

The result was that most of the deputies from the Baltic States were representative of local feelings and local views. That is true also of some deputies from the Ukraine. Many deputies are clearly reformers, most obviously Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Sakharov. But there are dozens more.

There will be those who argue that President Gorbachev has secured for himself a compliant Supreme Soviet which will do as it is told. I do not agree. It is not a revolutionary body, but it is reform-minded. Furthermore, the voices of deputies to the Supreme Soviet, and for that matter of deputies to the Congress, will continue to be heard. The politicization of Soviet society is only beginning, but it is a good beginning.

No one can fail to appreciate the difficulties facing the Soviet Union. The challenge of reforming the economy, the tragedies of Armenia and the train disaster in the Urals, the legacy of Chernobyl, and the ethnic violence of Armenia-Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Georgia. There is a rising tide of demands for greater recognition of the rights of nationalities. These come from around the Soviet Union, from the Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldavia, but most significantly in the Baltic States.

Perhaps the most remarkable development in a unique year in the history of the Soviet Union has been the flowering of the popular movements of the three Baltic States and the acceptance of large parts of their agenda by the local Supreme Soviets. The election of popular front representatives to the Congress of People's Deputies gives them a national forum for the pursuit of their objectives. Live television coverage of the entire session of the Congress showed Baltic representatives demanding a renunciation of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and independence for the Baltic States. This must have been an eye-opener for most of the country which would have been made aware of Baltic concerns for the first time. The agreement to set up a commission of the Congress to look into the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was an admission, at last, that the issue must be addressed.

In the meantime, the Baltic States insist on their independence, refusing to recognize Soviet all-union laws unless they have been approved in their own Supreme Soviets. They have made their languages the official languages of the Baltic States. The Baltic Assembly of Popular Movements which met in Tallinn last month will contribute to the sense of joint purpose of the three Baltic States.

The outcome of the contest of wills between Baltic Supreme Soviets and Moscow is still far from clear.