

February 23, 1990

USSR: Baltic Nationalists Press Ahead□□□

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Summary:

An analysis of upcoming elections in Lithuania and Estonia which will strengthen Baltic independence movements.

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~~Top Secret~~

USSR:

Baltic Nationalists Press Ahead

This weekend's Lithuanian and Estonian elections are likely to reinforce the Baltic republics' push for independence.

Leaders of Sajudis, the Lithuanian nationalist umbrella organization, expect their candidates to win a comfortable majority of the 141 seats in tomorrow's election to the republic's Supreme Soviet. A recent republic poll, however, indicates that the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) has risen substantially in popularity since it broke with the Soviet party last December and embraced Lithuanian statehood as its main goal. Early this month, senior members of Sajudis expressed concern about the election outcome on the basis of their projections of a 50-50 split between LCP and Sajudis candidates.

In neighboring Estonia, radical nationalists are sponsoring an election tomorrow, in which only ethnic Estonians can vote, for a "citizens' congress," scheduled for next month. The sponsors hope that by excluding ethnic Russians, many of whom oppose Estonian secession and who make up almost a third of the republic's population, they can elect a congress that will press the Estonian Supreme Soviet elected next month to pursue independence aggressively.

Comment: Candidates primarily loyal to Sajudis will probably capture a majority of the Supreme Soviet seats, despite the LCP's recent gains. If the Sajudis candidates win a comfortable hold on the legislature, they almost certainly will move quickly to hold a public referendum on independence and press Moscow to negotiate terms of secession. Even if candidates of the newly independent LCP win roughly half the seats, the legislature will still push the nationalist agenda, but it will probably be more willing to compromise with Moscow on issues such as the length of the transition to independence and the stationing of Soviet troops in the republic.

The drive to convene the Estonian "citizens' congress" has gradually gained substantial public support, and the congress will probably be a powerful political action group that will press the republic legislature to act boldly. At the same time, the congress is likely to increase tension over secession between the republic's ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians.

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