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USSR:

Baltic Parties Pressing Ahead

Last month's Central Committee broadside against Baltic nationalism and the prospect of the coming nationalities plenum have not deterred the Baltic republics' parties from pursuing an independent course, even though all three have renounced secession. [redacted]

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Since the Central Committee's sharp attack, the Latvian and Estonian parties have submitted draft party programs that advocate greater republic party autonomy from Moscow, although neither draft explicitly calls for an independent republic party. The Estonian party reportedly considered deleting a reference to the party's leading role in society from its program. [redacted]

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Party leaders and popular-front members from the three republics met last Friday to discuss forming a Baltic common market by 1993. Under the plan, the Baltic republics would coordinate production and would trade as a unit with other Soviet republics and foreign countries. [redacted]

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The Lithuanian government has shown caution, postponing the opening of its legislative session until 24 September—the nationalities plenum is 19-20 September—despite having earlier bowed to public pressure to begin on 20 September. The legislators plan to discuss a report that declares the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the subsequent incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR illegal; they will also discuss citizenship and election laws. Lithuanian party boss Brazauskas has said, however, that his party still intends to meet next month to call for an independent republic party. [redacted]

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Comment: The leaders of the Lithuanian party, which is the most radical of the three parties and was criticized by name in the Central Committee statement, probably are the most concerned about ascertaining whether Moscow's position on autonomy has changed. President Gorbachev's reported personal calls to Brazauskas may have hammered home that Lithuania, the only Baltic republic with a strong ethnic majority, has gone the furthest and has the most to lose if the tolerant climate toward nationalism changes. [redacted]

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Estonian and Latvian leaders, however, appear confident that the measures pursued by their parties will not provoke a backlash in Moscow. All three parties probably are trying, particularly on economic issues, to mark out their positions before the plenum. [redacted]

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