

# TOWARDS THE STATE OF LATVIA

## References

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## Picture

*People at the Supreme Council (currently, the Saeima) at the time of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Rīga, 4 May 1990. Photo by Aivars Liepiņš*  
*Collection of the Latvian War Museum*

<sup>1</sup> Job title - Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)

## Declaration of Independence of 4 May

During World War II, the Republic of Latvia lost its independence. Latvia remained under the Soviet occupation even after the end of the war; the Soviet political and socio-economic model was imposed on the people of Latvia. Despite extensive repressions and ideological "processing" of the Latvian people by the occupation regime, the longing of the Latvian people for independence could not be eliminated. As soon as it became possible, the Latvian people launched targeted restoration of independence, and in this process (also called the 'Third-Awakening' or the 'Singing Revolution'), the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on 4 May 1990 played a significant role.

### Historical context for the beginning of the Third Awakening

The restoration of independence became possible due to changes in the political situation in the USSR. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev<sup>1</sup> became the leader of the USSR and initiated extensive reforms, including towards the democratization of society.

From 1987–1988 onwards, the diversity of views was tolerated, the media (TV, radio, newspapers and magazines) became much





#### Source

*Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs, AS "Latvijas Avīze". 100 Latvijas vēstures relikvijas, 2012., SIA "Jelgavas Tipogrāfija", 194., 195.lpp.*

#### Picture

*Konstantīns Pupurs with the maroon – white – maroon flag of the Republic of Latvia at the Freedom Monument on 14 June 1988.*

freer. The information, the content of which directly pointed to the misery and repressions by the Soviet occupation regime in Latvia, was not censored. In 1988, open discussions on Latvia's occupation in 1940 began. The opinions on the restoration of national independence were expressed in an increasingly open manner.

The first official meeting to honour the victims of the communist terror was held at the House of Political Education (now – the Congress Centre) on 14 June 1988. At the end of the meeting, the participants marched to the Freedom Monument. During the parade, Konstantīns Pupurs, the activist of the Latvian human rights defence group "Helsinki - 86", Riga Division and the then student of the Latvian State University, Faculty of History and Philosophy, for the first time during the Soviet occupation, hoists the maroon - white- maroon flag of the Republic of Latvia and brings it through the whole of Rīga from the Freedom Monument to the sculpture of Mother Latvia at the Fraternal Cemetery.

Following the parade on 14 June with the maroon – white – maroon flag, K. Pupurs and his mother were deprived of the citizenship of the USSR, and were commissioned to leave the country within two weeks.

In the process of democratization, the foundation of various public organizations, which were neither directly nor indirectly subordinated to the Communist Party, was tolerated. This process reached its culmination on 8 October 1988 – the date of foundation of the Popular Front of Latvia. This organization rapidly became the main driving force of social and political changes. Already in 1989, the PFL leaders began to discuss openly the need for the restoration of national independence of Latvia.



The idea of the restoration of independence united the people of three Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia). The Baltic Way campaign held on 23 August 1989 was a striking symbol of unity. The people joined hands forming a human chain through the territories of all three states, thus demonstrating the solidarity and commitment to restore the countries' independence.

This campaign also gained wide international resonance, confirming that there is a great public support for the restoration of independence. Admittedly, many politicians in the West were initially reserved against the Baltic nations' efforts to restore independence

because they feared spoiling relations with the reform-minded Soviet leader M.Gorbachev, as well as outbreaks of violence between the supporters and opponents of independence.

This attitude changed rapidly when the Baltic nations showed consistent adherence to non-violent forms of regaining independence, even at times when they faced the arms (for example, in January 1991 during the barricades). In order to avoid the confrontation as far as possible with the central power of the USSR, the restoration of independence was directed by choosing the parliamentary path and obtaining the majority in the supreme councils of the republics.

## LPF's victory in the elections of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR – a precondition for the adoption of the Declaration of Independence

Last democratic elections before the foundation of the PFL were held in Latvia in 1931 when the 4th Saeima of the Republic of Latvia was elected.

The democratic elections in Latvia were neither held during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis nor during the Soviet and German occupation. However, in order to create the impression of a democratic form of government, during the period of the Soviet occupation, the elections of the pseudo parliaments – the Supreme Councils (SCs) were held every four (later every five) years. The Supreme Councils did not have any real power because the national and government policy was determined and controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its republican branch - the Latvian Communist Party (LCP). The situation changed after the democratization of society, when the CPL began to lose the power monopoly in Latvia.

The Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR that was elected in 1985, after the foundation of the PFL, increasingly listened to the public opinion, and when taking the decisions, began to take into account the PFL's rather than the LCP's recommendations.

In 1989, the elections of the Supreme Council of the USSR were held, and the voters expressed greater support for the candidates nominated by the PFL rather than by the LCP. The Popular Front of Latvia decided to take part in the elections of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR on 18 March 1990 in order to obtain a parliamentary majority - two-thirds of the votes that would allow for decisions on changing the national status in accordance

with the Constitution of the USSR. Before the elections, the Popular Front of Latvia publicly declared that, in case of victory of the PFL, the main priority of the new parliament will be the restoration of the national independence of Latvia.

To gain a majority - two-thirds of the votes cast - was an ambitious goal because not all residents of Latvia supported the restoration of independence. In accordance with the law, not only all immigrants who had arrived from the USSR during the occupation, but also



### Picture

Resolution of 9 October 1988 on the foundation of the Popular Front of Latvia; the first page with the leaders' signatures, 9 October 1988.

Collection of the Latvian National History Museum

servicemen of the Soviet occupation army had the right to take part in the elections. The idea of Latvia's independence was actively opposed by the LCP's reactionary wing and the International Front of the Working People of the Latvian SSR (Interfront), which was established with the support of LCP in January 1989. There were attempts to split the Latvian citizens on the basis of nationality. Since the proportion of ethnic Latvians had decreased to half of the population as the result of repressions and immigration from the USSR, the support of the rest of the Latvian



Sources

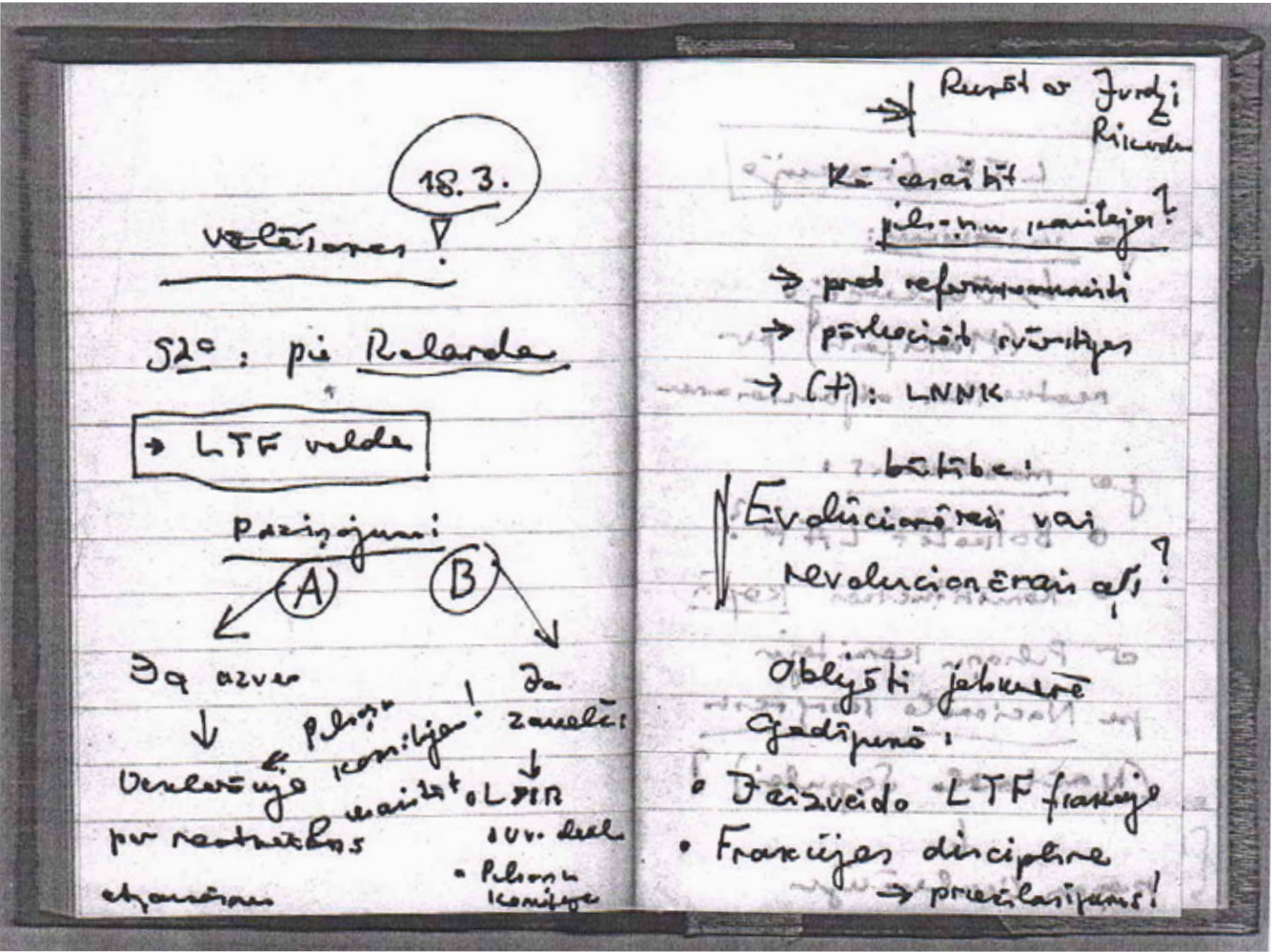
Ieskats Latvijas vēstures svarīgākajos jautājumos. Valsts kanceleja, 2016., 116.-127. lpp.  
[http://www.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/lv\\_vesture100gadei.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/lv_vesture100gadei.pdf)

Picture

Notes on various future scenarios and the need for consolidation of forces supporting independence that were taken by Egils Levits on 18 March 1990 – the day of elections of the Supreme Council. Source – personal archive of E. Levits

population was necessary. The situation was made even more complicated by the calls of radical advocates of the restoration of independence to boycott the elections of the Supreme Council, by arguing that they are illegal and are held under conditions of the Soviet occupation. Alternative scenarios were also tolerated, should the elections of the PFL fail to obtain the majority of votes. Most likely, the so-called international legal path would have been implemented, by involving only the citizens of the Republic of Latvia that was occupied in 1940 and their descendants in the action for the restoration of independence. The Citizens' Committee had already made a significant input to this position.

While striving for 201 place in the Parliament, the Popular Front of Latvia managed to win the elections of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR held on 18 March 1990, by gaining the majority of votes, while the number of members of the established PFL faction (131 deputy) did not reach the required two-thirds (134). The PFL candidates showed relatively lower results in supplementary elections in April in those constituencies where no candidate had obtained the majority of votes in the first round. At the same time, some deputies who had been elected as independent candidates could potentially support the Declaration of Independence. It was clear that the idea of independence will not be supported by 57 members of the "Equal Rights" faction.





Film chronicles about topicalities of the national awakening period, including the adoption the Declaration of Independence of 4 May 1990. (1990)

<https://www.filmas.lv/movie/2185/>

Picture

The draft Declaration of Independence (version of 9 April 1990) with notes of Tālav Jundzis, deputy of the Supreme Council

Sources

Romāns Apsītis. 1990. gada 4. maija deklarācijas sagatavošana un pieņemšana. Krājumā 1990. gada 4. maija Latvijas Neatkarības deklarācija: starptautiskie un iekšpolitiskie aspekti. 21 –31.lpp.

Text of the Declaration of Independence in version of 4 May 1990 and with changes made on 21 August 1991

<https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=75539&mode=DOC>

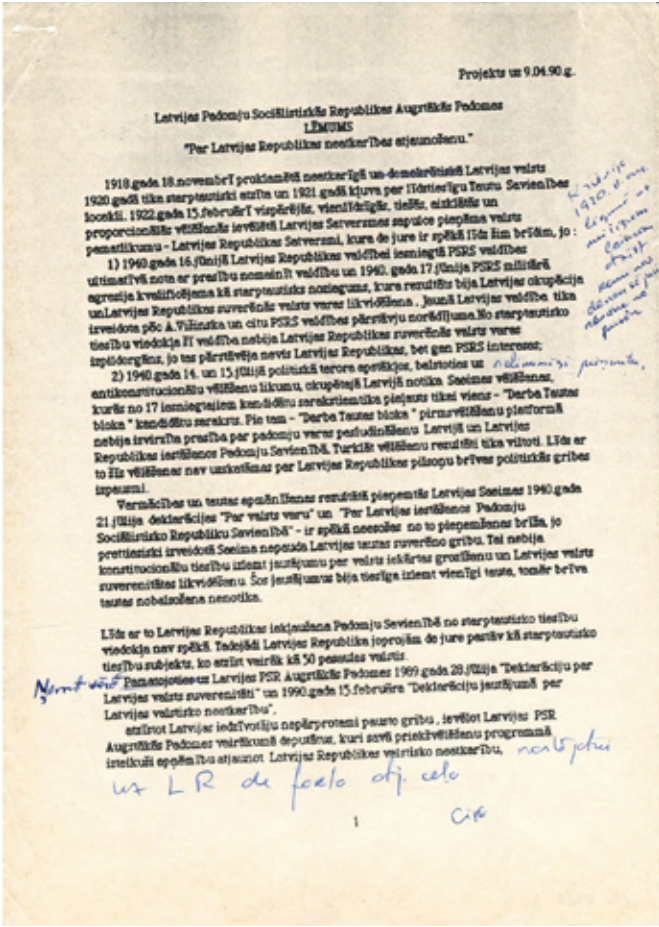
Drafting the Declaration of Independence

Already shortly before the elections of the Supreme Council in March 1990, the PFL management had considered the need to produce the drafts of those documents, which, in case of victory of the Popular Front of Latvia, should be adopted by the new Supreme Council. Egils Levits committed himself to produce the guidelines of the document of the declaration of independence of Latvia.

On 22 March 1990, a meeting was held in the apartment of Rolands Rikards, the newly elected deputy. It was attended by Egils Levits, Vilnis Eglājs, Valdis Birkavs, Romāns Apsītis, Rolands Rikards. The next day, having regard to his previous work and results of the meeting, Egils Levits developed a document that became a 'backbone' of the future declaration. The PFL Board established a working group on national legal issues involving Romāns Apsītis, Vilnis Eglājs, Aivars Endziņš, Tālav Jundzis, Andrejs Krastiņš Rolands Rikards and Ilmārs Bišers. The working group, including E. Levits, Edgars Melķis and Gunārs Kusiņš, clarified the text of the declaration.

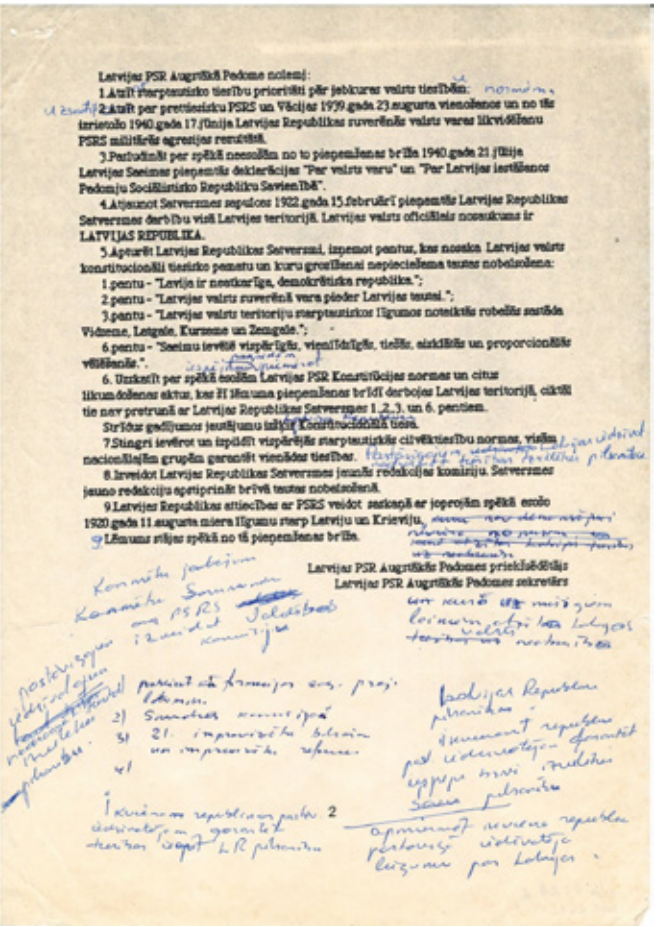
In the coming weeks, the text of the declaration was also discussed by the PFL faction, and until 28 April they agreed on the main guidelines and wording. It was decided to provide for

a transition period for the de facto restoration of the state authority of the Republic of Latvia. The unanimous support for the adoption of the declaration was expressed by more than eight thousand people's deputies at all levels, who had gathered at the Daugava Stadium in Rīga on 21 April 1990.



Quotes from the Declaration of Independence:

Taking into account the "Declaration on Sovereignty of State of Latvia" of 28 July 1989 of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR, the "Declaration on the Issue of Independence of the Latvian State" of 15 February 1990, and "Appeal of All-Latvia Congress of People's Deputies" of 21 April 1990, with respect to the will of inhabitants of Latvia which had been clearly expressed by electing as a majority those deputies, who had stated that they will restore independence of the Republic of Latvia by standing on the path of de facto restoration of a free, democratic and independent Republic of Latvia.



To recognize the priority of international laws over national laws. To hold to be illegitimate the treaty between the USSR and Germany of 23 August 1939, and the consequent liquidation of independence of the Republic of Latvia resulting from Soviet military aggression on 17 June 1940.

To proclaim the declaration "On Accession of Latvia to Soviet Union" of 21 July 1940 of the Saeima of Latvia to be void from the moment of adoption.



## Picture

*The deputies of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR after the adoption of the declaration "On the Renewal of the Independence of the Republic of Latvia" at the building of the Supreme Council. Dainis Īvāns in the centre. Photograph unknown. 4 May 1990.*

*Collection of the National History Museum of Latvia*

As we approach the centenary of Latvia, the State Chancellery is producing a series of informative materials about the formation of the State of Latvia and its founders. The informative material is aimed at strengthening the sense of statehood, raising awareness of the history of Latvia and its national values, as well as vivid personalities who influenced history and contributed significantly to the foundation and growth of the State of Latvia, particularly to the work of the government.

We are grateful to Dr. hist. Gatis Krūmiņš for his contribution to the fact sheet

**LV100** 

Information about the origins of our country, its path towards independence and Latvia's centenary events at

**LV100.lv**  
**[www.mk.gov.lv/simtgade](http://www.mk.gov.lv/simtgade)**

## Adoption of the Declaration of Independence

The newly elected Supreme Council convened its first meeting on 3 May 1990. On the first day, the officials were elected and organizational issues were addressed, whereas the decision on the Declaration of Independence had to be made on 4 May. Despite the opposition's efforts to play for time, following extensive debates, the voting was over at 19:20, and the declaration "On Restoring Independence of the Republic of Latvia" was adopted. More than 2/3 (138) of deputies voted 'for', one abstained and 57 deputies did not participate in the voting. Many people had assembled at the building of the Supreme Council waiting for the results of voting, and after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence welcomed the deputies who left the building with jubilation and congratulations. The popular manifestation at the Daugava Embankment begun at 19:00, and was later joined by deputies of the Supreme Council. A significant stage in the process of regaining independence had completed, which introduced the next, no less difficult one - the actual restoration of independence.

## Significance of the Declaration of Independence

The adoption of the Declaration of Independence was of vital importance for domestic and foreign policy; it was a turning point in the process of regaining independence. Following the adoption of the declaration, the establishment of an independent country-specific public administration institutions, as well as transformation of previous institutions was launched. The centre of gravity in the



processes leading to independence shifted from the public authority (PFL) to the entire public administration of the Republic of Latvia and its institutions - the Parliament, government and ministries. The adoption of the declaration demonstrated the unity of the Baltic States towards independence, which was an important factor of domestic and foreign policy. Adoption of the declaration confirmed that, although the proponents of Latvia's independence have chosen non-violent and constitutional manner of restoration of independence, they are prepared for brave and principled decisions. The renewal of the historical name of the Republic of Latvia, by removing the 'Soviet Socialist' that was

imposed during the Soviet occupation, was deeply symbolic. In the light of actual reality - the Supreme Council did not have a number of instruments needed for immediate takeover of the actual state power (own army, money, diplomatic representations) at the time the declaration was adopted, as well as the fact that the independence was opposed in principle by the central authority of the USSR in Moscow, the declaration refers to a transition period for restoration of independence. The transition period expired on 21 August 1991 with the adoption of the constitutional law "On the Statehood of the Republic of Latvia".