

secession, but through self-management. Political decentralization was feasible, he said, except for defence, foreign affairs and internal security. He reiterated the benefits of the July Supreme Soviet decree on economic autonomy. However, he also specifically stated that the wartime incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR was beyond reproach. In November, following the lead of the September session, the Baltic republics were granted full control over land and other resources and autonomy in planning and regulations and most financial operations.

By this time, Estonia had stepped even further from the Soviet Union. On 12 November 1989 it declared illegal the 1940 vote to join the USSR, on the grounds that it had been done under military coercion. Unlike Lithuania, Estonia did not call for secession or independence outright, but instead called for this as the basis for negotiating a new relationship between the Soviet Union and Estonia. This call was echoed at a mass rally on 2 February 1990, commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Tartu Peace Treaty in which Lenin's Soviet Union had recognized Estonia's independence.

Also in February 1990, Estonia followed the lead of Latvia and Lithuania in endorsing multi-party elections. This was a prologue to the elections to the Estonian Supreme Soviet slated for 18 March 1990. Preceding these elections were parallel, private elections, organized by the increasingly powerful Citizens' Committees, for a "Congress of Estonia." A significant percentage of the total population -- 580,000 people -- turned out to vote in the Citizen Committee elections. The Congress constituted itself on 11 and 12 March, claiming to be the constitutional representative of the Estonian people.

In the official Supreme Soviet elections, Rahvarinne won forty-three of 105 seats, the International Movement twenty-seven, and other independence-minded parties thirty-five. The Estonian Communist Party, which ran candidates belonging to all three camps, won fifty-five seats. Arnold Rüütel, President of the Presidium of the Estonian Supreme Soviet, was elected President.

Meanwhile, the Estonian Communist Party voted in principle to split from the CPSU, but to wait for the results of the twenty-eighth CPSU Congress, to be held in July 1990, before finally committing itself.

On 30 March, the new Estonian Supreme Soviet immediately declared itself to be at the beginning of a period of transition towards a new Republic of Estonia. On 2 April, the parliament announced that the Soviet Constitution could not be the basis for realizing independence from the Soviet Union. Soviet President Gorbachev warned Estonia to retract its resolution and not to follow the same path as Lithuania.