vilnius/Vil'njus. Ezheimesiachnij zhurnal soiuza pisatelei Litvy, 8, 1989, pp. 160–161; luozas URBSHYS, *Litva v gody surovyykh ispytanii 1939–1940*, Vilnius 1989, pp. 3, 80.

78 K. BRÜGGEMANN, "One day we will", pp. 232–233.



also have their say<sup>79</sup> with a run of 30,000 copies of *Atmoda* (Awakening). Thereby, other popular fronts in the East Slavic language area, such as *Ruch* in the Ukraine or *Adradzhene* in Belarus, and Democrats in the other republics of the Soviet Union, were provided with information about the secret protocols. Thus, the Baltic popular fronts, officially created to support Gorbachev and the perestroika, not only paved the way to a multi-party system outside the Communist Party, but also moved increasingly in opposition to the Soviet Union.

### **1989: from historical to political discussion**

Furthermore, throughout 1989 the difficult battle over the truthful view of the past, and current political decisions based on it, continued. The “party” council from *Sqjūdis* spoke on 1 February of the “ultimate violence”<sup>80</sup> of both dictators in the annexation. With these words, the consequences of the protocol moved more clearly to the center of Baltic attention. The Lithuanian Communist Brazauskas urged during his Moscow meetings with Gorbachev on 15 February the publication and condemnation of the protocol<sup>81</sup>, but he did not succeed. On 16 February, *Sqjūdis* expressed its primary goal of the attainment of full independence. A meeting on 23 to 24 February between Baltic historians and a Moscow delegation in Tallinn<sup>82</sup>, where the Balts demanded access to the decisive archives, ended inconclusively. Therefore, the scholars worked without Soviet participation on the argument for the close link between the protocol and annexation.<sup>83</sup> In March the various popular fronts won in their homelands majorities in elections for the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union where their representatives were able to influence the meetings in Moscow in the summer.

In order to continue at least the historical conversation, Valerionas Baltrunas, head of the Commission of Ideology in the Lithuanian Central Committee mediated a visit of a delegation of Lithuanian historians in Moscow on 17 April. In the Moscow Central Committee the interpretation of the events from 1939 to 1940 and the opinion of the Soviet party leadership—already assuming the existence of the protocol—were to be discussed.<sup>84</sup> This cleverly staged and perfectly timed propaganda visit aimed at the Balts to move to a moderate attitude in the forthcoming Congress without giving

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79 E. LEVITS, *Der politische Konflikt*, pp. 71, 118, footnote 253.

80 V. BARTUSEVICHIUS, *Entwicklungen*, p. 79.

81 Algirdas BRAZAUSKAS, *Scheidung vom Kreml*, Vilnius 1993, p. 34.

82 A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, p. 53.

83 Enn ROOZE, *Territorial'noe obrazovanie SSSR*, in: *Raduga* 2, 1989, p. 49; K. AR'IAKAS, *Vneshniaia politika*, p. 92; Arūnas BUBNYS, *Die ‚Entdeckung‘ des Molotow-Ribbentrop-Pakts und seine Deutung in der litauischen Presse und den Geschichtslehrbüchern*, in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939*, p. 331.

84 *Polityka* 33/19 (13 May 1989), p. 2; Kaszauškiene; A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, pp. 53–54; Tiesa (21 April 1989); *Kashauskiene and Komjaunimo tiesa* (21 April 1989); *Eidintas*.

them any concrete concessions. The information about the discussion was available only to party and loyal historians. At the same time the visit was to give some support to the Baltic Communists, but even they were not satisfied with this. On 21 April, Brazauskas demanded that the Central Committee Plenum of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union should deal with the economic independence of Lithuania, the political assessment of the pact, and the status of the Lithuanian Communist Party.<sup>85</sup> The protocols obviously possessed for him the second main priority. The Lithuanians, in particular, pressed early in 1989 as well for a political assessment of the consequences of the protocol. They pursued the accurate view of the past in order to be able to justify the political decisions of the present, particularly the withdrawal of the Soviet Union. Hence, they condemned the documents as a crime against international law. These historical issues with their political and legal explosiveness predominated in the Baltic Assembly<sup>86</sup> in Tallinn from 13-14 May, which again appealed to the world community as they questioned the Baltic affiliation to the Soviet Union under international law. The Estonian and Latvian Popular Fronts, as well as *Sajūdis* had send purposefully deputies to it as preparation and joint harmonizing for the Moscow Congress and the following 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pact. With the specific judgment and condemnation of the treaty came the first differences: *Sajūdis* representatives prevented a resolution that would annul all territorial changes caused by the pact, since such a decision also affected the area around Vilnius which was obtained from Moscow in 1939 and thus would have meant the possible loss of the capital.

However, all the Baltic representatives as one condemned the forcible occupation as gross violation of international law and binding Soviet obligations.<sup>87</sup> Even before the Soviet Congress met and a commission of inquiry began, the Baltic republics had already formulated the results which they hoped for but wouldn't be able to achieve even more than a year later. With lightning speed the confrontation around and over the secret protocols now left the historiographical level and reached the internal, as well as foreign political level, because the declaration of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet about the sovereignty of Lithuania already defined as historic interpretation with parliamentary means on 18 May that the sovereign state of Lithuania was forcibly and illegally affiliated to the Soviet Union in 1940 in accordance with the secret additional

85 A. BRAZAUSKAS, *Scheidung*, pp. 41, 51.

86 Mall LAUR – Riina LÖHMUS (eds.), *The May 1989 Baltic Assembly: Speeches and documents*, in: Nationalities Papers. Semi-annual publication of the association for the study of the nationalities of the USSR and Eastern Europe 16/2, 1988, pp. 243, 246; cf. Pravda. Organ Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS 142, 22 May 1989, p. 2: Miullerson.

87 *Appell der Volksfrontvertreter Estlands, Lettlands und der litauischen Reformbewegung Sajūdis*, in: *Aufstand der Opfer*, ed. Johannes Vollmer, pp. 47–48.

protocol.<sup>88</sup> The Lithuanians no longer demanded simply a new view of history. Even before the Moscow Congress actually met, parliamentary interpretations of the historical events were submitted in the Baltics. The decision of the Estonian Supreme Soviet supported this attempt on the same day, though it avoided radical words. It referred more clearly to the international legal dubiousness of secret clauses and was the first administrative body within the Soviet Union pointing out the need to annul them *ex tunc*. It also demanded the establishment of an appropriate special commission of the Moscow Congress.<sup>89</sup> Latvia followed its neighbors only at the end of July. The Baltic communists had thus successfully executed a historic national turn. With the departure of the Lithuanian representatives to Moscow on 20 May Brazauskas publicly called the Soviet Union for the reassessment of the agreement of 1939 which had already taken place in Lithuania. He also kept this opinion in front of the Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU.<sup>90</sup> But the Kremlin neither listened to him nor to the appeal of the Baltic conference of historians (among them, Rudis, Eidintas, V. Zhalys).<sup>91</sup>

Against the background of these advanced discussions, the arduous debates in the Congress of People's Deputies—at the time it was *de jure* the highest government agency—must have hit the Baltic delegates like a cold slap in the face.<sup>92</sup> For the moment, the concerted Baltic act with the half-hearted support of Gorbachev succeeded only in setting up the parliamentary commission of inquiry.<sup>93</sup> The Estonian, Endel Lippmaa, had filed the relevant application after winning Gorbachev's consent,<sup>94</sup> who wanted to divert discussions away from the massacre in Tbilisi. Marju Lauristin joined the Commission under the Chairmanship of Aleksandr Iakovlev<sup>95</sup> along with Edgar Savisaar, the chairman of the Estonian Popular Front.<sup>96</sup> But the Kremlin still acted with no imagination, delaying and persisting: the pact continued to be justified; only light moral criticism was allowed, only the secret part was lamented and its importance

88 Baltisches Jahrbuch 6, 1989, p. 155; A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, p. 54.

89 *Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Estonskoi Sovetskoi Socialisticheskoi Respubliki ob otnoshenii k paktu Molotova-Ribbentropa*, in: Raduga 8, 1989, p. 2.

90 A. E. SENN, *Perestroika*, p. 54; A. BRAZAUSKAS, *Scheidung*, p. 47.

91 *Konferentsiia po voprosam istorii Pribaltiki*, in: Vilnius 8, 1989, pp. 187–189.

92 *Pervyi s'ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR, 25 maia – 9 iunia 1989 g. Stenograficheskii otchet, T. V*, Moskva 1989, p. 125.

93 *Pervyi s'ezd, T. IV*, pp. 266–271.

94 H. LINDPERE, *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 20.

95 A. JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe*, pp. 497–498.

96 Ilga GORE – Inesis FELDMANIS – Aivars STRANGA – Martinsh VIRSIS, *O sovetsko-germanskom dogovore o nenapadenii ot 23 avgusta 1939 goda*, in: Atmoda. Informatsionnyi biulleten' Narodnogo Fronta Latvii "Probuzhdenie" 29, 10 July 1989, pp. 4–5; Aivars STRANGA – Martinsh VIRSIS, *Sorokovye, rokovye*, in: Daugava. Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii ezhemesiachnyi zhurnal Soiuzna pisatelei Latviiskoi SSR 6/144, iun' 1989, p. 68; cf. as Stalinist criticism: I. V. EMEL'ANOV, *Bol'shaia igra*, p. 11.

was equally downplayed. Therefore, the Baltic people consciously continued their own efforts and organized an international academic conference on “Legal Assessment of the Pacts between Germany and the USSR on 23 August and 28 September 1939 and on 10 January 1941” in Tallinn. From 30 June to 1 July, it brought together around 250 participants from the Baltic States, Finland, Poland, the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany, so there were researcher from almost all the countries affected by the agreements.<sup>97</sup> Symbolically, the Baltic incorporation advanced from national to an international problem. Since the Moscow party and State leadership continued to reject any clear concession, despite the incontrovertible facts, the Baltic States finally established their own parliamentary committees—beginning in Lithuania on 5 July—which also had to consider the consequences of the protocol<sup>98</sup> and thus could pave the way to regaining independence.<sup>99</sup> Demands grew louder for annulment *ex tunc* and restitution. At the same time, newspapers extended the document base.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, the Soviet leadership was in conflict over the acknowledgment of historical truth, extenuating the internal political and national tensions and *raison d'état*, which would not allow a collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore party faithful Iakovlev strictly split the years 1939 and 1940 in the Moscow Commission<sup>101</sup> with Valentin M. Falin’s help<sup>102</sup> (also dividing the protocol and the Baltic request of secession), and at the request of Gorbachev<sup>103</sup>, delayed the publication of the final report which was scheduled for July at the latest, and also risked the splitting of the Commi-

97 *Materials of the international scientific conference on legal assessment of the USSR-Germany pacts of August 23 and September 28, 1939*, in: Izvestiia Akademii nauk Estonii. Nauchno-teoreticheskii zhurnal Akademii nauk Estonii/Eesti teaduste Akadeemia toimetised. Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Sciences 39/2, 1990; Dietrich A. LOEBER, *Konferenz über die deutsch-sowjetischen Verträge von 1939 in Tallinn/Reval*, Osteuropa 39/11–12, 1989, pp. 1128–1130.

98 E. BENZ, *50 Jahre danach*, p. 11; Egil LEVITS, *Lettland unter der Sowjetherrschaft und auf dem Wege zur Unabhängigkeit*, in: Die baltischen Nationen - Estland, Lettland, Litauen, ed. Boris Meissner, Köln 1991, p. 175; *Deklaration über die Souveränität Lettlands*, Baltica 3, 1989, p. 6.

99 M. BUTENSCHÖN, *Estland*, p. 61; cf. Ilze CIPULE, *O iuridicheskoi sile i politicheskikh posledstviakh pakta Gitlera-Stalina*, Atmoda 25, 19 June 1989, p. 2.

100 A. DRIZULIS, *Pamiatnaia zapiska*, p. 176; Inesis FELDMANIS – Ajvar STRANGA – Martinsh VIRSIS, *Kitaiskaia stena i negodiai Gaus*, Atmoda 32, 31 July 1989, p. 4; Sovetskaia Litva, 196, 25 August 1989; *K 50-letiiu pakta Molotova-Ribbentropa*, in: Soglasie. Izdanie litovskogo dvizheniia za perestroiku. Prilozhenie k „Vozrozhdeniiu“ 10, 10 July 1989, p. 1; Vladimir ABARINOV, *V kuluarakh dvortsa iustitsii*, Raduga 8, 1989; cf. J. LIPINSKY, *Das geheime Zusatzprotokoll*, pp. 457–465 with a lot more hints on contemporary Baltic publications.

101 Cf. the work of the Commission: Keiji SATO, *Die Molotow-Ribbentrop-Kommission 1989 und die Souveränitätsansprüche post-sowjetischer secessionistischer Territorien*, in: Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939, pp. 199–215; H. LINDPERE, *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*.

102 Ibidem, pp. 23–24, 27–31. Speaks of “the Falinists” who had tried to obstruct the Commission’s work or maintain Soviet interpretations of history.

103 Valentin FALIN, *Politische Erinnerungen*, München 1993, pp. 444–445; B. CHAVKIN, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 178; H. LINDPERE, *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 39.

ssion with his interview on 18 August.<sup>104</sup> The Stalinist-Soviet version of “voluntary accession” was to continue; articles published by Falin in the press across the Soviet Union reinforced this impression.<sup>105</sup> The resolute Baltic view—to regard the elections of 1940 as well as the protocol as illegal and thus call the events “annexation”—had no majority in spite of the close cooperation between Baltic and reformist Russian delegates. Gorbachev tolerated Baltic reformist ideas as long as they served his perestroika and remained clearly loyal to the Unitary State. But for too long he supported the further concealment of important facts, denied too persistently the existence of the protocol,<sup>106</sup> held on too tenaciously and stubbornly to doubts, was consistently too hesitant and too late, and rejected the recognition of the violation of international law of the secret documents, so that he was still able to regard the inclusion in the Soviet Union as lawful and not to entail any legal consequences arising from the condemnation of the imperialist policies of Stalin. To the Baltics, this seemed to prove only that he also regarded the protocol as real basis of annexation.

In the Baltics, therefore, on 22 August the local press offered a forum to those Commission deputies who in protest against Moscow’s delaying tactics published their own conclusions and demanded the cancellation of the entire treaty. Unlike the Soviet one, the Lithuanian Commission of the Supreme Soviet also published on time its final report on the same day, which included the secret follow-up documents and their historical and legal implications such as compensation claims.<sup>107</sup> The Supreme Soviet questioned its own legitimacy with the approval of this decision. It followed “a widely held view in the Baltics”,<sup>108</sup> that expected the removal of the consequences of the agreements, above all, “by the initiative of the directly responsible states or their successors”.

Lastly, the “Baltic Way” was most impressive and effective in the media. On 23 August 1989 it gathered between 1.2 and 2 million (i.e. one in four) Balts, fifty years after the signing of the secret additional protocol, in an impressive and historically unprece-

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104 A. JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe*, p. 498; Jutta SCHERRER, *Der Molotow-Ribbentrop-Pakt – (k)ein Thema der russischen Öffentlichkeit und Schule?*, in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939*, p. 172.

105 H. LINDPERE, *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 40.

106 B. CHAVKIN, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 182; A. JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe*, p. 497: criticized Gorbachev’s denial, who in fact knew the truth.

107 *Zakliuchenie komissii Verkhovnogo Soveta Litovskoi SSR po izucheniiu germano-sovetskikh dogovorov 1939 goda i ikh posledstviu*, in: *Sobytiia i vremia. Zhurnal Tsentral’nogo komiteta kommunisticheskoi partii Litvy* 17, 1989, p. 1; V. Stanley VARDYS, *Litauen: Sowjetrepublik mit Widerwillen. Die Entwicklung seit 1940*, in: *Die baltischen Nationen. Estland-Lettland-Litauen*, ed. Boris Meissner, Köln 1990, p. 183.

108 E. BENZ, *50 Jahre danach*, p. 12.

dented<sup>109</sup> human chain. More than 650 kilometers from Tallinn through Riga to Vilnius, it peacefully protested against Soviet domination but for autonomy and independence. This huge and symbolic protest stood for disclosure, condemnation and now also compensation for the protocol and its consequences.<sup>110</sup> Groups from Georgia and Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, Poland and Russia also reinforced the chain. It became clear to the world that the Cold War would not really end without a solution to the Baltic question. The Baltic Council declared, only the annulment of the protocols will liberate the last colonies in Europe from the times of Hitler and Stalin.<sup>111</sup>

But again the Western reaction was disappointing. The West was prepared to set aside the right to self-determination of the Baltics to avoid endangering Gorbachev's position within the USSR.<sup>112</sup> This reluctance was convenient for leading representatives of the Russian minority (*Interfront*) which repeated Stalinist arguments on 23 August in Tallinn. On 26 August, the Moscow Central Committee supported it, stressed the peaceful human chain was a threat to peace, labelled participants (with the tacit Western approval) as 'separatists', via state-controlled television threatened by the gruff statement "about the situation in the republics of the Soviet Baltic"<sup>113</sup>, which sharply condemned the Lithuanian Commission report of 22 August and the "Baltic Way" and accused the Balts—in a consistent misrepresentation—of distorting history. Hence Gorbachev responded to the growing public disintegration of the Soviet Union by returning to an authoritarian leadership: a more exposed but ultimately helpless consequence. He intended to hold onto the survival of the Soviet Union and with his policies encouraged precisely the Baltic pursuit of its collapse; the Central Committee statement "put out the last spark of hope that a reconciliation with Moscow was possible."<sup>114</sup> The Moscow party headquarters also plunged their comrades in the Baltics into a life-threatening conflict between preservation of trust at Soviet Union level and the need to strive for reconciliation in dealing with the increasingly influential popular fronts.<sup>115</sup>

109 The "Baltic Way" therefore was included in the UNESCO World Heritage Documentary "Memory of the World" in 2009; cf. K. BRÜGGEMANN, *Estland und das Ende*, p. 305.

110 John HIDDEN – Patrick SALMON, *The Baltic nations and Europe. Estonia, Latvia und Lithuania in the Twentieth century*, London 1991, p. 154.

111 V. BARTUSEVICHUS, *Entwicklungen*, p. 88.

112 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *One day we will*, pp. 222, 236–237; cf. Allen LYNCH, *On the aggressive nature of the non-aggression pact*, Nationalities papers 17/2, 1989, p. 165: lasting academic interest.

113 Cf. Sergei V. VOLKOV – Iurii V. EMEL'IANOV, *Do i posle sekretnych protokolov*, Moskva 1990, pp. 11–14; E. BENZ, *50 Jahre danach*, pp. 30–31; A. S. CHERNIAEV, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym. Po dnevnikovym zapisiam* Moskva 1993, p. 251; Michail GORBATSCHOW, *Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1995, p. 498.

114 M. LAAR, *Nationales Erwachen*, p. 201.

115 R. J. MISIUNAS, *The Baltic States*, p. 328; J. HIDDEN, *The Baltic Nations*, pp. 155; Leonid MLETSCHEIN, *Fremde. Die erste Sitzung des Obersten Sowjets in Vilnius*, Neue Zeit 12 (19–25 March) 1990, p. 33.



Because of the silence of the Baltic Communists, the Baltic Council as alliance of all popular fronts reacted on 31 August to the threatening accusations from Moscow, behind which it recognized a perpetuation of the aggression of 1939. Its “call to the people of the Soviet Union”<sup>116</sup> sharply criticized the attempts to justify the annexation drawn in the protocol because of security interests. The Baltic commissions quickly and publicly confirmed this view that the three parliaments approved afterwards.<sup>117</sup> The Estonians abstained already from forwarding the report to the Moscow parliament, demanding it to be sent only to its own standing commission. They seemed no longer willing to wait for the Union’s decisions and wanted to carry out the political, legal and legislative consequences themselves. Gradually the MRP of 1939 became a less pressing issue in comparison to military occupation and annexation in 1940 and moved into the background.

In the Baltics academic literature and reference work rapidly took up the new findings. Editions of collected sources<sup>118</sup>, no longer censored, were printed. Slowly, memoirs and publications were added to this, which drew on Baltic language archives.<sup>119</sup> The return of foreign political archives from Moscow made this process easier. In Moscow itself, although on 20 September the Politburo had approved the resolution ‘On raising the level of information regarding the events of the years 1939-1941’, the key documents were denied even to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, such as to obtain transcripts of the German-Soviet negotiations in 1939.<sup>120</sup> That also left the source basis of the Commission as inadequate. It was also clear to Iakovlev that the Congress would not approve any resolution that accused the Soviet Union unilaterally or even condemned it. His very diplomatically formulated report didn’t find a sufficient majority on 23 December. Finally, with the second attempt a day later, the Congress approved the resolution—due to additional original documents and against considerable

116 V. BARTUSEVICHIUS, *Entwicklungen*, pp. 90–91; E. BENZ, *50 Jahre danach*, pp. 31–34.

117 Henn-Jüri UIBOPUU, *Die Verfassungs- und Rechtsentwicklung der baltischen Staaten 1988–1990*, Berichte d. Bundesinstituts f. ostwiss. u. internat. Studien 61, 1990, p. 32; Arno KEERNA – Iu. LEPP – Heiki LINDPERE – Lennart MERI, (eds.), *1940 god v Estonii. Dokumenty i materialy*, Tallinn 1989, pp. 8–23; *Zakluchenie komissii verkhovnogo soveta Litovskoi SSR po izucheniiu germano-sovetskikh dogovorov 1939 goda i ikh posledstviu*, Sovetskaia Litva 17, 27 September 1989.

118 A. KEERNA, *1940 god; Suokalbis. 1939–1941 metų dokumentai apie Stalino ir Hitlerio nouspredį likviduoti Lietuvą ir kitas suverenias vastybes*, Vilnius 1989; Iurii FEL’SHTINSKII (ed.), *SSSR-Germaniia 1939. Dokumenty i materialy o sovetsko-germanskikh otnosheniakh v aprele-sentiabre 1939g*, Vilnius 1989.

119 Kjullo ARJAKAS – Kheino ARUMIAE (Heino ARUMÄE) – Rein KHELME (Rein HELME) (eds.), *Ot pakta Molotova-Ribbentropa do dogovora o bazakh. Dokumenty i materialy*, Tallinn 1990; *Novyi vzgliad*, ed. Alfonsas Ej dintas; R. ZHIAPKAITE, *Evropa*, pp. 93–94; Vitautas KANCIAVICHIUS, *1939 god. Dokumental’nye materialy o zakliuchenii dogovora o vzaimopomoshchi mezhdru SSSR i Litvoi*, in: *Novyi vzgliad*, ed. Alfonsas Ej dintas, pp. 97–104.

120 M. PROZUMENSHCHIKOV, *The Revolutions*, pp. 515–517 criticizes the delayed opening of archives.

emotional and politicized resistance. It was a pioneering step for Soviet historiography and politics on the arduous path to a truthful interpretation of history but remained once again well behind the Baltic discussions. Although the resolution admitted the existence of the protocol, it was not allowed to find the originals. It condemned the international law content, but ignored the violation of international law of the protocol's consequences and the legitimacy of the annexation. It avoided possible claims of compensation.<sup>121</sup> The hope of placing the legitimacy of the incorporation by the Soviet Union officially in doubt had not been fulfilled. The Baltics stood before a long road, endangered by Moscow, before being allowed to exercise their self-determination freely. But at least a 'mental revolution'<sup>122</sup> had succeeded which, nonetheless, ruled out a return to earlier stagnation without massive renewed repression. The Balts considered the resolution a first successful step towards the restoration of their sovereignty,<sup>123</sup> and even as the "biggest victory for Estonian diplomacy since World War II"<sup>124</sup>. "The responsibility to have been involved in the condemnation of the pact in the Congress of People's Deputies, is now considered one of the most important Estonian contributions to the collapse of the USSR"<sup>125</sup>, because Moldova, Georgia and Armenia carefully looked at this Baltic success in order to follow the Baltic way out of the Union.<sup>126</sup>

### Since 1990: never-ending discussion

The following Baltic declarations of independence<sup>127</sup> returned in 1990 once again to the controversial past, by declaring the secret documents illegal. The Lithuanians formulated this most sharply, as they had to take into consideration only a comparatively small Russian minority in the country. Their Supreme Soviet decided on 7 February 'On the agreements of 1939 between the German Reich and the Soviet Union and the liquidation of its consequences for Lithuania' and suggested to Moscow, 'to begin bilateral negotiations for the restoration of independence of the Lithuanian state'. Estonians strove for internationalization. On 23 February their Supreme Soviet asked the international conference on the issue of the reunification of Germany to receive Estonians,

121 H.-J. UIBOPUU, *Die Verfassungs- und Rechtsentwicklung*, pp. 33; Boris MEISSNER, *Die staatliche Kontinuität, völkerrechtliche Stellung und außenpolitische Lage der baltischen Länder*, in: *Die baltischen Nationen*, ed. idem, p. 293; Cf. as a positive evaluation of the resolution: A. LIEVEN, *The Baltic revolution*, p. 222; J. SCHERRER, *Der Molotow-Ribbentrop-Pakt*, p. 172.

122 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *One day we will*, p. 222.

123 Cf. also A. JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe*, p. 501; K. SATO, *Die Molotow-Ribbentrop-Kommission*, p. 199: the Commission was an "important milestone in the collapse of the Soviet Union".

124 H. LINDPERE, *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, p. 8.

125 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *Estland und das Ende*, p. 303.

126 P. KOLSTØ, *National Integration*, pp. 264–266: reasons for the different development in Moldova.

127 E. BENZ, *50 Jahre danach*, pp. 16, 53–54, 56–57, 59; *Postanovlenie*, *Sovetskaia Litva* 33, 9 February 1990, p. 1.

“as participants of the conference as a state, directly affected by the aggression in 1939”<sup>128</sup>. The Letts were the most cautious. This escalating struggle for the withdrawal from the Soviet Union once again resorted to the secret protocols<sup>129</sup> and especially in retrospect was stylized as a founding myth of independence. Gorbachev was now on the alert. His Union was in danger. He rejected the unilateral declarations of independence. The Soviet reaction on 6 March was negative and remained a captive of long outdated historical falsehoods. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union then decided unanimously—that is, also with the consent of Gorbachev, Eduard A. Shevardnadze and Iakovlev—for “urgent actions of resistance against the secession of Lithuania from the USSR”<sup>130</sup>. It rejected the Baltic reassessment of the 1939 treaties and their consequences. The protocol was strictly separated<sup>131</sup> from the subsequent events or the documents<sup>132</sup>, such as the following ultimatums<sup>133</sup> were even stylized as a protective measure by Stalin for the Baltic. The Central Committee could hold on the current argument of many Soviet historians. After decades of silence or denial, and after falsified or imperfect representations in the past, it was difficult to make an open confession of the truth. When the party-addicted patriotic communist academics nostalgically transfigured the Soviet empire, they emphasized the close historical<sup>134</sup> or current bond<sup>135</sup> between the Baltics and Russia. The target was to avoid

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128 E. BENZ, *50 Jahre danach*, pp. 55–56.

129 *Documents pertaining to relations between the Republic of Lithuania and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (s.l., s.a.), p. 11; Egil LEVITS, *Die staatlichen Akte Estlands, Lettlands und Litauens über die Wiederherstellung der Unabhängigkeit*, *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums* 38, 1991, p. 168; *Deklaration des Obersten Rats der SSR Lettland über die Wiederherstellung der Unabhängigkeit der Republik Lettland*, in: *Das Ende des Sowjetkolonialismus. Der baltische Weg*, ed. Andrejs Urdze, Reinbek 1991, p. 147.

130 A. D. CHERNEV (ed.), *Kak protivodeistvovali vykhodu Litvy iz SSSR*, *Istoricheskii Arkhiv. Nauchno-publikatorskii zhurnal* 1, 1992, p. 4.

131 *Litauen. Der Weg*, p. 89; Lew BESYMENSKI, *Nach dem Pakt*, *Neue Zeit* 34, 22–28 August 1989, p. 33; Valentin FALIN, *Mit einem Federstrich läßt sich nichts ändern*, *Sowjetunion heute* 35/7, 1990, p. 18; I. V. EMEL'IANOV, *Bol'shaia igra*, p. 105; Aleksandr S. ORLOV, *SSSR i Pribaltika 1939–1940*, *Istorija SSSR* 4, 1990, p. 44; Alexander JAKOWLEW, *Offener Schluß. Ein Reformier zieht Bilanz*, Leipzig – Weimar 1992, p. 34.

132 German L. ROZANOV, *Stalin – Gitler. Dokumental'nyi ocherk sovetsko-germanskikh diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii 1939–1941gg.*, Moskau 1991, p. 127.

133 Andrej N. MERCALOV, *Der 22. Juni 1941: Anmerkungen eines sowjetischen Historikers*, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 24/91, 7. Juni 1991, p. 29; *Nachalo voiny i Sovetskii Soюз. 1939–1941gg. Mezhdunarodnaia nauchnaia konferentsiia v Institute vseobshchei istorii RAN*, *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* 4, 1995, p. 93 (A. S. Orlov).

134 I. V. EMEL'IANOV, *Bol'shaia igra*, pp. 16–47.

135 Pavel GUTIONTOV, *Bez al'ternativy*, *Izvestiia* 241, 28 August 1989, p. 1; A. JAKOWLEW, *Offener Schluß*, p. 148.

a discussion on the removal of the consequences of the protocol.<sup>136</sup> Also Gorbachev, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of USSR was a captive of this ideology. He threatened that some border issues related to the protocol would give rise to (Belarusian) territorial claims<sup>137</sup> to Lithuania and that way ‘warned’ his Lithuanian colleague Brazauskas of ‘anti-Soviet actions’. Thus he burdened the Soviet-Lithuanian negotiations and strained the formation of a unified Baltic position since Vilnius, unlike Riga and Tallinn, did not stand for a status quo ante pact policy because of territorial self-interest. Hence, on 11 March, and by an absolute majority vote on the declaration of independence, *Sąjūdis* used the Supreme Soviet the ‘body of the occupying power’—unlike later the Popular Fronts in Estonia and Latvia—to restore the independent Lithuanian state along the boundaries of the Lithuanian SSR and thereby to invoke the constitution of Lithuania from 1938. But seen legal-politically the Supreme Soviet was imposed by the Kremlin and after the cancellation of the protocol—proving in Baltic eyes the illegality of the Soviet annexation—it lost its legitimacy<sup>138</sup>. Gorbachev reacted to the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence by imposing an economic blockade. The real political power was still in the Kremlin and Gorbachev sped up the negotiations for the new Union’s treaty to make constitutional changes which would make it legally impossible to withdraw from the Soviet Union.<sup>139</sup> Western, especially the German diplomacy, also urged Vilnius to suspend its declaration, fearing the weakening of Gorbachev’s position and thus risking German reunification.<sup>140</sup>

The Baltic neighbors followed the Lithuanian’s path to recover their state sovereignty (Estonia on 30 March, and Latvia on 4 May). If Gorbachev had maneuvered tactically to comply with the Baltic request on acknowledging the protocol and to influence the first freely elected parliament to “voluntarily” remain in the Union, he failed. Because of Moscow’s pressure the Lithuanian People’s Assembly voted immediately for indepen-

136 Cf. Romuald J. MISIUNAS, *Soviet historiography on World War II and the Baltic states*, in: *The Baltic States in Peace and War, 1917–1945*, ed. V. Stanley Vardys – Romuald J. Misiunas, Pennsylvania 1978, pp. 178, 181–182; I. V. EMEL’IANOV, *Bol’shaia igra*, p. 14.

137 Cf. I. V. EMEL’IANOV, *Bol’shaia igra*, pp. 11, 13–14, 115, 260–261; K. GERNER, *The Baltic States*, pp. 63, 189 footnote 26; K. SATO, *Die Molotow-Ribbentrop-Kommission*, p. 213; cf. Andrew WILSON, *Belarus: The last dictatorship in Europe*, New Haven 2011, pp. 105–106: for Belarussian “pressure” in 1939.

138 Anatol LIEVEN, *The Baltic revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the path to independence*, New Haven 1994, pp. 79, 167.

139 K. BRÜGGEMANN, *One day we will*, pp. 234.

140 Alexander von PLATO, *Opposition movements and big politics in the reunification of Germany*, in: *The Revolutions of 1989*, p. 317; Susanne NIES, *Lettland zwischen Nationalismus und Pragmatismus. Die lettische nationale Bewegung und der lettische Nationalismus 1986–96*, in: *Nationalismus im spät- und postkommunistischen Europa*, p. 209.

dence. They announced a “call to the peoples of the USSR”<sup>141</sup> that Lithuania had restored its statehood, after the secret German-Soviet agreements had incorporated it as a victim of the Soviet aggression in 1940. This almost identical, historically based, argument still united politicians in the Baltics and led to the joint call on Gorbachev on 12 May to open negotiations on the definitive independence to right the injustices of 1939 and 1940.<sup>142</sup> This unity was sorely needed, because the Soviet state and the party leadership were making threats of armed intervention. Specifically, the Lithuanians had to keep working to receive an intrinsic guarantee from Warsaw to prevent any revisionist joint Polish-German border demands.<sup>143</sup> Up to this point, the Soviet communist occupation justified in the secret protocols had only been ended on paper. A common anniversary recalled this, once again.<sup>144</sup> The Western governments, however, were still more interested in Soviet imperial stability than in diplomatic recognition of Baltic independence. In addition, the forthcoming signing of the Moscow Two Plus Four Treaty on 12 September and the initialling of the Soviet-German Master Agreement summoned fears of a further agreement in the tradition of the controversial pact. The Baltic Council was afraid that decisions would be made over the heads of the Balts and possibly commit to a Soviet Baltic status quo by recognizing the Soviet borders indefinitely.<sup>145</sup> On January 1991, violent Soviet actions further intimidated the Baltic in Vilnius and Riga in the shadow of the Gulf War. However, they discredited the Kremlin by intensive international press coverage. But only the failed Moscow coup on 19-21 August 1991 finally allowed the secession to be internationally recognized. As late but decisive consequence of many years of effort to cancel the secret protocols on 24 August 1991, Boris Yeltsin’s Russia recognized the sovereignty of the former “Union Republics”. This started an international “wave of acknowledgement” until finally and formally the Soviet Union recognized Baltic independence on 6 September. Iakovlev had previously been commissioned by Gorbachev after the coup to visit George Bush Sr. in the United States to warn him against separatism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. But Bush had assured him that the United States supported the integrity of the Union, except the Baltic states.<sup>146</sup>

In the following years parliaments and historians have continued to build the fair historical representation of the years 1939-40. Discussions, and sometimes tangible disputes, between the Baltic states and Russia (as the successor of the USSR) on the

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141 V. BARTUSEVICHUS, *Entwicklungen*, p. 97.

142 *Kommunike o vstreche predsedatelei Verkhovnykh Sovetov Latvskoi, Litovskoi i Estonskoi Respublik*, Raduga 8, 1990, pp. 1–2.

143 Stephen R. BURANT, *Polish-Lithuanian relations: past, present, and future*, Problems of Communism 40, 1991, p. 83.

144 M. BUTENSCHÖN, *Estland*, pp. 327.

145 J. HIDDEN, *The Baltic nations*, p. 187.

146 A. JAKOWLEW, *Die Abgründe*, p. 683.

common history still continue. Russian historians deny increasingly since 1995, out of loyalty to the state-imposed view of history—whose main symbol of national identification is victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War’—any link between the pact and the incorporation of the Baltic states, which was made only on the basis of national security.<sup>147</sup> The Internet site of the Russian Communist Party continues to doubt the existence of the secret protocols<sup>148</sup>; on 19 April 2005 Communist Party leader Gennadii Zjuganov in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* referred to the Baltic as ‘inalienable part of historical Russia.’<sup>149</sup> The presentation in school textbooks as a seismograph for the state chosen formative view of history for future generations tends back to Soviet-Stalinist interpretations<sup>150</sup> and therefore presents the opposite of the Baltic view.<sup>151</sup> Also, thus far an official Russian apology for occupation and annexation remains to be made, probably out of fear of facing<sup>152</sup> damage claims in the billions.<sup>153</sup> This “historical amnesia” is straining Baltic-Russian relations, and without the recognition of historical facts bilateral trust cannot grow.<sup>154</sup>

147 David MENDELOFF, *The Causes and Consequences of Historical Amnesia: the Annexation of the Baltic States in Post-Soviet Russian Popular History and Political Memory, Draft 2.0*, März 1999, p. 1: official position of the Russian foreign ministry in 1998; Oleg Viktorovich VISHLEV, *Nakanune 22 iunija 1941 goda. Dokumental'nye ocherki*, Moskva 2001, p. 15; Jürgen ZARUSKY, 'Hitler bedeutet Krieg'. *Der deutsche Weg zum Hitler-Stalin-Pakt*, Osteuropa 59/7–8, 2009, p. 98; Stefan TROEBST, *Der 23. August 1939. Ein europäischer Lieu de mémoire?*, Osteuropa 59/7–8, 2009, p. 254.

148 Tatjana TIMOFEEVA, *Ob gut, ob schlecht, das ist Geschichte! Russlands Umgang mit dem Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pakt*, Osteuropa 59/7–8, 2009, p. 260; Lev GUDKOV, *Die Fesseln des Sieges. Rußlands Identität aus der Erinnerung an den Krieg*, Osteuropa 55/4–6, 2005, p.71.

149 W. von SCHELIHA, *Der Pakt*, p. 179.

150 Kristine BEKERE – Edgars ENGĪZERS – Vilius IVANAUSKAS – Igor KOPÖTIN, *Die sanfte Geschichtspolitik Russlands. Anmerkungen zu einer internationalen Sommerschule in Zvenigorod 2013*, Forschungen zur Baltischen Geschichte 9, 2014, p. 289; J. SCHERRER, *Der Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pakt*, pp. 164–172; E. ZUBKOVA, *Sowjetische Vergangenheit*, pp. 105–108; cf. Elena TEMPER, *Der 17. September 1939. Tag der Wiedervereinigung des belarussischen Volkes? Historiographie und Geschichtspolitik*, in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939*, pp. 239–256: concerning similar developments in Belarus.

151 Rafał WNUK, *Inszenierte Revolution. Sowjetherrschaft in Polen und dem Baltikum 1939–1941*, Osteuropa 63/5–6, 2013, p. 151; A. BUBNYS, *Die Entdeckung*, pp. 334–338: on Lithuanian textbooks; Maria GOLUBEVA, *Different History, Different Citizenship? Competing Narratives and Diverging Civil Enculturation in Majority and Minority Schools in Estonia and Latvia*, in: *Memory and Pluralism*, ed. Eva-Clarita Pettai, pp. 44–47: for communicating (still rather Soviet) knowledge of the Russian population in Latvia through schools.

152 T. TIMOFEEVA, *Ob gut*, pp. 261–262; Katja WEZEL, *Lettland und der 23. August 1939: vom ‚weißen Fleck‘ der sowjet. Geschichtsschreibung zum transnationalen Gedenktag?*, in: *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939*, pp. 314–318.

153 E. ZUBKOVA, *Sowjetische Vergangenheit*, p. 103.

154 D. MENDELOFF, *The Causes*, pp. 37, 49; Alfred Erich SENN, *Problems of Baltic Historiography, 1939–41*, in: *Northern European Overture to War, 1939–1941*, eds. Michael H. Clemmensen – Marcus S. Faulkner, Leiden – Boston 2013, pp. 493–499; Tomas KAVALIAUSKAS, *Transformations in Central Europe between 1989 and 2012. Geopolitical, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Shifts*, Lanham – Boulder 2014, pp. 139–154.



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### **Summary**

*The explosiveness of the debate on the German-Soviet secret treaties resulted in retrospect from the growing striving for Baltic autonomy since 1985. While general Soviet policies tried to keep the minorities within the Russian dominated Soviet state by historical arguments the Balts used these arguments for their local, regional and soon national struggle to leave the Union. Starting from the 1980s, a very specific Baltic interplay between state politics and national minorities changed imperial into national realities.*

*Latvians went ahead with the partial publication of the protocol, Estonians with the full publication and its academic and legal analysis, while the Lithuanians finally acted with political condemnation and pushed for legal cancellation. Although Latvians led this protest in 1987, they handed over the baton from August 1988 to February 1989 to the Estonians, who argued clearly legally, before the Lithuanians took the baton recalling ancient traditions; because only they had resisted the Soviet system for so long after 1945 and, with the support of the Catholic Church, remained much stronger than their Protestant neighbours in an increasingly active opposition to Moscow starting from the 1970s. At the beginning of perestroika, however, Lithuanians in comparison to Latvians and Estonians fell back in reevaluating the past, perhaps due to a lack of support from exiles and a lack of leaders knowing (western) languages. Only in the course of 1989 they were able to win back the leading role and thereby attracted the largest share of Soviet disapp-*

*roval. At the same time in Moscow a Soviet patriotic nostalgia already developed before historiography completely freed itself from traditional guidelines or subjected itself to critical evaluation.*

*In this way communist historiographical arguments remained virulent; they are currently getting louder in Putin's Russia, as distortion and concealment of historical facts. They present unpleasant facts as defamation and repeat Stalinist explanations. The detailed analysis of the Baltic historical struggle against Soviet historiography proves how difficult it is to change historical views. It can be used as an example to cope successfully with totalitarian heritage. But it proves as well, that coping in one region at a favourable time does not mean coping once and for ever. Russian historiography is on its way back to Soviet times. It is regaining old Soviet interpretations. Russia remains the most potential neighbour of the Balts; large Russian minorities still live in the Baltic countries. Historical discussions will go on. They will influence actual policies and will influence collective memory. The totalitarian Soviet system was and Putin's system still is incapable of a strong historical coup for a real free historiography. However, in the Baltic States this succeeded, at least in relation to the Soviet view of the shared past. But looking back it was not a predictable result. Historical argumentation paved the way to freedom, but only the failed Moscow coup, which precipitated the disaster of Gorbachev's Soviet Union and destroyed Communist leadership, together with Yeltsin's victory in Russia secured independence. Particularly in the Baltic States, the MRP claims a central place in the culture of memory to this day which is why the introduction of 23 August as anti-totalitarian European Day, was demanded, accepted and welcomed in 2008 against not only Russian opposition and criticism.*