

As noted above,⁵ President Gorbachev reacted quickly and negatively to the Latvian and Estonian declarations of independence. He declared them illegal and refused to negotiate -- at least publicly -- with any of the Republics on the issue. This gave way to the more flexible response articulated during his 12 June meeting with the three Baltic presidents, when he promised to enter negotiations if they would "freeze" their current declarations of independence.

President Gorbunovs of Latvia took this proposal to be a *de facto* recognition of Latvia's step-by-step approach to independence. He promised to submit the proposal to the Latvian parliament. Talks could start immediately after its approval.

CURRENT CANADIAN POSITION

Canada's recent policy must be understood in the light of its historical position on the status of the Baltic republics. This has been remarkably consistent since their incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940. Canadian interest in the area stems mainly from the large numbers of people of Baltic background who have made Canada their home. Canada's position has been that the 1940 annexations were illegal according to the norms of international behaviour and should not be recognized:

[T]he position of the Government of Canada has been made clear. It is to continue to ensure *de jure* non-recognition of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states.⁶

This tenet has been repeatedly stressed throughout the current Baltic situation.

At the same time, Canadian officials have traditionally acknowledged Moscow's effective control of the republics. As a result, Canada has generally treated the situation as an internal Soviet affair.

Canada's overall attitude toward the Soviet Union has shifted fundamentally in the recent past. Until spring 1989, Canada viewed the USSR's ideological hostility and military capabilities as the greatest threat to world stability; the changes underway in the Soviet Union under President Gorbachev were not yet rated as significant.⁷ A reversal in the policy was signalled in a speech

⁵ See section on Estonia.

⁶ *Commons Debates*, 29 May 1990, p. 12000.

⁷ "Department of National Defence, *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada*. East-West Relations: the way ahead." Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, *Canadian Foreign Policy Series* 89/2, 13 January 1989.