

ZIG-ZAGGING TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

Ukraine rejects Gorbachev's draft Union treaty

On 23 November, Gorbachev presented the draft of the new Union treaty. Describing the nationalities problem as 'the central issue of domestic policy', he again played on fears of bloodshed and anarchy and depicted the proposed treaty as virtually a last-ditch effort to prevent disintegration. By now, though, the Baltic republics and Georgia had made it clear that they would not sign, and Moldova and Armenia had also expressed their misgivings. Nevertheless, the Soviet leader declared that he was convinced that even in the Baltic republics 'most people' were 'in favour of preserving the Union' and accused their 'separatist leaders' of being afraid to agree to hold referendums on the issue of independence.¹

As expected, the draft of the Union treaty fell well short of what the republics were seeking. It proposed a federation with a centre which would still have substantial powers and there was no mention of the right to secession. There were, however, three controversial changes. First, the status of the autonomous republics was to be upgraded: the new Union treaty would recognize them as sovereign states and as co-signatories. For Ukraine, this concession to the autonomous republics threatened to complicate its problems with Crimea further. Second, the role of the Council of the Federation was to be enhanced from a consultative to a policy- and decision-making body. And, third, the word 'Socialist' in the name Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was to be replaced by 'Sovereign'. As the prominent deputy from the 'Democratic Russia' bloc, Galina Starovoitova, put it, the draft was simply a 'cosmetic renewal' of the 1922 Union treaty. Yeltsin's deputy, Ruslan Khasbulatov was even

¹ TASS, 23 November 1990.

more direct. 'This Union treaty is a big coffin for all of us to lie in', he declared.

The Soviet leadership appeared to spare no effort to promote the Union treaty and to intimidate supporters of independence in the Baltic republics and elsewhere. Ominously, Soviet Defence Minister Dmitrii Yazov and other military leaders began making tough statements about the need to protect the army's and the country's unity; by the end of November they and Gorbachev were threatening to use force in order to protect the rights of Soviet servicemen and military installations in the Baltic republics and elsewhere. On 27 November, the Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, General Mikhail Moiseev, addressed the Ukrainian parliament and criticized the decision requiring Ukrainian conscripts to serve in their own republic. As an observer noted, 'for some reason, he referred to the Red Army throughout as the "Russian army". Even the Communist "Group of 239" smarted at his speech.' Kravchuk told him firmly but politely that 'We are not about to revoke our decisions'."

The following day, Gorbachev appealed to the Russians not to get carried away with the idea of sovereignty at the expense of the preservation of the Union and what it represented for Russia. Speaking to a gathering of cultural workers in the Kremlin, he rejected the idea that the USSR was an empire. He maintained that 'this state has been formed over a thousand years' and that it had 'formed as a multinational state'. The Russians, he said:

Bear a special responsibility, whether they like it or not; that is how it has been, that is how it is—they are the backbone. If there is no Russia, there is no Union. And without the Union, Russia is not the same.³

A few days later, in a further direct challenge to the sovereignty of the republics, Gorbachev issued a presidential decree which rejected the right of the republics to form their own armed forces and declared null and void republican laws stipulating that conscripts perform military service in their own republic. In another apparent concession to the hard-liners and generals, he replaced his relatively liberal minister of internal affairs, Vadim Bakatin, with the former

² Pavlychko, *Letters from Kiev*, p. 126, and *Robotnycha hazeta*, 29 November 1990.

³ Soviet television, 28 November 1990.

Latvian KGB chief Boris Pugo and appointed Gromov as deputy minister.

Whether Gorbachev was placating the military and his numerous conservative critics or actually considering some form of a general crackdown, he was clearly shifting to the right. More and more calls were heard from hard-liners demanding implicitly or explicitly that a state of emergency to be declared throughout the USSR in order to restore order and preserve the Union. Indeed, on 5 December Yeltsin felt compelled to warn the military that its intervention in politics would lead to catastrophe and a civil war.

Whatever hopes or plans the hard-liners in Ukraine may have had, for their offensive clearly fitted into a broader pattern, the Ukrainian parliament and government did not waver. In fact, during this uncertain time, Ukraine signed treaties with, among others, the republics which were in the forefront of the drive for independence — the three Baltic republics and Georgia. Furthermore, the parliament did not allow itself to be pressured into debating the draft Union treaty. Its deputy chairman, Hrynov, explained that both the majority and the opposition agreed that the draft was incompatible with Ukraine's Declaration of State Sovereignty.⁴ At a meeting on 30 November with deputies from Ukraine to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, Kravchuk reiterated the Ukrainian parliament's position that a decision on the Union treaty would not be made until after a new republican constitution had been approved. At this meeting it was also agreed that a republican referendum should be held on the question of the Union treaty.⁵

When, on 13 December, the CPU held the second part of its Twenty-eighth Congress, Hurenko, though critical of the Gorbachev leadership's record, declared that the 'stabilization' of the situation in the country was the 'order of the day' and expressed support for the Soviet president's 'programme'. He also underscored that the CPU Central Committee was 'firmly' behind the idea of the Union treaty, though it considered that the present draft needed 'further work'. Hurenko's speech contained more than the usual invective against Rukh and its allies, the Ukrainian Party boss claiming that 'under the umbrella of Rukh' there had 'taken place the legalization of nationalism in its most extreme manifestations'.

⁴ Radio Kyiv, 9 December 1990.

⁵ *Robitnycha hazcta*, 2 December 1990.

He also revived the theme heard earlier in the year that the 'anti-Communist forces' and local authorities in Western Ukraine had gone beyond the law by seeking 'to change the very character of the social order' and spread their 'Galician messianism' and the 'Lviv variant' to other regions of the republic. Western Ukrainian 'national radicalism', he said, was in fact only stimulating 'separatist tendencies' within Ukraine itself. It was the 'nationalist and anti-Communist groups', the Ukrainian Party leader claimed, who were the main danger to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

With Hurenko himself revealing that during 1990 over a quarter of a million members had left the Ukrainian Party's ranks, at the Congress some attempts were made to improve its faltering image. At this belated stage, the Congress adopted a resolution condemning the crimes of the Stalin era and totalitarianism. With it being pointed out that there were already fifteen political parties in Ukraine (in fact the new Party for the Democratic Revival of Ukraine had just held its founding Congress and the Democratic Party of Ukraine was just about to), the CPU claimed for itself the role of a party of 'national understanding' as well as guarantor of stability and social justice.. The Congress, however, rejected the idea of the depoliticization and 'de-participation' of the state and economic structures. Moreover, the fact that Kravchuk and Fokin also addressed the Congress, with the former once again emphasizing his loyalty to the Party and the 'Socialist choice', only reinforced the impression the CPU still saw itself as a ruling party. The Congress also adopted statutes for the CPU which, on the one hand, asserted the Party's organizational independence, and, on the other, left it as a constituent part of the CPSU.⁶

When the USSR Congress of People's Deputies convened on 17 December, Gorbachev reiterated his appeal for more powers to hold the country together. Yeltsin and others opposed this, arguing that it would result in dictatorship. Gorbachev also surprised many by calling for an all-Union referendum on the future of the USSR and the new Union treaty. Yeltsin dismissed this proposal as a 'waste of time', while the Baltic republics called on the Congress to recognize their independence. On the other hand, a group of fifty-three Soviet officials and deputies at the Congress, ranging from the Moscow

⁶ *Ibid.*, TASS, 13 and 14 December; and *Molod Ukrainy*, 15 December 1990.

Patriarch to General Moiseev, urged Gorbachev to declare a state of emergency and to rule by decree in troublesome areas.

On 19 December, with the leaders of the Communist majority now insisting that it had become 'essential' to begin discussing Ukraine's position on the Union treaty 'immediately', the Ukrainian parliament turned its attention to this cardinal issue. But the charged atmosphere in Moscow appears to have brought home the need for a compromise among supporters and opponents of the idea of a Union treaty. The representatives of the parliamentary Commission on Inter-Republican and International Relations and of the Ukrainian government both rejected the variant of the Union treaty proposed by Gorbachev. From the democrats' camp, Yukhnovsky proposed an alternative draft which allowed for a transitional period for the transfer of key powers from the centre to the sovereign republics. Similarly, Mykhailo Horyn also came out in favour of a temporary Union treaty which would allow for the orderly dissolution of the USSR. An additional and noteworthy alternative variant was proposed by Volodymyr Vasylenko, the co-author with several other legal specialists of a draft treaty for the creation of a Commonwealth of [Independent] States. It was this concept, as Radio Kyiv noted, which most deputies seemed to support.⁷ Meanwhile, at the Congress of People's Deputies, a group of over forty deputies from Ukraine, including Korotych, issued a statement asserting that it was up to the Ukrainian parliament and the people of Ukraine, not the Congress, to decide what Union treaty, if any, Ukraine would join. 'Not a "renewed" centralized federation, but a commonwealth of sovereign states —that is our position', they declared.⁸

In Moscow, the drama continued. There was a shock on 20 December when, in his address to the Congress of People's Deputies, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze warned that dictatorship was taking hold in the USSR and announced his resignation. This, however, only seemed to encourage the conservatives. The Congress supported Gorbachev's plan to hold a referen-

Radio Kyiv and *Robitnycha hazeta*, 20 December 1990. The draft treaty for the creation of a Commonwealth of (Independent) States was published in *Li teratoma Ukraina* on 20 December 1990.

^k *Literatuma Ukraina*, 27 December 1990. See also the statement issued by the secretariat of the parliamentary majority urging support for the Union treaty and that Ukraine's position be discussed without delay, in *Radyanska Ukraina*, 21 December 1990.

dum on the Union treaty. Even more worrying for the Union republics was that the Congress voted in principle to support the proposed draft Union treaty and, however, that the revamped federation of 'sovereign and equal' republics should retain the name Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The supporters of genuine sovereignty for the republics and dismantling of the empire, who were clearly in the minority in this conservative body, fought back. On 25 December, Eduard Kozin, an ethnic Russian deputy from the Sumy region in Eastern Ukraine, tabled a motion on behalf of the Interregional group calling on the deputies to vote by name on the formal recognition of the declarations of sovereignty and independence which the republics had made 'as the result of their free self-determination'. But when the proposal was put to the vote it was defeated by 933 votes to 419, with 266 abstentions.

The subsequent details of how individual deputies had voted provided a clearer idea of where people actually stood. It turned out that 49 deputies from Ukraine voted for recognizing the sovereignty of the republics, and 121 against, among them, the Ukrainian Party leader Hurenko, his deputy Hryhorii Kharchenko and the CPU's ideological secretary Ostrozhynsky, as well as Ivashko, Masol, Yelchenko, Oliinyk and Paton. A number of prominent Russian democrats or liberal figures also voted against (e.g. Sobchak, Zaslavskaya), or abstained (e.g. Sergei Stankevich).⁹

On the following day, before the implications of the stand which the leaders of the CPU had taken in the voting could be assessed, the second session of the Ukrainian parliament concluded its work. Having been able to pass a law on the militia and agree on a budget for 1991, it finished on a brighter note befitting the approaching Christmas season: the deputies voted to make Christmas, (celebrated according to the Orthodox calendar on 7 January), Easter and the Feast of the Holy Trinity public holidays.

In Moscow, the Congress of People's Deputies ended with the majority agreeing to the expansion of Gorbachev's presidential powers and the election of his candidate, Gennadii Yanaev, to the newly created position of deputy president. With his position apparently strengthened as a result of his shift rightward, the Soviet president declared in his televised New Year's message that 1991

See the list in *Literatuma Ukraina*, 17 January 1991.

would be the decisive year during which 'the fate' of the USSR would be sealed.

Sovereignty Communists versus imperial Communists

In actual fact, from the centre's perspective, the general situation in the Union was continuing to deteriorate. At the end of 1990 it was not even clear if the Soviet government would have a sufficient budget for the next year. The Russian Federation had announced that it would drastically reduce its contribution to the Union budget and Gorbachev was again forced to work out a compromise with Yeltsin. In Georgia and Moldova, ethnic minorities were defying the titular nation and appealing for support from the centre. And in the Baltic republics, defenders of the empire and their military supporters were also urging Gorbachev to intervene and restore order.

In Ukraine, the New Year and Christmas holidays were overshadowed by the unabating social and political tensions. While the Ukrainian government was preoccupied with dealing with problems connected with unregulated and soaring prices — described by Kravchuk as 'blatant banditism in the economy' —and the threat of new strikes in the Donbas, the offensive of the hard-line forces continued. Towards the end of December, Pavlychko was again accused in the press of having been a member of the post-war Ukrainian anti-Soviet resistance movement, and in Western Ukraine a recently erected monument to the nationalist leader Bandera was blown up. On 8 January, the student leader Donii was arrested after an old-style search of his apartment and the confiscation of 'incriminating' literature, and two days later Khmara was formerly charged with no less than seven alleged offences.

The 'critical' new year opened on a tragic and disturbing note. With the Western states preoccupied with forcing Iraq to end its occupation of Kuwait, Gorbachev stepped up his pressure against the Baltic republics and other recalcitrant areas. On the Orthodox Christmas Day, he caused alarm by announcing that paratroopers would be used to enforce the draft in the Baltic republics, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Western Ukraine. But it soon became clear that in the Baltic republics, at any rate, there was a more sinister aspect to the deployment of airborne troops.

On 10 January, the Soviet president accused Lithuania's leaders

of gross breaches of, and departures from', the Soviet constitution and of seeking 'to re-establish a bourgeois system that contradicted the interests of the people'. Either Lithuania followed Soviet law, he warned, or presidential rule from Moscow would be imposed. The following day, a surreptitious and self-proclaimed pro-Moscow 'Lithuanian National Salvation Committee' announced that it was taking control of the republic and Soviet troops seized a number of key buildings in Vilnius. On the morning of 13 January, Soviet soldiers backed by tanks attacked the television and radio centre in the Lithuanian capital killing fourteen people. Thousands of Lithuanian citizens formed a human barricade around their parliament and protests against what appeared to be the beginning of a classic Soviet-style military intervention began pouring in from all over the Soviet Union and the outside world.

Ukraine's democratic forces also promptly demonstrated their solidarity with the Lithuanians. On 13 January, Rukh's leader, Drach, sent a message of support to them and on the same day Radio Rossiya announced that Ukrainian blue and yellow flags had been visible at the protests in Moscow. Demonstrations were hurriedly organized in Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv and other cities.

The crackdown in Vilnius exposed the widening division in the CPU's ranks between Communists who were determined to defend the sovereignty of Ukraine, even if it meant defying the centre, and those for whom the preservation of the Union and of the CPSU remained the priority. It was demonstrated by the different positions taken by the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament and the CPU Central Committee as regards the events in Lithuania. On 14 January, the Presidium adopted a statement which, considering the fact that the majority of this body were Communists, was surprisingly forthright — though not as radical as a similar statement issued a few days earlier by Yeltsin — in its condemnation of the methods that the centre was resorting to in attempting to subdue the indomitable Baits. It stated that the Presidium considered 'inadmissible the use of military force on the territory of any republic in order to resolve internal political or inter-ethnic conflicts without the approval of a republic's legitimate organs of government'.¹⁰

What was also striking about the Presidium's reaction was the principled position adopted by its chairman, Kravchuk. Already on

12 January, after attending a meeting of the revamped Council of the Federation at which Yeltsin and other republican leaders had opposed the use of heavy-handed methods in the Baltic states, he told journalists in Moscow that he was against the use of force in Lithuania and that he considered its parliament to be the legitimate representative of the will of the Lithuanian people. He also stressed that he did not consider that draft evasion and the general situation in Western Ukraine warranted intervention by the military.¹¹ He was even more outspoken after the Presidium adopted its statement, telling Radio Kyiv on 15 January —the same day that *Radyanska Ukraina* published another broadside from Kryuchkov, this time effectively justifying the military actions in Lithuania —that Lithuania like Ukraine was a sovereign republic and that external interference in their affairs was impermissible, that the use of military force had to be condemned and human rights protected.

By contrast, Hurenko was to declare on 22 January, after the crisis in the Baltic republics had escalated, that the CPU's Secretariat considered that the 'dramatic events' were being exploited by 'Lithuanian, Latvian, Ukrainian and other national-chauvinists' to fan 'anti-Communist hysteria' and encourage attacks on the Soviet army. He denounced the slogan 'Today —Lithuania, tomorrow — Ukraine' as 'provocative'.¹²

During these tense days, there were other signs suggesting that a realignment of forces was taking place. Significantly, the parliament's new organ, the daily *Holos Ukrainy*, finally published the texts of the Russian-Ukrainian treaty and of Yeltsin's address to the Ukrainian parliament. Furthermore, Kravchuk also came out in defence of Pavlychko and Donii was released.

As the protests against the military actions in Vilnius mounted, Gorbachev denied responsibility for the bloodshed but, even if hard-line elements were indeed trying to force his hand, refused to call the Soviet military to order. Moreover, he unsuccessfully sought to suspend the law on freedom of the press and, after the appearance of a pro-Moscow Latvian 'Salvation Committee', failed to take steps to prevent the repetition of violence in Latvia. Yeltsin headed the spontaneous opposition to the crackdown. He infuriated Gorbachev and the military leaders by travelling to Tallinn and signing a joint

¹¹ *Molod Ukrainy*, 15 January 1991.

¹² Ukrinform-TASS, 22 January 1991.

statement of protest with the Baltic leaders. Moreover, he also appealed to Russian soldiers stationed in the Baltic republics not to use their arms against civilians and announced that the Russian Federation would have to consider creating a separate Russian army to defend its sovereignty. On 21 January, the Russian leader declared that it was imperative to 'stop the Union leadership's slide toward reaction' and for the republics to maintain a united front against the centre. In this connection, he returned to the idea of a treaty between Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and, this time, also Kazakhstan, as the best line of resistance.¹³

Nevertheless, on 20 January, the day on which about 100,000 people demonstrated in Moscow against the Gorbachev leadership, Soviet troops seized the Latvian Ministry of Internal Affairs, killing and injuring more civilians in the process. After this, Gorbachev either lost his nerve or realized that the opposition to the hard-line course of preserving the crumbling empire was too great. The pressure on the Baltic republics was reduced and the blame for what had happened placed on military units which had supposedly over-reacted and taken matters into their own hands.

The tragic events in the Baltic republics further increased the political polarization of society and aggravated relations between the centre and the sovereign republics. Conservatives and hard-liners felt betrayed by Gorbachev's retreat, while democrats and opponents of empire were outraged by the bloodshed and the Soviet leader's refusal to accept responsibility for what had occurred. In Ukraine, the use of force in the Baltic republics precipitated the crystallization of two divergent tendencies within the CPU—the 'sovereignty Communists', exemplified by Kravchuk, and the 'imperial Communists' led by Hurenko, as the two groups were now to be dubbed.

Seemingly undeterred by Gorbachev's new vacillation, on the eve of the new session of the Ukrainian parliament, at which both the anti-Union referendum and the preparation of a new Ukrainian constitution were expected to be discussed, the imperial Communists appeared determined to secure the political initiative for themselves even if meant taking on Kravchuk and the sovereignty Communists publicly. The opening salvo was fired on 24 January, when the CPU's deputy leader, Kharchenko, announced at a press

conference that the CPU Politburo had examined the draft, and as yet unpublished, concept of Ukraine's new constitution being prepared by the parliamentary Constitutional Commission, which was headed by Kravchuk, and had serious reservations about it. The working draft apparently did not reflect 'clearly' enough the 'Socialist choice of the people of Ukraine' and proposed dismantling the Soviet system and transforming Ukraine into a presidential and 'bourgeois' republic. Consequently, Kharchenko explained, the Central Committee of the CPU had decided to invite a group of specialists to prepare an alternative variant which was being submitted to the parliament.¹⁴

Kravchuk seems to have waited until his first official trip abroad as Ukraine's leader to deliver an implicit response. Addressing the Forty-seventh session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in early February, he stressed the republic's determination to break with its totalitarian past. He declared:

Frankly speaking, in our past our legislation also reflected international human rights standards. But their genuine exercise has become possible only now — now that we have set ourselves in earnest the task of building a state governed by the rule of law, effecting a true division of powers, and setting up an independent judiciary. This is not an easy task to fulfill. But we have embarked on this road and we will stay the course.¹⁵

Surprisingly, though, this important programmatic statement by the head of the Ukrainian parliament does not seem to have been reported by the Ukrainian media.

There was one other crucial issue facing the Ukrainian parliament - the status of Crimea. On 20 January, the local authorities in the peninsula had conducted their referendum in defiance of official Kyiv and the Crimean Tatar minority. The delicacy of the Crimean question and the powerlessness, unwillingness or inability of the leaders of the sovereign Ukrainian state to tackle it had been reflected in official Kyiv's passivity and reluctance even to challenge the constitutionality of the Crimean referendum. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Communist authorities in Crimea had secured an

Radio Kyiv, 24 January, and *Radyanska Ukraine!*, 29 January 1991.

'Statement by L.M. Kravchuk, President of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR at the Forty-seventh Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights', *Press Bulletin*, Permanent Mission of the Ukrainian SSR, Geneva, 6 February 1991.

overwhelming vote in favour of the re-establishment of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic 'as a subject of the USSR and a party to the Union treaty': 81.4% of the eligible voters participated, of whom 93.3% gave their endorsement. The result threatened Ukraine's territorial integrity and further complicated its position as regards the Union treaty.

Kravchuk steers an independent course

With Gorbachev determined to go ahead with the referendum on the future of the USSR—the USSR Supreme Soviet had on 16 January agreed that it would be held on 17 March—and the continuing fear of a possible attempted coup by disgruntled hard-liners, democratic and anti-imperial forces made new efforts to form a united front. Ukrainian democrats, most notably from the PDRU and DPU, played a prominent role in this respect. On 26-7 January representatives of forty-six democratic political parties and movements from ten Union republics, including 'Democratic Russia', Rukh, Sajudis and the Belarusian Popular Front, met in Kharkiv for the inaugural conference of the Congress of Democratic Forces. The majority of the organizations represented at the conference agreed that the main aim of the new coalition would be 'the peaceful liquidation of the totalitarian regime, the dismantling in a civilized way of imperial structures, the creation of sovereign democratic states' and the establishment of a 'Commonwealth of Independent States'. One of the leaders of the PDRU and chairman of the Ukrainian parliamentary Commission on Human Rights, Oleksandr Yemets, was elected interim head of the Congress' Consultative Council.¹⁶

A fresh attempt was also made to unite Ukraine's democratic forces. A coalition named 'Sovereign Democratic Ukraine', which included Rukh and the main democratic parties and organizations, was cobbled together. Its first action was to create a coordinating committee, 'Referendum—Sovereign Ukraine', to oversee the preparations for the referendum. Yemets was also elected to head this committee.¹⁷

¹⁶ For the programmatic documents adopted by the Congress, see *Litcratuma Ukraina*, 7 February 1991.

¹⁷ Radio Kyiv, 26 January and 14 February 1991.

There was also another significant movement towards consolidation, but on a regional basis, which, because of the precedent it was setting, proved highly controversial. On 8 February, Soviet television aired a report from the Transcarpathian region where representatives of the three regional councils of Western Ukraine had agreed to coordinate their activities and to convene a joint assembly. According to the head of the Lviv regional council, Chornovil, the decision had been based on the need for closer coordination in the economic sphere, the region's opposition to Ukraine's signing a new Union treaty and the 'slandorous' disinformation about the situation in Western Ukraine which he claimed the central and republican Party-controlled media were continuing to spread. The first meeting of the 'Galician Assembly', as it was called, was held in Lviv on 16 February. Although the Assembly was to go out of its way to affirm its commitment to the territorial unity of the Ukrainian state, its creation provided ammunition for those intent on playing up the differences between Western and Eastern Ukraine and was seen as a boon to centrifugal tendencies in Ukraine.

The crucial question, however, was how the rift between the sovereignty Communists and the imperial Communists would affect the alignment of forces within the parliament. On 11 February, though, the third session of the parliament got off to a relatively quiet and constructive start; with Kravchuk travelling to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the more sensitive issues were left until his return.

For the time being, attention was focused on another event — a conference organized in Kyiv by the People's Council, Rukh and other democratic organizations on Ukraine's security and the creation of a national army. The conference, whose participants ranged from the deputy head of the parliament, Hrynov, to the radical nationalist Shukhevych, issued appeals addressed to non-Ukrainians serving in the huge Soviet armed forces on Ukraine's territory (which were thought by some speakers to constitute up to 70% of the military personnel) and to the Ukrainian parliament. Asserting Ukraine's right to create its own 'depoliticized', professional army consisting of citizens of all ethnic backgrounds, the conference supported the creation of similar national armies in the other sovereign republics and the right of Soviet military personnel to move to their home republics if they chose and serve there. It also urged the Ukrainian parliament to restore the Ukrainian Ministry

of Defence and begin creating national armed forces and the conversion of military-industrial enterprises.¹⁸

For Ukraine's rival political forces, the approaching all-Union referendum was, however, of paramount concern and they concentrated on launching their respective campaigns. On 4 February, the People's Council and Rukh held a press conference at which their representatives denounced the referendum as 'unconstitutional', arguing that it represented an attempt by the centre to appeal over the heads of the leaders and parliaments of the Union republics — the subjects of the Union — directly to the population. It was for Ukraine, they argued, not the centre, to decide whether the republic should be independent or not. The following day, the Central Committee of the CPU issued an appeal reiterating its support for the idea of a Union treaty, expressing its readiness to accept the variant proposed by Gorbachev as its basis and urging the population of Ukraine to vote for a 'Sovereign Socialist Ukraine in a Renewed Union'.¹⁹

For his part, Kravchuk declared after his return from Switzerland that he was preparing his own alternative variant of a Union treaty. He again insisted that the new formation would have to be a genuine 'union of sovereign states' with 'a clear delineation of powers between the Union and the republics'. No one had 'the right to interfere in Ukraine's affairs', and if the republic were to give the centre 'any kinds of rights', this did not mean 'that it is forever'. He also announced that Shulha was in Moscow participating in the revision of the draft of the Union treaty which Gorbachev had proposed.²⁰

On 12, February Kravchuk successfully steered the parliament through a stormy debate about the status of Crimea and persuaded the majority to agree to the restoration of Crimean autonomy 'within the borders of the Ukrainian SSR'. The opponents, who included many of the opposition, argued that the Crimean referendum had been illegal and should not be recognized. Kravchuk, however, maintained that to ignore the wishes of the bulk of the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 and 4 February 1991. On 28 February, the Ukrainian parliament was to establish a new commission on the internal and external security of Ukraine headed by Vasyl Durdynets.

¹⁹ Ukrinform-TASS and Radio Kyiv, 4 and 5 February 1991.

²⁰ Radio Kyiv 11 February, and *Komsolskoe znamya*, 13 February 1991.

peninsula's population would undermine 'peace and understanding in Ukraine'. He expressed his confidence that the leaders of Crimea would abide by the Ukrainian constitution and not discriminate against any of the peninsula's national minorities, adding that in any case the Ukrainian parliament retained the right 'to correct' them if they violated the republic's laws. The head of the Ukrainian parliament was helped by the fact that the head of the Crimean regional soviet, Bagrov, sought to reassure the Ukrainian parliament that he and his colleagues were not questioning the peninsula's status as part of Ukraine.²¹

For the moment the Crimean crisis seemed to have been defused and the parliament shifted its attention to the highly charged issue of the all-Union referendum. Voters were to be asked to answer yes or no to the question: 'Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedoms of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?'

By now, though, Gorbachev's gamble was backfiring on him. The three Baltic republics, Georgia and Armenia had already refused to participate in the referendum, Moldova seemed poised to join them and the Russian parliament had decided to add its own question to the all-Union one. Moreover, on 9 February the Lithuanians had called Gorbachev's bluff by holding their own poll in which the overwhelming majority of the republic's eligible voters had come out in support of independence. Furthermore, while Hurenko on 4 February addressing the Central Committee of the CPSU in Moscow had urged the centre to pursue a firmer and more consistent policy in defence of the Union," representatives of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan had met in the Soviet capital to coordinate their approach toward the Union

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treaty."

Once again the rift between the sovereignty Communists and the imperial Communists was evident. The Presidium of the parliament criticized the wording of the official referendum question and proposed that a second question be asked alongside it: 'Do you consider it necessary that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

²¹ Radio Kyiv, 12 and 13 February 1991.

²² TASS, 4 February 1991.

²³ Radio Kyiv, 5 February 1991.

become a Union of Soviet sovereign states in which each people will decide its own fate?' Defenders of the CPU's line presented their own resolution insisting that voters be asked only the question formulated by the centre. The opposition remained resolutely opposed to the referendum. Neither of the two resolutions gathered enough support and, although the Group of 239 had clearly split, it appeared that there would be deadlock.

Kravchuk, however, proposed a compromise which in one masterful stroke pulled the rug from under the feet of the imperial Communists, turned the tables on the centre, placated the opposition and boosted his reputation as the defender of the republic's sovereignty. He argued that a Union was necessary, but one built on entirely new principles. Although the centre should have consulted the Union republics about the text of the question in its referendum, he recommended that the Ukrainian parliament 'rise above' this problem and leave the centre's question as it was. But on the other hand, he told the deputies, 'we cannot continue to remain in the position of servants'. He proposed that the parliament formulate an additional question to be asked in the form of a republican survey during the referendum which would clarify what type of a Union voters in Ukraine would be prepared to join. Therefore, instead of 'disrupting' the referendum, it would be 'conducted in such a way that our rights are charted and that we are not drawn into a war with the [USSR] Supreme Soviet and its powers'. To the dismay of the imperial Communists, Kravchuk's proposal was carried by a resounding 288 votes.⁴

While the parliamentary commissions got to work on the formulation of the additional question, the Constitutional Commission met to review the progress on the drafting of the new constitution. Once again, Kravchuk signalled his independence from the CPU's line. He declared that he was in favour of a compromise between a presidential and parliamentary form of government and a bicameral legislature. It was agreed that the Commission would present its final draft to the parliament in March.²⁵

On the following day, 15 February, Kravchuk reiterated his dissenting position on the Union treaty, referendum and other issues at a plenum of the Central Committee of the CPU, thereby making

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 and 14 February 1991.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 February 1991.

it clear that his role as head of the Ukrainian parliament took precedence over his position as a member of the CPU's Politburo. Significantly, the Ukrainian Party press failed to disclose what he actually said. *Izvcstiya*, however, commented cryptically that 'for the first time in recent years' the plenum witnessed 'differences of opinion within the republic's leadership regarding how to solve the present difficulties' and that Hurenko 'did not support L. Kravchuk's proposals'.²⁶

In the published version of Hurenko's speech, there was no direct attack against Kravchuk. But it was evident from the Ukrainian Party leader's tone and emphasis that his position differed markedly from the centrist (in the Ukrainian spectrum) and 'national Communist' stance which Kravchuk had adopted. Lashing out again at Rukh and 'extremist groups' in Ukraine, Hurenko conjured up the old-style image of a coordinated conspiracy against the USSR involving anti-Communist and separatist forces in the Baltic and other republics, hostile foreign radio broadcasts and Western 'patrons' providing instructions and financial and technical assistance. He argued that the 'most decisive' sphere of activity was to ensure that what he described as the 'referendum on the preservation of the USSR' produced the required result and paved the way for the signing of the new Union treaty. It was also imperative, he stressed, that the new Ukrainian constitution 'bolstered the Socialist nature of our social order'.

Other speakers joined Hurenko in criticizing the Gorbachev leadership for its lack of resoluteness. Some of them also voiced concern about waning Party discipline, complaining about Communist officials seeking to 'ingratiate' themselves with democrats and that the Communist majority in parliament was too passive. Once again, alarm was expressed about the situation in Western Ukraine and the local Party boss Sekretaryuk protested that the Kyiv authorities were allowing the leaders of the Lviv region to continue with their 'experiment of building anti-Communism in one *oblast*'. Expressing the CPU's anger and impatience with the central leadership, the plenum also addressed an appeal to Gorbachev urging him 'to fulfil his duty before the people, the country [and] future

generations' and take emergency measures to 'restore order in the state' and economy.²⁷

Clearly, however, the democratic authorities in Western Ukraine had long ceased to pay much attention to the anxiety and indignation which they were continuing to generate within the CPU. Rather, they were avidly following the example which the Baltic republics were continuing to set. In fact, at its first session, the Galician Assembly decided on 18 February that the Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions would add a third question to the all-Union referendum: 'Do you agree that Ukraine should become an independent state which itself decides all questions of internal and foreign policy, [and] safeguards the equal rights of citizens regardless of their national or religious background?' The presence at the session of the deputy head of the Ukrainian parliament, Plyushch, who spoke objectively about the record of the democratic authorities in Western Ukraine, underscored the CPU leadership's lack of control over the 'sovereign Communists'.²⁸

Kravchuk was wise enough not to challenge the Galician Assembly's decision. Instead, in the continuing heated debates in the parliament about the all-Union referendum, he condemned the 'nihilism' which the Congress of People's Deputies had shown towards the sovereignty of the Union republics, maintaining that 'to disregard' the declarations of sovereignty was a 'very dangerous policy'. But he also warned against rushing things and rupturing the complex system of economic ties that had developed over the decades. Independence was something, as he put it, 'that we will get to, but we still have a certain way to go'.²⁹

On 28 February, the Presidium of the parliament presented the proposed text of the republican survey in which the principle of a loose association of sovereign states superseded the idea of a renewed Soviet federation and in which Ukraine's sovereignty was reasserted. It was worded: 'Do you agree that Ukraine should be part of a union of Soviet sovereign states on the principles of the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Ukraine?' After a further intense debate, the parliament gave its approval by a convincing margin of 277 to 32.³¹

²⁷ *Radyanska Ukraina*, 16 and 20 February, and Ukrinform-TASS, 15 February 1991.

²⁸ Radio Kyiv, 18 February 1991.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20 February 1991.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1991. See also Roman Solchanyk, 'The Changing Political

The result was a humiliating defeat for the imperial Communists and a personal triumph for Kravchuk. It also attested to the implicit formation of a centrist coalition between the sovereignty Communists and the moderate national democrats who marginalized the militants on both sides of the political divide.

A few days later, Kravchuk's rising popularity as an emergent national leader was demonstrated by the cordial reception which he was given during his visit to Lviv. He, for his part, sounded a conciliatory and statesman-like note and called for unity in the struggle for the realization of Ukraine's sovereignty. It was essential, he argued, not to allow political or regional differences to undermine what would have to be a sustained joint effort 'if the republic was to become a genuinely independent state'.

Ukraine votes for sovereign statehood

As the all-Union referendum approached, the political situation in the USSR seemed to be reaching boiling point. On 19 February, appearing on a Soviet television programme, Yeltsin called for the Soviet president's resignation (Kravchuk dissociated himself from this position); five days later, tens of thousands of Muscovites demonstrated in support of the Russian leader; the parliament of the Russian Federation decided to ask Russian voters if they supported the idea of a popularly elected president of the RSFSR; ethnic conflict smouldered in Georgia's South Ossetian region; on 1 March miners, in the Donbas and other parts of the USSR began new strikes in support of higher wages; and, on 3 March, the inhabitants of Latvia and Estonia also voted overwhelmingly for independence.

Against this turbulent background, on 9 March, the Soviet media published a revised version of the proposed Union treaty which only eight of the fifteen Union republics, including Ukraine, had worked on. With time running out before the referendum, the latter had succeeded in extracting concessions from the centre. These included an acknowledgement of the republican declarations of sovereignty and of the right of the republics to establish their own diplomatic

Landscape in Ukraine', *Rcport on the USSR*, vol. 3, no. 24 (14 June 1991) pp. 20-3.

' Radio Kyiv, 4 March; *Molod Ukrainy*, 5 March, and *Radyanska Ukraina*, 6 March 1991.

and other ties with foreign states. Nevertheless, the proposed new Union still retained the essential elements of a federal state, complete with the supremacy of federal laws in a number of key spheres, a common citizenship, a federal budget and federal taxes. Yeltsin rejected it outright, while Kravchuk stated that he had 'reservations about practically every article' in the document.³²

During the final days before the all-Union referendum, the Gorbachev leadership used every means at its disposal, especially, the central media, to drum up support for a renewed Soviet federation. In a series of emotional appeals, it depicted the referendum as a choice between order, harmony and continued Soviet strength on the one hand, and chaos, bloodshed and disintegration on the other. When it came to the moment of truth, though, the defenders of the Soviet federation managed to achieve only a rather hollow victory and not the convincing triumph which they had hoped for. Although overall about 76% of those who participated in the referendum voted in the affirmative, this was only equivalent to about 58% of the USSR's eligible votes. Six Union republics boycotted the referendum, in several of the remainder the wording of the centre's question was changed, and in Russia and Ukraine support for the preservation of the Union was eclipsed by the voters' more enthusiastic endorsement of the supplementary republican assertions of sovereignty. The strongest support for a renewed federation came from the more backward or politically docile areas — rural Russia, the Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Embarrassingly for the Gorbachev leadership, barely half of the Muscovites who voted (only 34% of the eligible voters) supported the centre's position, and in Yeltsin's home city of Sverdlovsk almost 70% of the voters opposed it.

In Ukraine, voter turnout was high, with 80.2% of eligible voters participating in the all-Union referendum and 82.2% casting their vote in the republican poll. Some 70.5% of the voters, or 58% of the registered electorate, answered yes to the question posed in the all-Union referendum. But a significantly higher number of those who voted - 80.2% — answered in the affirmative in the republican survey, thereby simultaneously endorsing Ukraine's Declaration of Sovereignty and specifying the terms under which Ukraine would be prepared to join a new Union. Even in Crimea and the eastern

¹² *Hobs Ukminy*, 3 April 1991.

and southern regions, support for Ukraine's sovereignty was given by 83% upwards of those who voted, and only in Crimea did the vote for the preservation of the Union marginally surpass that of the backing for Ukrainian sovereignty (87.6% to 84.7%). Significantly, in the still largely Russified Kyiv, the majority actually rejected Gorbachev's proposal (only 44.6% voted in favour), while 78.2% endorsed the proposition presented in the republican poll. The vote in support of asserting republican sovereignty would have been even higher if many Western Ukrainians had not opposed or boycotted the republican survey in favour of voting for independence. In fact, in Western Ukraine, the majority of voters not only massively rejected the idea of a renewed Soviet federation but also voted overwhelmingly in their regional poll for Ukrainian independence.³³

With his hand strengthened by the results, Kravchuk seemed to be imbued with new confidence and forcefulness. The republican ballot, he told *The Independent*, had 'put Ukraine on the path of sovereignty and independence' and the results of the all-Union one had 'no meaning' for him. But he was also careful to point out that he remained committed to an evolutionary approach even if this meant distancing himself from his ally in the push for republican sovereignty—Yeltsin. 'I support Yeltsin on sovereignty', he explained, 'but I don't support Yeltsin's moves towards destabilizing the country. We have to avoid all actions that can lead to civil war'.

At his first major press conference after the voting, Kravchuk declared that the people of Ukraine had overwhelmingly made their choice and that there could be no turning back. They had come out in support of full-fledged sovereignty and Ukraine's participation, during what he described as a transitory period, in a loose union of sovereign states. The parliamentary leadership, he indicated, was determined to push ahead in this direction: the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament had appointed a working commission consisting of Yukhnovsky, Shulha and Kotsyuba to elaborate the republic's position on the new Union treaty in accordance with the results of the republican survey, and the Constitutional Commission

See the preliminary results provided by Ukrinform in *Robitnycha hazeta*, 20 March 1991. See also Roman Solchanyk, 'The Referendum in Ukraine: Preliminary Results', *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, no. 13 (29 March 1991), pp. 5-7.

See Susan Viet's interview with Kravchuk in *The Independent*, 23 March 1991.

was preparing to submit its draft concept of the new Ukrainian constitution to the parliament and convene a special conference at which this document and alternative variants could be discussed. In the clearest statement yet of his new credo, the head of the Ukrainian parliament, who at the same press conference pointed out that at the last plenum of the Central Committee of the CPU he had disagreed with the line it was prescribing, urged that the result 'should be the constitution of a new, democratic and free Ukraine enjoying full rights'.³⁵

Behind all this there was probably one other new factor which Kravchuk had taken into account — that sooner or later he would present himself as a candidate for the presidency of Ukraine and that he needed to broaden his support. Certainly this was the general trend in the USSR: Gorbachev had assumed the Soviet presidency and Yeltsin, having secured an endorsement from the Russian voters for the idea of a popularly elected president of the Russian Federation, was moving in this direction. When, on 29 March, the Constitutional Commission met again, after 'stormy' debate, it endorsed a draft concept of the new Ukrainian constitution which foresaw the establishment of a unitary presidential republic with a bicameral legislature.³⁶

Although after the all-Union referendum and the republican polls Ukraine's imperial Communists sought to put on a brave face, they also saw that the writing was on the wall. Instead of sticking to the hopeless cause of preserving the Soviet federation intact, Hurenko modified his line and at the beginning of April began telling workers in Kyiv that 'of course, some republics, like Georgia and Lithuania will leave the Union'. But he also invoked Gorbachev's claim that it was unthinkable for Ukraine to go its own way and undermine the rump Union. Nevertheless, even the Ukrainian Party boss now stated that he disagreed with the Soviet president on the need for the new Union treaty to be signed 'immediately'.

The results of the republican survey and the appearance of a new political centre in Ukrainian politics seemed to clear the air and usher in a more constructive period in the parliament's work. During the following weeks the parliament was able to pass laws on freedom of

³⁵ *Hobs Ukrainy*, 3 April 1991.

³⁶ Radio Kyiv, 30 March 1991.

³⁷ *Robotnycha hazcta*, 5 April 1991.

conscience and religious organizations, protection of the environment, the rehabilitation of victims of political repression, external economic activity, enterprises, banks and banking activity, protection of the consumer, and adopt resolutions on the establishment of a stabilization fund and recognizing different forms of land ownership. On 5 April, Khmara was freed from custody, although preparations for his trial continued. A week later, though, he was to be detained again when he sought to meet with the striking miners in the Donbas.

There was no let-up though in the general economic crisis and miners in Russia and eastern Ukraine were still continuing their strikes. Indeed, throughout the entire spring the seemingly intractable problem of placating Ukraine's disaffected miners, who were supported by democratic forces, was to sap the energy of the Ukrainian leadership. Without being able to improve their economic and living conditions, Kravchuk's appeals to the Donbas miners not to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty through their industrial action had little effect.

In early April, after the Soviet government introduced sharp price increases, the industrial protests spread, especially among Belarusian workers. In Russia, Yeltsin skilfully used the opportunity to boost his popularity. When at the beginning of April, the Russian parliament agreed to the direct election in June of an executive president of Russia, the portents for Gorbachev and the centre became even grimmer.

Laying the foundations of sovereign and democratic statehood

Although Gorbachev had sought to depict the results of the all-Union referendum as a victory which would accelerate the signing of a new Union treaty, in actual fact he was no longer able to paper over the cracks in the Soviet federation. On 19 April, during a visit to Japan, he signalled another shift in the Kremlin's position and his apparent new readiness to face up to political realities and seek a compromise with the Union republics. He announced that on his return to Moscow he would try to hammer out an agreement on the terms of the new Union treaty with the nine republics which had participated in the referendum.

By now, the fifteen Union republics had divided into three clusters. The six republics which had come out for independence

—Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova—had already begun to coordinate their activities. Ukraine belonged to the second informal coalition which was formed by the five largest republics—Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—who favoured a confederal arrangement and sought a 'union of states' as opposed to a 'union state'. The third cluster was composed of the four remaining republics: Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Kyrgyzstan, however, gravitated towards the second group, while Azerbaijan, still reeling from the effects of the prolonged Soviet pacification, remained an unknown factor.

It was perhaps not entirely fortuitous then that Gorbachev's announcement came a day after a consultative meeting in Kyiv of the representatives of the working groups on the Union treaty of the legislatures of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Convened on the initiative of the Ukrainian parliament, its purpose was to enable the second cluster of republics to work out a common negotiating position on the Union treaty. Among the points they agreed on was that only Union republics should be subjects of the new treaty and that they would henceforth refer to themselves as states; that it was the Union republics which invested their inhabitants with citizenship and not the Union; and, that the centre's prerogatives should be minimized.³⁸

On 23 April, with the strikes in different parts of the USSR still continuing and the situation becoming desperate, Gorbachev met in a government *dacha* in Novo Ogarevo outside Moscow with leaders of the nine republics which had participated in the referendum. Kravchuk, however, was absent—he was on an official visit to Germany—and Ukraine was represented by Fokin. In return for a number of major concessions, the Soviet president managed to obtain the agreement of the leaders of the Union republics to work together with him to stabilize the political and economic crisis in the USSR and to end the strikes. The ten signatories of the five-point deal produced by the meeting agreed that the signing of a new Union treaty by the 'sovereign states' was a top priority for overcoming the crisis. Within six months of the new treaty being

³⁸ Radio Kyiv, 18 April 1994. See also Roman Solchanyk, 'The Draft Union Treaty and the "Big Five"', *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, no. 18 (3 May 1991), pp. 16-18.

signed, a new Soviet constitution would be adopted and this would be followed by elections to 'the organs of power of the Union'. All the signatories with the exception of the Soviet president recognized the right of the remaining six Union republics to decide independently whether they would sign the new treaty, but they also made it clear that only those who did would get 'most favoured nation' status in the economic sphere. Yeltsin subsequently also revealed that Gorbachev had accepted that autonomous republics would not sign the Union treaty independently but as members of the delegation of the state which they were part of.

Although the 'nine plus one' agreement immediately lent itself to different interpretations by the centre and the Union republics, it was generally hailed as a major breakthrough. It eased the long-standing tensions between the centre and the Union republics, and especially between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. But the more sceptical critics, ranging from nationalists in Western Ukraine to imperial Communists, concluded that the agreement essentially amounted to a pact between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. In return for vague promises about a 'cardinal enhancement of the role of the Union republics', Gorbachev had won support for the unpopular anti-crisis programme of the new Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov and could once again present himself as the defender of order. On the other hand, 'Gorbachev would from now on be a political hostage not of the hard-liners, but of Yeltsin and his allies in the republics'.³⁹

Kravchuk was distinctly cautious about the Novo Ogarevo agreement. He welcomed the fact that finally there was 'agreement that the Union will be a union of sovereign states, that the centre of economic and political life should be transferred to the republics', but noted all the same that 'this statement has no juridical force'.⁴⁰

Rather than concentrate on the new Union treaty, the head of the Ukrainian parliament remained preoccupied with guiding the efforts being made to lay the foundations of Ukraine's sovereign and democratic statehood. Already, on 18 April, the Verkhovna Rada had agreed to a restructuring of the republican government and the

See Morrison, *Yeltsin*, pp. 253-8, and Roman Solchanyk, 'The Gorbachev-Yeltsin Pact and the New Union Treaty', *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3 (10 May 1991), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 May 1991.

replacement of the Council of Ministers by a Cabinet of Ministers headed by a prime minister. Fokin was endorsed in this position. On the same day, a three-day 'republican scientific-practical conference' on 'The Concept and Principles of a New Constitution of the Ukrainian SSR' had opened in Kyiv. It had seen the expected clash between representatives of the Constitutional Commission and Hurenko and other defenders of the CPU's line. The latter had spoken out against the 'de-ideologization of the constitution' and continued to insist that the new constitution embody the idea of 'the Socialist choice' and make clear that Ukraine intended 'remaining a member of a renewed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'.⁴¹

The areas of agreement and disagreement between the parliamentary majority and the opposition were again thrown into relief on 25 April when both camps delivered programmatic statements. The leader of the Communist majority, Oleksandr Moroz, criticized the Soviet government's anti-crisis programme and called on the republican authorities to propose their own variant; he also spoke of the need for 'constructive cooperation' for the purposes of stabilizing the political and economic situation in Ukraine and bolstering the republic's sovereignty. On the other hand, the People's Council called for the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, introduction of a national currency, adoption of a law on republican citizenship, and the 'de-participation' of the security, military and economic institutions on the republic's territory. Not only was an implicit working compromise arrived at, but also the moderates in both factions united to issue a strong rejoinder, proposed by the opposition, to the hard-line and imperial-minded 'Soyuz' (Union) faction in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies which had again called for the imposition of a state of emergency in order to restore order and save the Union. The statement adopted by the Ukrainian parliament condemned Soyuz's appeal as an attempt by extreme conservative forces to turn the clock back and return the USSR to the times of the 'administrative-repressive system'. In it, the Ukrainian parliament let it be known that it was dealing with the republic's problems and that it considered such

⁴¹ Radio Kyiv, 14-17, 22-3 May 1991; Roman Solchanyk, 'Ukraine Considers a New Republican Constitution', *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, no. 23 (7 June 1991), pp. 23-6.

calls as those of Soyuz to be an impermissible challenge to Ukraine's sovereignty.⁴²

That very evening, though, deputies and the Ukrainian public were given something else to think about by the coverage of Kravchuk's visit to Bonn by the Central Soviet television. There had already been frequent complaints about what many in Ukraine considered to be the central media's insensitive or biased handling of Ukrainian topics and, because Ukrainian television did not have any correspondents based abroad, the republic's dependence on central Soviet television's coverage of events in the outside world. Now, at this delicate stage of the tug of war between the old imperial centre and a republic seeking to assert its sovereignty, Soviet television's main evening news programme, *Vremya*, broadcast a report from Bonn in which its correspondent, Kondratev, mocked the fact that at the meeting with the German president and foreign minister, the Ukrainian side had preferred to use Ukrainian, rather than Russian. He invited viewers to imagine what would happen if a Bavarian delegation came to the USSR and insisted on conducting talks in the 'Bavarian dialect'. Kravchuk was outraged and his immediate reaction showed it. He told Radio Liberty's Ukrainian Service — the very 'enemy voice' which he as an ideological functionary had combated for years — that he had instructed Foreign Minister Zlenko, who was accompanying him, to send a telegram to the Soviet television authorities stressing that 'we will never let such things by, especially lies and insinuations'.⁴³

While Ukraine's parliamentary factions were preparing for the next round of the struggle over the constitution, Kravchuk and Fokin were at least given a respite from the industrial unrest plaguing the republic and the USSR at large when the miners decided to end their strikes. Armed with the concessions which Gorbachev had made in Novo Ogarevo, Yeltsin was able to transfer control of the mines in Russia from the centre to the republic (something Ukraine

⁴² Radio Kyiv and Ukrinform-TASS, 25 April 1991.

⁴³ In fact, it was the author who interviewed Kravchuk in Munich about this incident for Radio Liberty. I recall how anxious Kravchuk and members of his delegation were for the interview to be broadcast to Ukraine as soon as possible in order, as they put it, 'to break the centre's monopolistic hold over the information sphere'. After the interview was broadcast, several newspapers in Ukraine published excerpts from it. See, for instance, *Za vilnu Ukrainu* (Lviv), 30 April, and *Litemtuma Ukraina*, 9 May 1991.

had already done, at least nominally) and thereby persuade the Russian miners to return to work. In early May, Ukraine's miners also began to return to work after their nine-week-old strike. But the retreat by the Donbas miners had its price. At the beginning of the month, the Ukrainian government and the Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Ukraine concluded an agreement on social protection: it committed the increasingly hard-pressed Ukrainian authorities to introduce a new minimum living standard, establish wage indexation linked to price rises, and, in case of a worsening of supplies, to undertake to distribute goods.⁴⁴ —

The battle over the new constitution and the future political profile of the Ukrainian state was resumed on 14 May when, on behalf of the Constitutional Commission, Kravchuk presented its draft concept to the parliament for its consideration. It was supported in principle by the opposition (which insisted that references to Ukraine's joining a new Union be deleted), but drew a protest from Hurenko, who claimed that it had not taken into account the CPU's position and the results of the all-Union referendum. The subsequent heated debates revealed that although the Communist majority may not have been united on all issues, when it came to defending the CPU's cardinal interests, namely preserving the social and political order in Ukraine, and even the name 'the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic', it was still a cohesive enough and powerful force. Indeed, it was thanks in no small measure to Kravchuk's political skills that a vote of no confidence in the work of the Constitutional Commission was averted.

During a pause in the debate, the president of Croatia, Frano Tudjman, paid an official visit to Ukraine. He was probably the first foreign leader to speak openly of the independence which he said both his republic and Ukraine were seeking. Despite the display of mutual solidarity, Kravchuk showed more caution and restricted himself to speaking, in public at any rate, about the analogous quest of the two republics for sovereign statehood within a union of sovereign states.⁴⁵

With the Communist majority threatening to undo the proposals to move ahead with the political transformation of the Ukrainian state, on 23 May Yemets proposed on behalf of the People's Council

Radio Moscow, 1 May 1991.

Radio Kyiv, 20 and 21 May 1991.

that a referendum be held in which the population of Ukraine would choose between the different concepts of the constitution being proposed by the majority and the minority. The deputies decided instead that the Working Commission would 'refine' the draft concept by June and submit it again to the parliament but that the most sensitive questions concerning the name of the state, the state symbols, the system of government and the 'socialist choice' would have to be put to a referendum. Although the struggle over the constitution still remained undecided, Kravchuk and the supporters of change were left with at least some grounds for satisfaction, not least of which being the fact that the idea of direct presidential elections was approved and that the working title of the draft concept was designated 'Constitution of Ukraine'.⁴⁶

The following day, Kravchuk flew to Moscow to take part in negotiations on the new Union treaty which were again held in Novo Ogarevo. According to his legal assistant, Ivan Tymchenko, who accompanied him to the Soviet capital, the leaders of the Union republics and autonomous republics were whisked off from the Kremlin to Novo Ogarevo without their aides but Gorbachev had an entire team of experts to assist him. Tymchenko, however, had prepared a critique of Gorbachev's draft Union treaty for Kravchuk as well as an alternative variant for the latter to work from. This helped the Ukrainian leader to maintain a clear and well-reasoned position and thereby not only to withstand the Soviet leader's pressure to rush ahead with the conclusion of a new Union treaty but also to influence the leaders of some of the other Union republics.⁴⁷

On his return to Kyiv, Kravchuk gave a major interview on Ukrainian television about how the Novo Ogarevo process was progressing and the position which he had adopted. Unlike the upbeat appraisals of the second meeting given by Gorbachev and Yeltsin, who both expressed confidence that an agreed draft Union treaty would be ready by the following month, the Ukrainian leader emphasized that only the principles on which the new treaty should be based were being discussed and that the preparation of an acceptable document still required considerable effort and time.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-17, 22-23 May 1991, and Solchanyk, 'Ukraine Considers a New Republican Constitution'.

Author's interview with Tymchenko.

There was 'still insufficient agreement on many key questions' and it would be 'unrealistic' to attempt to 'rush' things, he maintained. For instance, the issue of the ownership of property needed to be resolved before a new treaty could be considered. Here, indicating the kind of timeframe which he envisioned, Kravchuk recommended that the Ukrainian parliament and government should work out 'by, say, 1 October', the questions connected with establishing the republic's jurisdiction over the resources and assets on its territory. Insisting on a clear delineation of powers between the centre and the republics in the treaty, he also 'categorically opposed' the idea of any spheres of joint jurisdiction.

Kravchuk also revealed that he and some of the other republican leaders had successfully pressed for the 'de-ideologization' of the treaty, and for it to be called the 'Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States'. In fact, the head of the Ukrainian parliament used this occasion to stress publicly once again that, although he remained a member of the Politburo of the CPU, he had to represent the interests of the entire people of Ukraine and not any one political party. He also revealed that preliminary agreement had also been reached that the new union would be open-ended and that not all states would join it at once. Kravchuk said he had opposed participation in the new treaty of existing Soviet institutions, such as the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and had insisted that only the states joining the new union and the president of the USSR, representing the centre, could be parties to it. He was also able to reassure his Ukrainian audience that Bagrov had stated in Novo Ogarevo that he was confident that the Supreme Soviet of the Crimean Autonomous SSR would agree to Crimea signing the new treaty as part of the delegation of Ukraine.

There was, however, one inconsistent note in the interview: the Ukrainian leader stated that he leaned towards the idea that the 'new formation of sovereign states' should be a 'federative state union' based 'solely on the powers which will be delegated to it'. It is unclear why at this stage he spoke of the future union as a federation rather than a confederation or commonwealth, something which seemed to contradict the outcome of March's republican poll.⁴⁸ This only fuelled suspicion and fears on the part of the opponents of a

⁴⁸ The interview was published in *Holos Ukmyny* on 29 May 1991.

revamped Union, who had been galvanized by the Novo Ogarevo process and were busy organizing new protests.

A few days later, *he Monde* published its own interview with the Ukrainian leader in which he provided some indications about his developing political strategy. 'We must first adopt the new constitution next January', he explained, then adopt a law on a multi-party system, after which, in about April or May of 1992, parliamentary and presidential elections could be held in Ukraine. Because of the uncertain political situation and in order 'to defend Ukraine's interests', it might, however, become 'urgently necessary to consolidate the executive' before then by electing 'a strong president by universal suffrage'. 'I hope to be president', Kravchuk confirmed. What would the sovereign Ukrainian state be called, he was asked. 'Ukraine! Without epithets!' he declared. 'And not the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Epithets pass, but Ukraine remains.'⁴⁹

The Central authorities, however, continued to maintain the semblance that the new Union treaty was just around the corner. The next meeting in the Novo Ogarevo process was held on 3 June, after which the chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Anatolii Lukyanov, declared that substantial progress had been made and that it had been agreed that the ail-Union parliament would retain its powers until the new Union organs were formed.⁵⁰ The pressure from the centre for the new Union treaty to be concluded as soon as possible was stepped up after Gorbachev was formally invited on 13 June for talks with the leaders of the 'Group of Seven' (G7) leading industrial states at their forthcoming summit in mid-July in London. Thus, at a third meeting in Novo Ogarevo on 17 June to discuss the Union treaty, which was held two days after Yeltsin was elected president of the Russian Federation, a working draft of the treaty was finally approved and, after being presented to the public the following day by the Soviet president, was sent to the parliaments of the Union republics for their consideration.

Kravchuk, who was preoccupied during this period with crucial parliamentary work connected with laying the foundations of Ukraine's sovereign and democratic statehood, especially working out a compromise on the concept of the new Ukrainian constitution, remained relatively unforthcoming about the new Union

⁴⁹ *Le Monde*, 29 May 1991.

⁵⁰ TASS, 5 June 1991.

treaty. On 7 June, the Verkhovna Rada had quietly passed a law asserting the republic's jurisdiction over all-Union enterprises and organizations on the republic's territory. A week later, it was announced that the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament had created a new council of Ukrainian and foreign advisers to advise on constitutional law, privatization, banking and taxation. Among its members was the Geneva-based management specialist Bohdan Hawrylyshyn and the Hungarian-American millionaire financier and philanthropist, George Soros.⁵¹ A few days later, the Ukrainian parliament voted to mark the first anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty by designating it as 'Ukraine's Independence Day' and by making it a public holiday.⁵²

Kravchuk scored another significant domestic victory when, on 19 June, the Ukrainian parliament approved without much trouble the revised concept of the new Ukrainian constitution. Although it included the reference to the 'Socialist choice' which the majority had insisted on, the document retained most of the democratic and organizational principles and provisions that the Constitutional Commission and the opposition had supported. It envisaged a democratic and unitary presidential republic with a unicameral professional parliament, an independent judiciary and the government consisting of a prime minister nominated by the president and endorsed by the parliament, and a cabinet of ministers.⁵³

At this juncture, Kravchuk also informed the parliament that although a new draft of the Union treaty had been submitted to the parliaments of the Union republics, there was still disagreement on the 'structure and organs of power of the new Union' as well as the system of taxation. The Ukrainian leader explained to the *Financial Times* that he had 'initialled the draft treaty so it could be passed to its [Ukraine's] parliament for discussion; there was no commitment to sign it at the end of the day'. He also declared that Ukraine would not sign any such treaty until 'sovereignty is enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution' and that this would take 'until the year-end at least'.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ukrinform-TASS, 7 June, and Radio Kyiv, 13 June 1991.

⁵² Radio Kyiv, 18 June 1991.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1991. The text of the concept was published in *Radyanska Ukraina*, 3 July 1991.

⁵⁴ See Chrystia Freeland's report about Kravchuk in the *Financial Times*, 20 June 1991.

In the meantime, Ukraine's national democratic forces were stepping up their campaign against the new Union treaty but were unable to overcome their own internal rivalries and to cement a genuinely solid coalition. At the beginning of June, for instance, the URP held its second congress. It saw unpleasant exchanges between moderates and radicals and Khmara's militancy and brusqueness apparently caused Chornovil to have a heart attack.⁵⁵

Ukraine sticks to its chosen path

Against the background of widespread protests organized by Rukh and its allies against the signing of a new Union treaty, and with the Union of Ukrainian Students threatening to begin a new protest hunger strike outside the legislature building, on 27 June the Verkhovna Rada discussed the draft which had emerged from the Novo Ogarevo process. By now, however, the parliaments of seven of the nine Union republics which had participated in the negotiations with the centre had approved the draft, thus intensifying the pressure on the Ukrainian and Russian parliaments to make up their minds.

Although the ardent exchanges in the Ukrainian parliament again brought into sharp relief the polarization on this issue, it emerged that even Hurenko and other supporters of the Union treaty had reservations about the draft. Deputies were concerned that the prospective new 'Union of Soviet Sovereign States' was envisaged as a '*sovereign federative democratic state*' [author's emphasis], which would be a subject of international law. This, and the division of powers proposed in the draft appeared to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty.

Kravchuk, who during an interval went outside to reassure demonstrators that the parliament would not make any hasty decision, was instrumental in producing a compromise intended to buy more time. He reiterated that the people of Ukraine had indicated in the republican poll that they wanted to live in a union of sovereign states but noted that the proposed draft treaty still contained numerous provisions which were unacceptable for Ukraine and would require further work. Somewhat unexpectedly, no less than 345 deputies voted to postpone taking any decision on the

⁵⁵ Haran, *To Kill the Dragon*, pp. 177-8.

draft until it had been studied more closely and brought into line with Ukraine's Declaration of Sovereignty. They decided to give the parliamentary commissions until 1 September to prepare their comments and changes, after which a parliamentary working group would by 15 September complete the work and submit a revised draft to the new session of the parliament.⁵⁶

This emphatic decision by the Ukrainian parliament to put the interests of the republic first upset Gorbachev's hopes to have a Union treaty signed before mid-July and, suddenly and dramatically, brought home what Kravchuk had already indicated, that it was unlikely that Ukraine would be prepared to sign a new Union treaty in the foreseeable future. When, in early July, the Russian parliament approved in principle the draft Union treaty, Ukraine remained the only Union republic which had participated in the Novo Ogarevo process still to be biding its time.

During the first week of July, which saw the final days of the work of the second session of the parliament, issues connected with enhancing Ukraine's sovereignty continued to dominate. The deputies approved a broad republican anti-crisis programme prepared by Fokin's government and adopted legislation creating the institution of a popularly elected executive president. The presidential election was scheduled for 1 December 1991. Within days the URP was to nominate Lukyanenko as its candidate and by the end of the month some of the more radical elements within Rukh's leadership, as well as the Coordinating Council of the Galician Council, were to propose Chornovil.

On 5 July, Gorbachev unexpectedly held a meeting in Kyiv with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. This angered many of the Ukrainian deputies who, in view of the fact that the Soviet president had not informed the Ukrainian parliament and government in advance, considered that he had shown total disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty. Pavlychko, the head of the parliamentary foreign relations commission told the parliament that it 'ought to draw serious lessons' from what had happened and strive to ensure that 'the —for the time being — Union president and foreign politicians

⁵⁶ Radio Kyiv, 27 and 28 June 1991; Ukrinform-TASS, 27 June 1991; and, *Litcratuma Ukraina*, 4 July 1991. See also Roman Solchanyk, 'Ukraine and the Union Treaty', *Reports on the USSR*, vol. 3, no. 30 (26 July 1991), pp. 22-4.

take into account our Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Ukraine and our desire to head towards the complete independence of the Ukrainian state.¹⁵⁷

The events of the next few weeks were to demonstrate, though, that this still remained a case of easier said than done. The first anniversary of Ukraine's Declaration of Sovereignty was officially celebrated with considerable pride and fanfare. Kravchuk, with one eye no doubt on the forthcoming presidential contest, took up the mantle of national leader and statesman. Speaking at a ceremonial meeting on 13 July, he pointed out that Ukraine had already had two chances during its history 'to renew its statehood' — during Khmelnytsky's 'War of Liberation' in the middle of the seventeenth century and 'after the revolution of 1917 —but for various reasons these had failed. 'Right now, we have another, and it seems a realistic, opportunity to make our dream come true', he declared.

Our generation bears on its shoulders the burden of tasks which our ancestors were unable to complete and of responsibility before our successors. We will be worthy of this responsibility and not retreat before any challenges. Let us unite our forces in the historic work for the glory of Ukraine and the well-being and flourishing of its people.

Reviewing what had been achieved during the past year, Kravchuk noted that during a relatively short, but complex, period considerable progress had been made towards establishing Ukraine as a democratic state based on the rule of law, the division of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches, a multi-party system and respect for the rights of national minorities. He pointed out that during the past year the Ukrainian parliament had 'adopted 220 legal acts, including 46 laws, relating to the 'constitutional foundations' of Ukraine's statehood', 'democracy', 'economic independence' and 'the transition to a market economy'. In the sphere of foreign relations, 'a profound rethinking' and reorientation of Ukraine's foreign policy had taken place and produced 'positive results' in the form of bilateral treaties with other states, particularly its neighbours, Russia, Belarus, Poland and Hungary, visits to Kyiv by foreign leaders, the opening in Kyiv of foreign

consulates and visits to Hungary, Switzerland and Germany by the head of the Ukrainian parliament.⁵⁸

Kravchuk's claims about the progress which democracy was making in Ukraine were marred, however, when on 18 July Khmara was detained yet again. This time he was brutally seized from his hotel room in central Kyiv by riot police in full view of foreign journalists and democratic deputies. Kravchuk's role, if any, in this incident remains unknown, but it is not inconceivable that the continuing political farce with Khmara was now being used by hard-liners as a way not only of getting even with the radical deputy but of complicating matters for Kravchuk and maintaining political tensions.

During the second half of July, as Yeltsin and leaders of other Union republics prepared to sign the new Union treaty and worked out further compromises with Gorbachev, Ukraine continued to stand its ground. The Russian leader, who on 20 July had taken the bold step of 'depoliticizing' Russia's state agencies by banning all political party activity within them, managed to extract further concessions from Gorbachev over taxation powers. Unlike Kravchuk, Yeltsin and Nazarbaev apparently felt that they had secured enough concessions from the centre and that, given the continuing economic difficulties and rumblings among the conservatives and hard-liners, there was no point in delaying the signing of the Union treaty any further.

On 23 July, a group of militant defenders of the empire, including General Valentin Varennikov, Commander-in-Chief of Ground Forces, and Colonel General Boris Gromov, issued an unambiguous warning in the conservative *Sovetskaya Rossiya*: they advocated a military coup to prevent the disintegration of the Union. Ukraine's hard-liners also made their feeling known. Towards the end of July, speaking at a plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Hurenko's deputy, Kharchenko, warned that 'In our conditions, feelings of national separatism, or so called national communism, pose a special danger'.⁵⁹ Soon afterwards, the Secretariat of the CPU sent a letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party stating that Ukraine's Communists and workers condemned

⁵⁸ *Hobs Ukrainy*, 14 July 1991.

⁵⁹ Haran, *To Kill the Dragon*, pp. 180 and 185.

Yeltsin's ban on the activity of political parties within Russia's state structures and organizations.

A hastily arranged US-Soviet summit meeting in Moscow at the end of July temporarily detracted attention away from the Union treaty. The news that US President George Bush would also visit Kyiv on his way home from Moscow was greeted in Ukraine as a major boost for the republic's sovereignty. Bush also met briefly in Moscow with Yeltsin and Nazarbaev, but his unexpected arrival in Kyiv seemed to bestow international recognition on the republic's assertion of its sovereignty and to hold out the exciting prospect of direct bilateral ties with the world's most powerful state.

Leaders of the Ukraine's democratic forces, however, remembered their disappointment with the position which British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had taken a year earlier, and noting that the American president's programme did not include any meetings with the leaders of the opposition, kept their expectations at a modest level. Drach, for instance, told a press conference on the eve of the visit that Bush appeared to be 'hypnotized by Gorbachev'. 'We welcome George Bush as president of the democratic state — the USA,' he explained, 'but we do not accept him as Moscow's agitator for the Union treaty'.⁶⁰

On 1 August, the American president was welcomed by thousands of enthusiastic Ukrainians waving flowers, blue and yellow and American flags, and placards declaring support for Ukrainian independence or opposition to the Union treaty. In his welcoming remarks, Kravchuk told his guest that Ukraine had embarked on 'the path towards democracy, a market economy and sovereignty' and, by pursuing a gradualist approach, was attempting to safeguard peace, stability and ethnic harmony on its territory. He expressed confidence that 'the USA, which adopted the Declaration of Independence, which was one of the first to declare before the entire world the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, knows the value of real sovereignty and will understand our desire for freedom for the people of Ukraine'. The Ukrainian leader also said that he hoped that the visit would pave the way for the establishment of direct relations and economic ties between the United States and Ukraine.⁶¹

(⁶⁰ Radio Kyiv, 1 August 1991.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

In his celebrated 'Chicken Kyiv' speech (as the American press subsequently dubbed it) to the Ukrainian parliament on 1 August, President Bush declared that the United States would not try to 'choose between winners and losers in political competitions . . . between republics and the centre' or 'meddle in your internal affairs'. Nevertheless, he proceeded to urge Ukraine to back the Soviet president's efforts to hold the Soviet state together. 'The nine plus one agreement', he argued, 'holds forth the hope that republics will combine greater autonomy with greater voluntary interaction — political, social, cultural and economic — rather than pursuing the hopeless [the original text used 'suicidal' instead of 'hopeless'] course of isolation'. He also issued a stern warning, the first part of which might indeed have rankled Communist diehards in the chamber, but the second part of which seemed inappropriate and insensitive considering the efforts which both the Ukrainian leadership and the democratic opposition had made to avoid ethnic discord in the republic. 'Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism', he stated. 'They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred.' Stating that Washington appreciated 'the new realities of life in the USSR' and wanted 'good relations — improved relations with the Republics', the American president, who had just signed a major US-Soviet treaty limiting strategic weapons (START) in Moscow, left no doubt who his administration would continue to give priority to: 'We will maintain the strongest possible relationship with the Soviet Government of President Gorbachev.'⁶²

Unlike many others, Kravchuk did not publicly express any disappointment with the Bush visit. Instead, speaking at Kyiv airport after the American president's departure, he said that the lesson to be drawn was that Ukraine had to define more clearly the parameters of its sovereignty and insist that the precondition for its participation in the new Union be the recognition of its rights as a sovereign state, including its right to be 'the subject of international law'. He explained somewhat obliquely that foreign leaders, including President Bush, had all told him that as soon as 'you [that is, Ukraine] dot all your i's and decide who you are and where you are going — we will immediately enter into normal international relations with

⁶² 'Text of Remarks by the President in Address to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic', Kyiv, 1 August 1991.

you'. Kravchuk also announced that the American president had invited him to visit the United States and that he had accepted.⁶³

Later that same day, Gorbachev announced on Soviet television that the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan would sign the new Union treaty on 20 August, with other republics following later. But on 6 August, Plyushch, who had been Ukraine's 'observer' at the latest round of negotiations in Novo Ogarevo at the end of July, challenged Gorbachev's claims that all the main issues connected with the new Union treaty had now been resolved. In an interview on Ukrainian television, he also indicated that Ukraine had been criticized for its stand by the leaders of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, saying they had accused the republic of trying to safeguard its higher standard of living at the expense of the Central Asian states.⁶⁴

Yeltsin was later to reveal in his memoirs about this period that after the Ukrainian parliament postponed its decision on the Union treaty, he, Gorbachev and Nazarbaev in fact held unofficial and confidential meetings to discuss the Union treaty and other 'urgent issues'. At their private consultations in Novo Ogarevo on 29 July, Yeltsin had urged the Soviet president to remove the heads of the KGB and Soviet armed forces, Vladimir Kryuchkov and Dmitry Yazov, and to replace the unpopular Soviet prime minister, Pavlov, with Nazarbaev. According to Yeltsin, Gorbachev had agreed that Kryuchkov, Pugo and Pavlov would be replaced after the signing of the Union treaty. From this account, it would appear that Yeltsin and Gorbachev had been drawing closer to one another while Kravchuk, because of his position on the Union treaty, had maintained his distance. It was now not just a question of a pact between the Soviet and Russian leaders: a powerful new triumvirate, or 'threesome', as Yeltsin referred to it, was forming behind the scenes and assuming responsibility for the fate of the Union.⁶⁵

With Yeltsin publicly defending his decision to sign the new Union treaty from criticism from the likes of democrats such as Sakharov's widow, Yelena Bonner, and Afanasev, Ukraine's leaders remained united in their determination to defend the republic's sovereign statehood. In mid-August, Kravchuk met with Gor-

⁶³ Radio Kyiv, 2 August 1991.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1991.

⁶⁵ Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia*, New York, 1994, pp. 38-9.

bachev while the two were on holiday in Crimea and, as the Ukrainian leader later recounted, ended up explaining yet again to the Soviet leader that his sovereign republic still found the terms of the new Union treaty to be unacceptable. Nevertheless, perhaps because of his tacit understanding with Yeltsin and Nazarbaev, the Soviet president had seemed quite confident and had implicitly challenged Kravchuk's right to speak on behalf of all of Ukraine, reminding him that Hurenko and the Central Committee of the CPU were for the Union treaty.⁶⁶ With a week to go before the signing of the Union treaty, though, the resolute position of Ukraine's leaders was confirmed by Hrynov, who informed journalists that 'Neither Fokin, Kravchuk, nor I are ready to say on what terms we will, and if we will, sign the Union treaty. But the fact that today it contradicts our Declaration about our sovereignty is incontrovertible.'⁶⁷

Certainly, in mid-August 1991, it seemed that Ukraine's sovereignty and preparations for the republican presidential elections were of greater concern than joining any revamped rump Union. The building blocks for Ukraine's statehood were being put in place one by one. For instance, even in the sensitive defence and security spheres things were also moving forward: the parliamentary commission on the internal and external security of Ukraine had been transformed into a commission on defence and state security; the republic's new minister for the military industry and conversion, Viktor Antonov, had let it be known that Ukraine was getting ready to take over the defence industry on its territory; at the end of July, Rukh convened a meeting in Kyiv of supporters of the creation of a national army, which became the founding congress of a new patriotic pressure group —the Union of Officers of Ukraine,⁶⁸ and, public discussion about the future of the Soviet nuclear weapons deployed on the territory of sovereign Ukraine was also beginning.⁶⁹

See Kravchuk's description of his last meeting with Gorbachev in the first part of the long interview which he gave to the chief editor of *Kievskie novosti*, Sergei Kichigin. It was serialized under the heading 'Poslednie dni imperii . . . pervye gody nadezhdy' [The Last Days of the Empire ... the First Days of Hope], *Kievskie vedomosti*, 23 April 1994.

'Vesti', Russian television, 15 August 1991.

For a useful account of the initial efforts in support of the creation of a national army, see A.M. Rusnachenko, *Na shlyakhu do natsionalnoi armii (1989-1991)* [On the Path to a National Army (1989-1991)], Kyiv, 1992.

Furthermore, the parliament was preparing a republican law on citizenship (the draft of which the ever vigilant Heorhii Kryuchkov attacked in the pages of *Radyanska Ukraina* on 16 August), the government was contemplating introducing a national currency, a republican customs system was being established, and the Ukrainian foreign ministry was continuing to assert the republic's new sovereignty in foreign affairs. Thus, regardless of whatever Gorbachev, or for that matter Yeltsin also, might have thought about the prospects for a new looser Union, Ukraine appeared to be set on a course towards independence.

For example, on 7 August Radio Kyiv aired a discussion on this theme with the publicist and representative of the Green Party, Serhii Hrabovsky.