

Rīga Historical Walk

commemorating the victims of Soviet and
Nazi occupations

21 August 2025



LATVIJAS
OKUPĀCIJAS
MUZEJS



The Aftermath of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: Riga Walk Locations

1 Schwarzhäupterhaus (Rātslaukums 7). Guild hall for Blackheads, originally unmarried Riga merchants since the 14th century. Closed with the Baltic German emigration of 1939, damaged by shelling in June 1941, demolished in 1948. Rebuilt in 1999.

2 Synagogue Peitav Shul (Peitavas iela 6/8). From June 4-8, 1941, the first week of German occupation, most synagogues in Riga were burned. The Peitav Shul was spared from fear of spreading fire in the old town, but the Nazis looted its treasures and used the building as a warehouse.

3 Stacijas laukums [Railway Station Square]. On June 17, 1940, the first day of the Soviet occupation, communist agents instigated a violent riot against local police. Soviet military officials announced that they would keep order if Latvian police could not.

4 Former Rīga police prefecture (Aspāzijas bulvāris & Radio iela) On July 1, 1941, when German forces stormed Rīga, *Einsatzgruppe A* commander Walter Stahlecker came here and met Viktors Arājs, whom he named as head of an *Einsatzkommando* and who became known as the foremost local collaborator in Holocaust crimes in Latvia.

5 Former Radio and telegraph office (Kr. Barona iela & Radio iela). On June 17, 1940, Soviet forces seized the building and forbade any radio broadcasts not approved by them.

6 Riga Latvian Society (Merķeļa iela 13). One of the oldest Latvian social organizations, founded in 1868 during the national awakening. Liquidated on July 5, 1940, by decree of the newly installed pro-Moscow government. On July 18 the Society building was handed over to the Red Army, which used it as the Baltic Military District officers' club.

7 Embassy of Germany (Raina bulvāris 13). The embassy organized the Baltic German emigration, and here on June 21, 1940, the Soviet and German envoys drank a toast to Soviet-German friendship.

8 Supreme Court Building (Brīvības bulvaris 10). The Latvian Justice Ministry became the seat of *Reichskommissar für das Ostland* Hinrich Lohse in July 1941.

9 Former Interior Ministry (Raina bulvāris 6). The *Sicherheitspolizei* and SD, commanded by Rudolf Lange, had its headquarters here beginning in July 1941.

10 Kalpaka iela 6. Headquarters of *Ostland Generalkommissar* for Latvia Otto-Heinrich Drechsler, who led the creation of the Riga Ghetto in Autumn 1941.

11 Embassy of Russia (Ukrainas neatkarības iela 2). Then the USSR Embassy. Here Stalin's deputy Andrey Vyshinsky worked to carry out the occupation after his arrival on June 18, 1940. Local collaborators were recruited and the Latvian Communist Party met and worked here.

12 Foreign Ministry (Valdemāra iela 3). Here Ulmanis' cabinet of ministers met to take decisions including acceding to the Soviet ultimatums of October 5, 1939; June 16, 1940; and June 19, 1940.

13 National Theater (Kronvalda bulvāris 2). Site of the original 1918 declaration of Latvian independence, the newly, fraudulently elected "People's Saeima" first convened here on July 21, 1940, to petition to join the USSR.

14 Parliament (Saeima) building (Jēkaba iela 11). Beginning in autumn 1941, the seat of SS Leader for Ostland Friedrich Jeckeln, whose first major action was to organize and execute the mass murder of Riga's Jews at Rumbula on November 30 and December 8.

15 Rīga Castle (Pils laukums 3). Official residence of Kārlis Ulmanis as President of Latvia. Following the Soviet occupation of June 17, 1940, Ulmanis was guarded as a virtual prisoner here until his deportation on July 22.

16 Doma laukums 5. Office of the *Rigasche Rundschau*, the most prominent and politically liberal Baltic German newspaper since 1867, whose final issue came on December 13, 1939, as most of its readers had emigrated to Germany.

17 Large Guild Hall (Amatu iela 6). In a speech here on October 12, 1939, President Ulmanis praised the October 5 pact allowing Red Army bases in Latvia, denied that the ensuing exodus of Baltic Germans was related to it, and vowed to crack down on those spreading rumors that Latvia's independence was threatened.

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Timeline: The Aftermath of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in Latvia
(numbered map landmarks circled ①)

Prelude

- August 23, 1939** Nazi Germany and the USSR sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. A secret protocol provides for each side's zone of influence, with the Baltic States in the Soviet zone.
- September 3** Nazi Germany attacks Poland, followed by the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland on September 17th.
- September 21** Latvia suspends diplomatic relations with Poland on the basis that its government is no longer on Polish territory.
- October 5** Latvian Foreign Minister Vilhelms Munters accedes to Soviet demands on instruction from Latvia's Cabinet of Ministers, signing the Soviet-Latvian Mutual Assistance Treaty, including permission to allow Soviet military bases in Latvia.
- October 6** Adolf Hitler, in a Reichstag speech, invites Baltic Germans to "return home to the Reich".
- ①⑦ October 12** Latvian President Kārlis Ulmanis declares in a speech at the Large Guild Hall that the ethnic German exodus is unrelated to the treaty with the USSR, and vows to crack down on those spreading rumors that the treaty threatens Latvia's independence.
- October 29** The first Soviet military forces enter Latvia and begin establishing bases. Soviet demands to allow expanded facilities and military forces continue right up until the occupation.
- October 30** Latvia concludes an agreement with Nazi Germany on transfer of ethnic German Latvian citizens to Germany. President Ulmanis declares all German schools and organizations are to be closed within two weeks.
- November 27** Foreign Minister Munters publishes a newspaper article describing Finland's refusal of Soviet demands as unrealistic and unjustified. Following the Soviet invasion of Finland, Latvia abstains from the League of Nations vote to expel the USSR.
- ①⑥ December 13** Closing of the *Rigasche Rundschau*, the leading Baltic German newspaper since 1867.
- March 10, 1940** USSR ambassador Zotov, transferred from Latvia to Finland, sends a memo to Moscow claiming the Latvian ruling elite is preparing an anti-Soviet military entente with Sweden.
- Early June 1940** Latvian communists are summoned to Moscow to be part of a Soviet Latvian provisional government (similar to Kuusinen's, intended for Finland) in the event that the upcoming ultimatum is refused. Soviet security forces are prepared to round up the armies of the Baltic countries and imprison them in the same labor camps which previously held recently murdered Polish Army officers. The camps are set up to hold between 56,000 and 70,000 prisoners of war, including police and members of the home guard (*Aizsargi*).
- June 15** Soviet forces attack the Latvian border post at Mašlenki, killing border guards and abducting local inhabitants to Russia. This is the date on which the Red Army occupies all of Lithuania, but the exact reason for the attack is still unknown.

Occupation

- ⑫ June 16** A Soviet ultimatum demands the Latvian cabinet resign and allow unlimited numbers of Red Army troops to enter the country. The Latvian government accepts without protest.
- ③, ⑤ June 17** Soviet armed forces occupy all of Latvia. NKVD personnel already in Latvia instigate a riot near the Riga railway station. Red Army troops take over the central radio and telegraph station, forbidding any broadcasts not submitted for approval in advance. President Ulmanis announces that Soviet troops should be welcomed as allies.

- June 18** Andrey Vyshinsky, prosecutor of Stalin's 1937-1938 show trials, presents himself to President Ulmanis as Soviet special envoy.
- ⑮ June 19** Vyshinsky visits Ulmanis where he is confined at the Rīga Castle to deliver Moscow's list of the new members of the cabinet of the Latvian government.
- ⑪ June 20** A new government obedient to Moscow is formed, led by Augusts Kirchenšteins. A demonstration crowd organized to celebrate this marches to the Soviet embassy where Vyshinsky addresses them.
- ⑦ June 21** German ambassador Von Kotze meets Soviet envoy Derevyansky, who explains Soviet actions as a response to a military alliance of the Baltic States threatening the USSR and Germany. The two drink a toast to German-Soviet friendship.
- ⑪ June 22** The hitherto illegal Latvian Communist Party (LKP) begins functioning in the Soviet embassy building.
- ⑥ July 5** The Riga Latvian Society, one of the oldest Latvian organizations, is closed by decree of the new puppet government. On July 18, the society's building and treasury are given to the Red Army, which installs the Baltic Military District officers' club there.
- July 5** New Saeima (parliamentary) elections are decreed. Latvian democratic parties organize platforms and candidates but are blocked from participating.
- July 14-15** "Elections". Voters are instructed to deposit the Working People's Bloc candidate list into the ballot box, with no alterations. Alleged voter activity is 97.6%. Complete election results are published in Moscow 12 hours before the election closes.
- ⑬ July 21** The fraudulently installed "People's Saeima" convenes in the National Theater, unanimously petitioning for Latvia to be admitted to the USSR. Ulmanis resigns as president, and the next day is deported to the USSR where he dies in captivity in Turkmenistan in 1942.
- July 23** U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles condemns the "devious processes" by which "the political independence and territorial integrity of the three small Baltic republics were to be deliberately annihilated by one of their more powerful neighbors".
- August 5** The Soviet Union grants the petitions of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to join the Soviet Union. None of the Western democracies recognizes the annexation as legitimate.
- June 14, 1941** Overnight arrests and mass deportations of so-called 'anti-Soviet elements'. 15,443 inhabitants of Latvia are deported to distant areas of the USSR. Families are separated, adult men are shot or imprisoned in Gulag camps where most perish from hunger, disease and cold, while women and childress are forcibly resettled across Siberia.
- June 22** Nazi Germany attacks the USSR. By the end of the first day, German forces cross the Latvian-Lithuanian border.
- ④ July 1** German forces capture Rīga. *Einsatzgruppe-A* commander Stahlecker meets Viktors Arājs at the main police prefecture and names him an *Einsatzkommando* leader. Arājs becomes the most notorious collaborator in the Holocaust killings in Latvia.
- ② July 4-8** Jewish synagogues in Rīga are burned. The killing of Latvia's Jews begins in the first days of the German occupation; by the end of 1941, the great majority have been murdered.
- ⑧ July 17** *Reichskommissariat Ostland* is created. Nazi Germany administers Latvia not as a previously independent country, but as occupied Soviet territory.