

Following Latvia's independence resolution of 4 May 1990¹, the sovereign and independent "Republic of Estonia" was declared four days later. The key articles setting out Estonia's sovereignty were taken from the 1938 constitution. On 16 May, a law was passed to establish a provisional system of government during the period of transition to independence.

The three heads of government of the Baltic Republics had met in Vilnius on 12 April 1990 to sign a ten-year agreement on economic cooperation towards a Baltic Common Market. On 12 May they met again in Tallinn to revive the Baltic Council, a body for Baltic cooperation that was created by treaty in 1934 by the pre-war independent republics. This reconstituted Council was to coordinate the Republics' strategies for independence.

President Gorbachev outlawed the Estonian and the Latvian declarations of independence on 14 May. He maintained that they violated the USSR Constitution and were in contravention of the 3 April law defining procedures for secession.² President Gorbachev met with President R  utel of Estonia and President Gorbunovs of Latvia on 22 May. In an "unpleasant" encounter Gorbachev demanded they cancel their independence declarations before any negotiations could begin.

During this period, a pro-Soviet, anti-independence backlash occurred. Coordinated demonstrations took place in Estonia and Latvia on 15 March, one day after President Gorbachev's statements decrying independence for the Baltic republics. In both cases, the parliament buildings were rushed by unarmed crowds -- in the case of Latvia, by unarmed Soviet soldiers. They were rebuffed by civil militia acting under orders from the republic authorities.

In June, the Estonian parliament passed laws ending the Republic's subordination to Soviet government administration and institutions. It further called for Soviet-Estonian relations to be rebuilt on the foundations of the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920.

Lithuania

Lithuania's reaction to the activities of the nationalist movement varied from Estonia's. The Lithuanian Restructuring Movement -- Sajudis -- inaugurated itself on 22 and 23 October 1988, although it had been active informally for most of the previous year. Its programme, based upon the models provided by its companion Estonian and Latvian organizations, called for political, economic and cultural autonomy; a separate currency and citizenship; and curbs on immigration from other parts of the USSR.

Unlike the situation in Estonia, in Lithuania the Communist Party and the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet initially took a hard-line stance against the nationalist proclamations. The Lithuanian leadership bent to public pressure in the area of symbols of cultural autonomy in order to blunt the effectiveness of the nationalist movement. On 20 August 1988, education reforms to reverse Russification were announced. Also that month, Lithuania was allowed to have the old,

¹ See section on Latvia below.

² See section on Lithuania below.