

The Latvian International Front was founded in January 1989 in opposition to the elements of the Latvian Popular Front's programme that dealt with restricting immigration and state language requirements. Together with the formation of other national fronts, this indicated some early lack of cohesion in the movement. In spring 1990, a radical Latvian popular front -- the National Independence Movement -- staged its own elections to a "Congress of Latvia." The popular level of participation by ethnic Latvians indicated strong support for independence, whatever the movement, among that constituency.

On 15 February 1990, the Latvian Supreme Soviet condemned the 1940 incorporation of the republic into the Soviet Union. It called for the start of negotiations toward independence and passed laws on the official use of the old flag, state symbols, and the national anthem.

On 18 March 1990, in the first round of elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet, as with the other republics, those candidates endorsed by the Popular Front won, and ethnic Russian candidates did less well. This pattern was repeated in run-off elections in late April (run-offs were held in ridings where no clear victor emerged in the first round of voting). However, the margin of victory was not quite as decisive as in Estonia or Lithuania.

In an interesting byplay preceding the March elections, Latvian representatives to the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies demanded that President Gorbachev meet with them to begin talks on their republic's independence. They revealed that the Soviet president had met quietly with Lithuanian and Estonian representatives to discuss future relations between the individual Baltic republics and the Soviet state while publicly rejecting such negotiations. The Latvians claimed that they had been promised similar meetings in exchange for support for Mr. Gorbachev's bid to be elected by the Congress instead of by direct popular vote.

On 6 and 7 April 1990, the Latvian Communist Party split into pro-Moscow and independent parties. Unlike the case of the other two Baltic republics, in Latvia the independent Communist Party represented the minority side of the split.

On 4 May 1990, the newly elected Latvian Supreme Soviet passed a resolution proclaiming independence. The resolution, drafted by the Popular Front, was more cautious in its approach than Lithuania's. The 1922 Constitution was reinstated, but the bulk of it then immediately suspended in favour of a transitional period during which negotiations for independence would take place. Soviet laws were not rejected outright, providing that they did not conflict with Latvian laws or rights.

Parliament chose Anatoly Gorbunovs, Chairman of the Latvian Supreme Soviet and a member of the majority pro-CPSU faction of the Communist Party, as president. It was hoped that his good standing with Soviet officials would prove a positive influence in negotiations with them.