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INDEPENDENCE AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE U.S.S.R.

'Mortal danger': Ukraine and the attempted coup in Moscow

On the very eve of the signing of the new Union treaty the hard-liners within the Soviet leadership attempted to seize power. Gorbachev, who was vacationing in Crimea, was placed under house arrest and isolated. On the morning of Monday, 19 August 1991, the official media in Moscow announced that the Soviet president was unable 'for reasons of health, to carry out his duties' and that his deputy, Yanayev, was assuming presidential responsibilities. They also announced that a state of emergency was being introduced in certain parts of the USSR for six months and that the country would be governed by an eight-man State Committee for the State Emergency in the USSR (better known in the USSR by its Russian acronym as the GKChP - for *Gosudarstvenniy komitet po chrezvychainomu polozheniyu v SSSR*), headed by Yanayev. The plotters, or 'putschists' as they were dubbed, included the powerful heads of the Soviet security and defence ministries, KGB chief Kryuchkov, Defence Minister Yazov, Minister of Internal Affairs Pugo, as well as Soviet Prime Minister Pavlov and Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Lukyanov, who was not formally a member of the GKChP.

During the dramatic few days before the attempted coup was foiled by the Russian democratic forces loyal to President Boris Yeltsin, the fragility of the sovereignty of the republics was exposed and the fate of the peoples of the USSR hung in the balance. The action was largely restricted to Moscow where, as the putschists were sending in tanks and troops, Yeltsin called on the population to defend democracy and assumed the leadership of the resistance. The reaction to the attempted coup was varied: only the leaders of the Baltic and Moldovan republics promptly condemned it, while most,

including Kravchuk and Nazarbaev, appear to have preferred to wait and see who would come out on top in Moscow.

Once the coup had failed, Kravchuk, Hurenko, Deputy Prime Minister Masyk, and other leading Ukrainian Communist figures who were accused of having sat on the fence or supported the putschists, sought to vindicate themselves. In view of some of the enduring inconsistencies and gaps in the accounts of what occurred, it still remains unclear what was covered up and what degree of *ex post facto* embellishment there was.' One thing is certain, though: during the crucial first two days, Kravchuk and his fellow sovereignty Communists did not display the courage and resoluteness which they had showed at the beginning of the year when Lithuania had been threatened, and it was left to the republic's democratic forces to manifest solidarity with Yeltsin and Russia's defenders of democracy.

Kravchuk and Hurenko were both to claim that they learned about the attempted coup in the early morning of 19 August. Kravchuk was to tell the Verkhovna Rada on 24 August that he had been awoken by a telephone call from the Commander of the Kyiv Military District, General Chechevatov, whereas later he would say that it was the Ukrainian Party leader who had informed him of what had transpired. Hurenko claimed that he had learned about the developments in Moscow from announcements on the radio; but, after the failure of the coup, it was revealed from documents discovered at the Party's offices in Lviv that, already on 18 August, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU had issued instructions to Party leaders at the republican and regional levels calling for active support for the GKChP.

At nine o'clock on 19 August, Kravchuk, Hurenko and Masyk (Fokin was away on holiday) met in Kravchuk's office with the

The main published sources on what occurred in Ukraine during the attempted coup in Moscow are: the extensive collection of documents compiled by Les Tanyuk, *Khronika oporu* [Chronicle of Resistance], Kyiv, 1991; the official transcript of the debate at the extraordinary session of the parliament on 24 August 1991, in *Pozacherhoua Sessiya Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainskoi RSR Dvanadtsyatoho Sklykannya, Byuleten No. 1 and No. 2*, [Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian SSR of the Twelfth Sitting, Bulletin nos 1 and 2], Kyiv, 1991, hereafter referred to as *Extraordinary Session*, no. 1 and no. 2; Kravchuk's recollections in Chemerys, *Prezydent*, pp. 204-14, and in his interview with Kichigin in *Kievskie novosti*, 30 April and 9 July 1994; Lytvyn, *Political Arena*, pp. 269-74; and *Nezavisimost*, 25 September 1992.

GKChP's representative who had been dispatched to Ukraine, General Varennikov, who was accompanied by Chechevatov and another general. Varennikov, a tough, imperial-minded, military leader, had formerly commanded the Transcarpathian Military District and been a member of the Central Committee of the CPU. What was actually said and decided at this meeting is uncertain for differing accounts emerged. The fact remains, though, that Varennikov cabled the GKChP informing it that Kravchuk and Masyk had initially 'reacted negatively' to what he had to tell them - Hurenko 'kept silent' - and had insisted that it was up to the Ukrainian parliament to decide if it was necessary to declare a state of emergency anywhere on the territory of the republic. The general had been 'forced to charge the atmosphere somewhat' in order 'to bring home to the comrades' that the GKChP's emergency measures were 'already in force' and that the Ukrainian authorities were expected to comply. He reported that eventually 'Kravchuk and the other comrades agreed with the proposals [which Varennikov had made on behalf of the GKChP, including, it seems, to consider imposing a state of emergency in Western Ukraine]' and would 'shortly take measures in this spirit'."

Kravchuk and Masyk were subsequently to explain that they had sought to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and had challenged the competence of the GKChP on the republic's territory. On being confronted, however, with the threat of military intervention, they had been guided by the desire to prevent tanks from being sent in and blood being split. That same day, 'in connection with the appeal to the Soviet people [sic]' by the GKChP, Masyk created two governmental bodies: a 'temporary commission' headed by the republican minister for defence, national security and emergency situations, Yevhen Marchuk, which was given broad if vague powers to oversee the maintenance of public order and internal security; and, a team of eight members of the Presidium of the Cabinet of Ministers who were given responsibility for ensuring order and the smooth running of the economy in various regions of the republic. One of their tasks - 'the strengthening of control over the activity of the mass media and use of technology for disseminating information prescribed for these officials - sounded very much

" Extracts from Varennikov's message were published in *Nezavisimost*, 25 September 1992.

like the imposition of censorship that the GKChP had called for.³ Democrats were later to accuse Masyk of having in effect begun to collaborate with the putschists by setting up an 'unconstitutional body'; he was to reply that the temporary commission headed by Marchuk was in fact conceived of as a reserve republican leadership in case he and Kravchuk were 'taken away' and that its establishment had been approved by the Presidium of the parliament.⁴

According to Yukhnovsky, when, soon after the meeting with Varennikov, anxious leaders of the opposition met with Kravchuk, the Ukrainian leader had simply told them that the situation in the republic was calm and that the public should be urged to maintain this state. Masyk, however, was to state a few days later that at precisely this time a 'war of nerves' had begun: military helicopters hovered overhead and a Soviet special forces unit was flown in from Brest and stood poised on the outskirts of Kyiv to seize government buildings.

At four in the afternoon, Kravchuk addressed the Ukrainian population on television and radio. By this time in Moscow, as Western radio broadcasts were informing listeners in the USSR, Yeltsin had addressed supporters from atop a tank: he had denounced the coup, appealed for a general strike and declared that he was assuming control of Soviet forces deployed on the territory of the Russian Federation. By contrast, Kravchuk called on the Ukrainian population to remain 'calm', show 'self-restraint' and carry on with their work as normal. He stressed that a state of emergency had not been declared in Ukraine and that its government and parliament were functioning. Evading any direct assessment of what was going on in the Soviet capital, he sought to create the impression that the republic's leaders still did not have a clear picture of what had happened and maintained that it was impermissible 'to be hasty' in such 'extraordinarily serious political matters'. An evaluation of the situation, he said, would be made in due course by the Presidium of the Supreme Council and the parliament itself. Nevertheless,

³ See in Tanyuk, *Chronicle of Resistance*, pp. 129-32.

Masyk's interview in *Vechimy Kyiv* of 26 August 1991, reproduced in Tanyuk, *Chronicle of Resistance*, pp. 133-7.

Ibid. The author has not managed to find any evidence supporting Masyk's claim that Soviet military helicopters did indeed make a threatening appearance over Kyiv.

Kravchuk did hint that something unconstitutional and sinister was going on and stressed the need for the law, constitutional norms, democracy and the republic's sovereignty to be respected. In the most forthright part of his speech, he appealed to the population to avoid confrontation and to do everything possible to avoid 'destabilizing the situation'. 'Our position is one of prudence,' he declared. 'We should act in such a way that no innocent blood is split'.⁶

Leaders of Ukraine's democratic forces were disappointed by Kravchuk's apparent prevarication and refused to remain passive. Despite the ban on strikes, demonstrations and public meetings which the GKChP had announced, Rukh, using the building of the Writers' Union as the temporary headquarters of Ukrainian resistance to the GKChP, issued a statement at midday signed by Drach condemning the attempted coup. It called for opposition in the form of a republican strike and asserted 'the right of the people of Ukraine' to an independent and democratic state. Other democratic political parties and organizations also began issuing similar statements. By the end of the day, the main democratic forces were forming a coalition which expressed solidarity with Yeltsin and called for an all-Ukrainian strike and civil disobedience. Beyond Kyiv, the Lviv regional council was the first major body to come out against the putschists.

Yukhnovsky was to tell the Ukrainian parliament that when the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament met in the evening of 19 August, Kravchuk did not clarify his position and argued that only after the USSR Congress of People's Deputies had convened and offered its evaluation would it be possible to say if what had taken place was an attempted coup or not. What is also curious is that Kravchuk apparently did not inform the Presidium about what he would later describe as Varennikov's blatant threats.^s

Caught between the Presidium's Communist majority, representatives of which seem either to have implicitly supported the GKChP or been reluctant to come out against it, and its forceful democratic minority, which was urging him to take a stand on the side of Yeltsin and convene an emergency session of the parliament, Kravchuk stalled. Avoiding expressing support for Yeltsin, he told

⁶ The text is reproduced in Tanyuk, *Chronicle of Resistance*, pp. 102-4.

⁷ See *Ibid.*, pp. 182-97.

^s Author's interview with Mykola Shulha, Yalta, 22 September 1995.

representatives of the opposition that 'Ukraine will go its own way'. The only problem, though, was, as the opposition well knew, that in such a situation Ukraine's sovereignty was in jeopardy and the republic's fate was being decided not in Kyiv but in Moscow.

In the meantime, Hurenko called a meeting of the CPU's leadership and stressed the need for the Communist majority in the parliament and its Presidium to remain disciplined and to follow the new line.⁹ That same day, the CPU's Secretariat issued secret instructions to regional Party committees throughout the republic. It called on them to support the GKChP and to try to maintain 'calm', 'order' and 'discipline'. Demonstrations and strikes were not to be permitted, nor the appearance of material in the mass media which could 'destabilize the situation'. According to the document, the 'key question' of the day was 'the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' and 'all activity aimed at undermining the Union' and 'manifestations of regional egoism [sic]' had to be curtailed.¹⁰ The following day, however, Hurenko was to present a sanitized version of the CPU's position to journalists: in a statement given to the press, he declared that the Ukrainian Party was adhering to the line which Kravchuk had enunciated on television.¹¹

The following day, as the tension in Moscow mounted, the Presidium continued its meeting without reaching agreement. At about two o'clock in the afternoon, seven members of its democratic opposition issued their own statement condemning the attempted coup and expressing solidarity with Yeltsin. They were: Yukhnovsky, Yemets, Tanyuk, Yavonvsky, Pavlychko, Hrynov and Volodymyr Pylypchuk. Kravchuk did not permit their appeal to be read at the meeting of the Presidium and the republic's officially controlled media, which were dutifully publishing the GKChP's documents, avoided mentioning it.¹⁻

Meanwhile, Ukraine's democratic forces had united in a coalition calling itself 'Independent Democratic Ukraine' and issued a statement declaring that 'all of Ukraine's democratic parties and public

" *Ibid.*

Tanyuk, *Chronicle of Resistance*, pp. 166-8. The document was first published by Tanyuk in *Vechimyj Kyiv* on 26 August 1991, and *Literaturna Ukraina* reproduced on 29 August 1991.

¹¹ Ukrinform-TASS, 20 August 1991.

Tanyuk, *Chronicle of Resistance*, pp. 118-21.

organizations' condemned the 'attempted *coup d'etat* as an attempt to 'stop the process of democratization', 'restore the unlimited dictatorship of the CPSU' and 'preserve the empire'. It noted that the Baltic republics, Moldova and Georgia had already opposed the GKChP and that in Moscow units of the Soviet security forces had gone over to the side of Yeltsin. In Ukraine, the statement added, the democratic forces were also calling for resistance to the 'putschists' committee' but the Communist majority in the Presidium of the parliament was implicitly siding with the GKChP by blocking condemnation of it. The democratic forces were therefore issuing an ultimatum: either the Presidium acknowledged that the GKChP was an 'unconstitutional body' whose orders had no force on Ukraine's territory and convened an emergency session of parliament, or the coalition would appeal to the population to unite around the Presidium's democratic faction. The statement also appealed to military personnel stationed in Ukraine not to obey the GKChP and urged the population to support a republican strike beginning at noon the following day.¹³ That same day, leaders of the Donbas strike committees urged Kravchuk to convene an extraordinary session of the Ukrainian parliament, warning that the 'passivity' of the Presidium towards 'the *coup d'etat* that is taking place' and the detention of the Soviet president 'on the territory of Soviet Ukraine', would compromise it 'for ever'.¹⁴

In the evening, as spontaneous demonstrations continued on Kyiv's Khreshchatyk, the majority of the Presidium finally agreed on a tame compromise statement by a vote of fifteen to ten which merely echoed what Kravchuk had already declared. It failed to pass any judgement on the legality of the GKChP and instead left this matter to be decided by the Ukrainian parliament after the USSR Congress of People's Deputies had taken a position. The furthest it went was to state that until the Ukrainian parliament made its ruling the GKChP's orders had no juridical force on the republic's territory. Rather ambiguously, though, the document affirmed that the Soviet and republican constitutions, and laws 'adopted in accordance with them', remained in force, which the opposition considered as contradicting the Declaration of Sovereignty. The latter also objected to an appeal to the public to 'refrain from strikes, meetings

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 198-9 and 202.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

and demonstrations'. Not surprisingly, therefore, the representatives of the opposition rejected the statement. On the other side, Shulha and two other representatives of the majority considered that the statement went too far and also did not endorse it.¹⁵

By now Nazarbaev had denounced the attempted coup and called for Gorbachev to be allowed to confirm personally if he was unable to carry out his presidential duties. President Bush had also telephoned Yeltsin and expressed his support for Gorbachev. This, and the actions of the democratic forces within the republic, were increasing the pressure on Kravchuk to clarify his position. When he appeared again on Ukrainian television later that evening, he did indeed sound a little bolder: he expressed doubt about Gorbachev's sudden incapacitation, mentioning that he had recently seen him in good health in Crimea, and said that he would insist that the Soviet president be invited to be present at an extraordinary session of the USSR Supreme Soviet which had been scheduled for 26 August.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian leader still seems to have wanted to hedge his bets. He suggested, as he had done in an interview shown the evening before on central Soviet television - and which he was subsequently to claim had been censored and distorted — that matters could not go on as before in the Soviet Union and that the present situation had not arisen by chance. Gorbachev, he noted, was also to blame for the 'misfortune' which had overtaken the country. What was curious, however, is that Kravchuk now suggested that the USSR Congress of People's Deputies should have taken decisive action earlier and that the USSR Supreme Soviet could still redeem the Soviet legislature and restore faith in democracy and legality. His emphasis on the role of this conservative institution, which he himself had only recently criticized for having rejected the sovereignty of the republics, and whose head, Lukyanov, had on 20 August denounced the Union treaty as going too far in its concessions to the Union republics, did indeed sound odd coming

Shulha insists that this did not mean that the three supported the GKChP, as the democratic opposition was later to claim. Rather, he explains, they were anxious to avoid precipitating any intervention by Soviet troops which they believed *were* ready to strike. Shulha also claims that Kravchuk did not share with the Presidium all the information at his disposal and that the democratic opposition was better informed about how events were developing than the Communist majority. Hrynov, for example, apparently maintained good telephone contact with Yeltsin's associate, Gennadii Durbulis. Author's interview with Shulha.

from a sovereignty Communist. Even more ambiguous was Kravchuk's comment that the GKChP had 'already made quite a few mistakes', but that this was 'normal because it is a new formation; it has not found itself yet'. 'Can this be corrected,' he asked, replying: 'I think it can and that this should be done by an extraordinary session of the [USSR] Supreme Soviet'.¹⁶

What was particularly compromising, and what Kravchuk himself would tell the Ukrainian parliament on 24 August was his 'one mistake' during the attempted coup, was that he still refused to convene an emergency session of the Ukrainian parliament. During the night of 20-1 August, as reports were reaching Kyiv of shooting in Moscow and what appeared to be the storming of Yeltsin's headquarters in Moscow's White House, the Ukrainian leader continued to reject the appeals of the democratic faction within the Ukrainian parliament's Presidium to come out in support of the Russian democrats.

The following morning, with the opposition intensifying its pressure for the parliament to be convened, Kravchuk still insisted that the signatures of 150 deputies first be obtained. But as the day continued and there were more and more indications that the attempted coup had failed, Kravchuk rapidly changed his tune. In the presence of Yukhnovsky and Yemets, he telephoned Lukyanov and demanded that Gorbachev be present at the extraordinary session of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Later, he had a telephone conversation with Gorbachev, who after all, as the democratic forces had kept pointing out, but the Ukrainian leader had preferred not to mention, had been detained on the territory of 'sovereign' Ukraine. That evening, appearing yet again on Ukrainian television, Kravchuk sought to capitalize on these two conversations, describing the first as an 'ultimatum' delivered to Lukyanov from 'a leader of such a large state as Ukraine', and utilizing the second as evidence of the Ukrainian leader's purported support for a president who he now acknowledged had been 'arrested' by the 'so-called Emergency Committee' which had 'deviated' from democracy and the 'constitutional and legal process.'

Kravchuk's extemporaneous explanation that the GKChP was a new body which had not yet 'found itself' was omitted from the version of the interview published two days later in *Radyanska Ukraina*. See Roman Solchanyk, 'Ukraine: Kravchuk's Role', *Report on the USSR*, vol. 3, no. 6 (6 September 1991), p. 48.

In the meantime, thousands of demonstrators continued to protest against the GKChP in central Kyiv and blue and yellow flags continued to be visible among the pro-Yeltsin demonstrators in Moscow.¹⁷ At a large protest rally in the Ukrainian capital, Pavlychko read out a statement, which was 'unanimously endorsed', calling for the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament to assert control over Soviet military units stationed in the republic, for the parliament to appeal to the outside world for recognition of Ukraine as an independent state and condemning the leadership of the CPU for having abandoned not only the people which it claimed to represent but also its general secretary.¹⁸

Only on 22 August, after the 150 signatures had been gathered, the Russian parliament had held an emergency session, Yeltsin had emerged victorious and Gorbachev had returned to Moscow, did Kravchuk finally agree to convene an extraordinary session of the Ukrainian parliament - in two days' time. At a press conference, which for some reason he gave that same day only to foreign journalists, he sought to portray himself as an opponent of the attempted coup from the very start and an ally of Yeltsin, who had been thanked by Gorbachev for his support. As for the future, unlike Nazarbajev, the Ukrainian leader reiterated his previous position that there was no need to rush the conclusion of the new Union treaty and ventured that what was needed was a transitional Soviet government consisting of about nine people (the leaders of the republics still prepared to form a Union?). The republic's democratic forces had demanded that, in view of the vulnerability of Ukraine's sovereignty which the attempted coup had exposed, the parliament should assert control over the military forces stationed on Ukrainian territory, but Kravchuk declared that this was 'out of the question', though the creation of a national guard was another matter. Asked if he would now leave the Communist Party, he replied that 'One shouldn't blame the entire Party for what happened', only the leaders who had not 'declared their position during this terrible time'.¹⁹

As the day continued: in Moscow, an angry crowd gathered

On the anti-GKChP demonstrations in Kyiv, see *Kultura i zhyttya*, 24 August 1991. On the participation of Ukrainians in the pro-Yeltsin protests in Moscow, see *Literaturna Ukraina*, 29 August 1991.

¹⁷ For the text, see Tanyuk, *Chronicle of Resistance*, p. 211.

¹⁹ *Molod Ukrainy*, 24 August 1991.

outside the KGB headquarters and toppled the statue of the founder of the Soviet secret police - Feliks Dzerzhinsky; in Estonia and Lithuania the Communist Party was banned; and, in Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev announced his resignation from both the Politburo and the Central Committee of the CPSU and issued a decree on departization.

With the Communist Party totally discredited by the abortive coup, it is not difficult to imagine the alarm and demoralization which must have gripped its leaders, not least in Ukraine. On 22 August, the CPU's Politburo issued a statement condemning 'the adventuristic anti-state plot' and, seeking to distance itself from the putschists, criticized the CPSU Central Committee (Ivashko was still officially the Soviet Party's deputy leader) for failing to provide a timely assessment of the coup.²⁰ Speaking at a press conference, Hurenko even paid tribute to Yeltsin's 'civic courage'.²¹ But these rather pathetic attempts to stave off impending disaster only encouraged the more militant anti-Communist forces to seek to expose the CPU's complicity in order to drive it from the political arena. The following morning, the democratic authorities in the Lviv region headed by Chornovil led the way by suspending the CPU's activities, sealing Party buildings and beginning an investigation of Party documents issued during the attempted coup.

Kravchuk's connections with the CPU leadership during and immediately after the attempted coup remain obscure. His apparent reluctance in the first days after the abortive coup to condemn the role of Hurenko and the CPU leadership nevertheless raises questions about his position. Much later, long after incriminating evidence against the CPU's leadership had been unearthed, Kravchuk would claim that Hurenko and his associates had distrusted him and, although he remained a member of the CPU's Politburo, had not kept him fully informed about the Ukrainian Party's activities in support of the GKChP. Kravchuk would also imply that from the very outset he had resisted Hurenko's attempts to reassert the CPU's control over the republic in the name of the GKChP by refusing to meet him and Varennikov at the CPU's headquarters instead of in his office. On 27 August, Kravchuk was also to announce that he had written a statement announcing his resignation

²⁰ Radio Kyiv, 22 August 1991.

²¹ *Pravda Ukrainy*, 23 August 1991.

from the Party immediately after his meeting with Varennikov on 19 August. But if he did, it seems that he must have kept this document in his drawer." In fact, it later became known that on 22 August Kravchuk participated in a meeting of the CPU's Politburo; it is unlikely that if he had been perceived as a 'renegade' at this time he would have been allowed to participate.²³

Ukraine declares independence

For Ukraine's democratic force, the collapse of the attempted coup brought elation and relief. Despite the display of unity represented by the formation of 'Independent Democratic Ukraine', it had been unclear how successful this coalition's call for a general strike would have been and how effectively the opposition could have resisted if a state of emergency or military rule had in fact been imposed. Certainly, as one observer noted, the crowds of protesters in Kyiv had been relatively small compared to the demonstrations in Moscow or even Leningrad.²⁴ Fortunately, the strength and efficacy of the coalition had not had to be put to the test, the defenders of the empire and the old order had shot their bolt, and paradoxically, after three dramatic days of danger and uncertainty, for the defenders of democracy and republican sovereignty the putschists' debacle had turned into a godsend.

While the Ukrainian parliament prepared for its extraordinary session, there were more democratic developments in Moscow and some of the other republics which invariably influenced the atmosphere in Kyiv. On 23 August, Kravchuk flew to the Soviet capital to attend a closed meeting of the republican leaders convened by the Soviet president. Perhaps still not fully aware of the extent to which his power and that of the centre had been weakened, Gorbachev evidently remained determined to push ahead with the conclusion of the new Union treaty. Yeltsin, for one, immediately let it be known though that in light of what had occurred the document would have to be revised. Later that day, the Russian

²³ The document is reproduced in Chemerys, *Przydent*, p. 213.

²⁴ Lytvyn summarizes the protocol of the meeting, chaired by Hurenko, which he discovered in the Central State Archive of Public Associations in Kyiv in his *Political Arena*, p. 272.

²⁴ Haran, *To Kill the Dragon*, p. 189.

leader also publicly demonstrated the revolutionary political transformation which the failed coup had precipitated - the collapse of the Soviet Communist system and the dissolution of the Soviet empire. Flaunting his increased authority as Russia's victorious leader, Yeltsin first humiliated the Soviet president, who was still reluctant to condemn the CPSU outright, in front of the Russian parliament and television cameras, and then, ignoring Gorbachev's objections, proceeded to sign an edict suspending the activities of the Russian Communist Party pending the investigation of its role during the attempted coup. That same day, while Communist Party offices were being sealed in Moscow and Leningrad, the white, red and blue flag of pre-1917 Russia was hoisted above Yeltsin's headquarters in the Kremlin, symbolically overshadowing the Soviet flag still flying nearby over President Gorbachev's office.

Against this tumultuous background, Kravchuk returned home to face the music. Knowing full well that the parliamentary opposition would be after his blood and that his political future was at stake, he prepared for what was probably going to be the most challenging day of his life. Formally, the extraordinary session of the Ukrainian parliament, the proceedings of which were broadcast live on republican radio and television, had only one item on the agenda: the political situation in Ukraine and how to protect the republic from possible military or state coups in the future. Some preparatory work had been carried out by a working group appointed by the Presidium and headed by Plyushch, which consisted of members of both the majority and opposition. It was also proposed by the Presidium that the debate would be preceded by reports from the chairman of the parliament and from the leaders of the majority and opposition.

Kravchuk defended himself by maintaining that in very dangerous and unpredictable conditions, with the military on alert and the picture of what was happening in Moscow remaining unclear, he and his colleagues in the Presidium, which were themselves divided, 'did everything in order that a state of emergency not be introduced [in Ukraine], that people were not crushed, that there were no victims and that innocent blood was not spilt'. With his speech being interrupted by shouts and jeers from the chamber, the embattled speaker acknowledged that from the vantage point of hindsight the Presidium's statement about the attempted coup had been too feeble and come too late, but then played his trump card.

Referring to a record of the meeting with General Varennikov, which he said his close colleague Masyk had made, for the first time he mentioned sensational details about what had purportedly occurred behind the closed doors of his office.

Kravchuk claimed that Varennikov had called on the Ukrainian leaders to support the GKChP and to consider imposing a state of emergency in Western Ukraine and Kyiv. The general had threatened the use of military force in the event of their failing to support the putschists. In a telephone call made to Kravchuk during the meeting, the chief of the KGB, Kryuchkov, had reinforced this ultimatum. The head of the Ukrainian parliament said he had responded by declaring that the GKChP was unconstitutional and that Ukraine would continue to abide by its own laws and constitution and to uphold its sovereignty. Failing to explain why he had not informed other members of the Presidium about this and not shown the same resoluteness in public, Kravchuk declared not very persuasively: 'I categorically reject all accusations about indecision, procrastination and not defining my personal position'.

The Ukrainian leader emphasized that the attempted coup had revealed the limited nature of the republic's sovereignty and that new laws would have to be passed, and 'more decisive and concrete steps' taken, to broaden it. Because of what had occurred, it was also necessary to review Ukraine's position as regards the Union treaty. 'Ukraine can only join the kind of Union,' he now declared, 'participation in which would exclude the possibility of encroachments by anyone on our state sovereignty'.

What specific remedies and proposals did the Ukrainian leader come out with? First, he argued that as head of the Ukrainian parliament he did not have sufficient authority to take decisions on his own and to issue edicts, and that the recent events had underscored the need temporarily to increase the powers of his office so that he could fulfil the role of head of state until a president was elected. The attempted coup had also 'revealed the complete vulnerability' of the republic 'to external and internal adventurism' and the lack of a mechanism for protecting Ukraine against such threats. Kravchuk therefore proposed the creation of a Defence Council which would be responsible for safeguarding the sovereignty of the republic, the creation of a national guard and the adoption of laws regulating the status of the Soviet troops deployed on Ukraine's territory. Furthermore, the KGB and MVD in Ukraine

had to be fully subordinated to Ukraine's head of state and could cooperate with, but not belong to, any all-Union structures. Kravchuk's only reference to the future of the CPU was an acknowledgement that the time had come to 'decide on the departization' of these two security ministries.

In view of what had occurred and the radical changes still taking place in Moscow, this was hardly a bold or particularly convincing performance. Consequently, the head of the parliament was subjected to intense questioning and criticism by indignant or incredulous deputies. Holovaty brought up the secret instructions which the CPU leadership had sent out and Masyk's creation of an 'unconstitutional' and implicitly pro-GKChP commission. Seemingly taken aback, Kravchuk announced that on the previous day, on learning about the secret instructions issued by the CPSU's Secretariat from Nazarbaev's public statements, he had resigned from the CPSU's Central Committee and, on his return to Kyiv, had informed Hurenko that he was unable to remain a member of the CPU's Politburo. Pressed by Hrynov and other deputies to put to the vote a proposal to seal the CPU's offices, Kravchuk instead proposed establishing a commission to investigate who had collaborated with the GKChP. After Hurenko was prevented from speaking because of the jeering, Plyushch, who was chairing at that moment, sought to defuse the situation by announcing a break.

After the deputies resumed the debate, it was clear that the People's Council had regained the initiative and was determined to capitalize on the situation to the maximum. On behalf of the opposition, Pavlychko called on the parliament not to get carried away by emotions but to concentrate on three critical issues which he and his colleagues believed had to be decided that day, namely, the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, that the Presidium of the parliament take control over all military units deployed on the republic's territory, and the complete departization of Ukraine's state structures. Hurenko responded by protesting against what he claimed were attempts to turn the session into a 'Lynch court'. He complained that in four regions the CPU offices had already been 'illegally seized' and appealed to the parliament not to go along with the democrats' *diktat*, which he compared to a virtual *coup d'etat*. But at this stage, no one was prepared to back him.

Kravchuk had to face even more embarrassing questions about his role. When a deputy confronted him with the fact that Lukyanov

had apparently told a group of Ukrainian parliamentarians in Moscow that Kravchuk had informed him that a state of emergency would be introduced in Western Ukraine, Crimea and perhaps even Kyiv, the chairman of the parliament lost his composure and branded the Russian politician a liar and a criminal. Struggling to stay afloat, on the one hand, he sought to convince deputies that, 'They were terrible days and nights; you cannot even imagine what it was like', and on the other, on being pressed to clarify his position, clutched at two of the proposals which Pavlychko had made - independence and departization. He also switched to a more populist and patriotic tone, declaring his faith in 'my people and its own strength'.

At this stage a new element was also introduced into the debate which brought out the unease of many of the Ukrainian parliamentarians about what was happening in Moscow and helped Kravchuk to get off the hook. The news arriving from the Soviet capital raised concern that the Russian authorities were unilaterally taking over the centre's structures, including the KGB. Yeltsin was placing his people in key positions and the Russian government had taken over the all-Union economic and communications ministries. One angry deputy, Valerii Batalov, asked rhetorically whether Ukraine had any need of a Union in which all the key positions would be held by Russians. Kravchuk seized at the opportunity to redeem himself and replied that he too had been 'distressed and even annoyed' by the 'demands that only Russians be appointed'. He warned that although 'democracy had been saved by Russia and Yeltsin', the victory had produced a 'very dangerous' wave of 'drunken democracy' and recommended that the deputies support the declaration of independence.

Now that independence had been placed on the agenda, some of the tension was removed and the deputies heard the reports from the leaders of the majority and opposition. Unlike Hurenko, the leader of the majority, Moroz, delivered a reasonably constructive and conciliatory speech which also contained a few surprises. He condemned what he described as the putschists' attempt to use the CPSU in carrying out their *coup d'etat*, but also emphasized that he had protested to Gorbachev as far back as February 1989 that the Party was not developing in the direction of democracy and in the spirit of restructuring. Citing Nazarbaev's example of the previous day of calling on the Communist Party of Kazakhstan to break with the CPSU, Moroz declared that if the next plenum of the CPU's

Central Committee did not 'find the courage' to do likewise, he would take upon himself the responsibility for organizing a Ukrainian Communist Party'. He went on to propose that while asserting Ukraine's 'unchanging course towards independence', the parliament should approve, without delay, a number of measures which were essential for bolstering the republic's sovereignty, the most important of which he argued were the creation of a national army and the introduction of a national currency.

Moroz's speech brought the majority closer to the opposition but it conspicuously avoided the question of deparitization and the fate of the CPU. This issue was taken up very forthrightly by Yuhnovsky, who delivered an outspoken speech strongly condemning the role both of Kravchuk and the CPU. The leader of the opposition presented a chronological record of the events between 19-21 August which directly challenged Kravchuk's account and suggested that the collaboration with the GKChP by the CPU's leaders in Kyiv and in the regions had been more substantial than Kravchuk and others made out. Moving on to the new situation after the failure of the coup, he maintained that: 'In fact, the Union no longer exists as a state. The republics are *de facto* independent states; they should take power fully into their own hands. Russia is doing so.' The question was: 'How are we to do this in Ukraine?'

Yuhnovsky argued that it was not enough simply to declare Ukraine's independence without ensuring the triumph of democracy through the 'decommunization' of the republic. Otherwise, the independent but still 'Communist' Ukraine would be hostile to Yeltsin's 'democratic' Russia and would be recognized only by 'Saddam [Hussein] and other dictators'. Yuhnovsky therefore made the following proposals, which he said he had prepared himself, thereby suggesting that they had not been cleared in advance with the People's Council: that the parliament declare Ukraine an independent and democratic state and that this decision be endorsed by a referendum (this was the first time the declaration of independence was linked to a referendum, and subsequently Yuhnovsky was to be criticized by other democratic leaders for having introduced this idea); that the activity of the Communist Party on Ukraine's territory be stopped, but that all Party functionaries who did not support the coup retain their current level of earnings and be found new jobs; that the Presidium of the

parliament resign and a new Presidium be elected; and that all activity promoting 'violence, discord and enmity' be banned in Ukraine. Like several other representatives from the opposition, Yukhnovsky also brought up Khmara's case, which he maintained had been 'fabricated by the CPU and KGB', and called for the deputy's immediate release.

After another debate, during which Yavorivsky read out a proposed version of the declaration of independence and Crimea's representative Bagrov urged the deputies not to rush into voting for independence - 'it means leaving the Soviet Union' he stressed - Kravchuk announced a further break, giving the deputies an hour to try and settle their differences. During it, the People's Council met in the cinema room on the third floor of the legislature building while the majority met downstairs in what was essentially an emergency session. The opposition recognized the need to reach out to the moderate Communists and Pavlychko therefore hastily revised the draft declaration of independence in such a way that the wording deliberately avoided antagonizing the Communists. Yukhnovsky's idea of making the declaration conditional on endorsement in a republican referendum was also accepted.

The despondent Communist majority felt betrayed by the 'centre' and realized that Gorbachev's authority had dissipated. It also felt threatened by the strong anti-Communist backlash in Russia. Hurenko was acting in his typically arrogant and stand-offish manner befitting a Party leader of the old days and Moroz's statement had highlighted the rifts among the Communist leadership. The Communist deputies wanted somehow to save their party and preserve as much unity as they could, but also wished to avoid triggering a social explosion which would release anti-Communist passions. While they were 'groping for a way out', as one participant put it, Pavlychko, Yavorivsky and other representatives of the People's Council arrived and appealed to the majority to unite with the opposition in supporting the declaration of independence. Their argument ran along the lines that: 'we were all once Communists under Moscow, but now a point of no return has been reached and independence is the only way forward. Let's unite around independence.' The overtures from the People's Council turned out to be the lifeline that the majority had been seeking and the Communist deputies eagerly grabbed at it. Suddenly, despair gave way to hope and a new enthusiasm. 'We were like blind kittens who had

found a way out', the same witness recalled²⁵ In the excitement, agreement was also reached on the departization of the republican Procuracy, MVD, KGB and all military forces stationed in Ukraine.

At shortly before six o'clock in the evening, Kravchuk read out the revised Declaration of Independence:

In view of the mortal danger surrounding Ukraine in connection with the state coup in the USSR on 19 August 1991,

- continuing the thousand-year tradition of state-building in Ukraine,

- based on the right of a nation of self-determination in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other international legal documents, and,

- realizing the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Ukraine, the Supreme Council solemnly declares the independence of Ukraine and the creation of an independent Ukrainian state - Ukraine. The territory of Ukraine is indivisible and inviolable, From this day forward, on the territory of Ukraine only the Constitution and laws of Ukraine are valid. This act becomes effective at the moment of its approval.

The Declaration, which was to be put to a republican referendum on 1 December, was overwhelmingly approved by 346 votes in favour, 1 against (Albert Korneev, an ethnic Russian deputy representing a constituency in the Donbas) and 3 abstentions. Thus, seventy-three years after the Ukrainian Central Rada had first proclaimed an independent Ukrainian state, and after seven decades of Soviet rule, Ukraine had again affirmed its desire for independent statehood. This time there was no imminent danger of invasion as in January 1918, for the 'mortal danger' had passed with the defeat of the defenders of the Soviet empire; the Ukrainian national democratic movement was significantly stronger and more developed in 1991 than in 1918 and had been able over the last few years to lay the groundwork for statehood based on a civic rather than ethnic basis; and, the decision to proclaim independence seemed to reflect unity and mass support. Just how prepared Ukraine actually was for independence and how broad the support was would still have to be seen.

²⁵ Author's interview with Shulha.

Immediate problems: The CPU, Russian reactions and national security

While the crowds outside the parliament began to celebrate, the deputies pressed on with other important business. The most important issue was the fate of the Communist Party. In accordance with the agreement reached between the opposition and the majority, the departization of the republican Procuracy, KGB and MVD was approved without problems (by 331 for, 10 against and 5 abstentions). Many of the Communists seemed to have felt that this was a sufficient enough concession and that they should not give way any further. A subsequent motion to depoliticize state structures, enterprises and organizations failed, with only 217 deputies supporting it, 84 voting against and 13 abstaining. This only incensed the opposition and increased calls for the banning of the Communist Party. As the debate continued, a group of twenty deputies announced their resignation from the Communist Party. But even this did not prevent the blockage of Hrynov's motion to seal government and Party offices in order to prevent evidence about collaboration with the putschists from being destroyed.

During the final hour of its work, the parliament voted to place all military units stationed in Ukraine under its control, to re-establish a republican Ministry of Defence and to proceed with the creation of republican armed forces. Kravchuk, who had salvaged his authority by backing independence, also managed to persuade the deputies to agree to the extension of his powers until the election of a president. Drawing on all his old skills, he reciprocated by supporting a request from the opposition that the Ukrainian national flag be displayed in the chamber. After Chornovil pointed out that a blue and yellow flag with which 'Ukrainians had stood on the barricades by the White House' was now flying amid the crowds outside the parliament building, Kravchuk forestalled opponents by declaring that this 'memorable flag' had indeed 'won the right to be in this chamber'.

In the euphoria of it all, even the general dismay over the way in which Russia was taking over the structures of the centre temporarily receded and the Verkhovna Rada voted to convey a message of goodwill to Ukraine's northern neighbour. It approved a statement addressed to Russia's parliament and president expressing recogni-

tion of their 'heroic actions in defence of freedom and democracy during the *putsch*' and affirming Ukraine's commitment to the principles enshrined in the Russo-Ukrainian treaty of November 1990. Kravchuk adeptly sidestepped the contentious issues concerning the establishment of a commission to investigate who had supported the putschists and the Khmara case by deferring them to the parliamentary commissions. With this, the ambiguous figure who in the morning had begun the proceedings fearing for his political life, but after almost twelve momentous hours had emerged as acting head of an independent Ukrainian state, brought the historic extraordinary session to a close.

While celebrations were continuing that evening it was announced on Soviet television that Gorbachev was resigning as general secretary of the CPSU, nationalizing Party property and banning Party activity in government organizations and the security forces. In other words, the main agent of the Soviet empire's cohesion - the Communist Party - had itself imploded. It also became known that President Yeltsin had issued a decree recognizing the independence of Latvia and Estonia.

The following day, the Belarusian parliament declared the independence of Belarus and voted to suspend the activities of the Belarusian Communist Party. In Kyiv, with its Communist majority stunned by what was happening, the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament decided to confiscate the CPU's buildings and freeze its assets until the commission which for almost a year had been examining the question of the nationalization of the Party's property had concluded its work. It also announced what amounted to an amnesty for political prisoners, that is, for Khmara, his colleagues and others detained during the recent struggles between the Communist and anti-Communist forces. The leadership of the Kyiv City Council went further and sealed off all the Party offices in the Ukrainian capital, including the Central Committee building outside of which thousands of people had gathered to express their support for this action.²⁶

On 26 August, with more evidence of the CPU's complicity in the attempted coup emerging, the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament decided to 'temporarily suspend the Party's activities. It also recognized the independence of the three Baltic states. For its

part, the leadership of the Kyiv City Council voted to dismantle the giant Lenin monument in the capital's central October Revolution Square (where the previous autumn student protesters had pitched their tents) and to rename the latter Independence Square. That same day, the CPU Central Committee hurriedly held its last plenum. Behind the scenes, Kravchuk agreed not to sign the Presidium's decree until the plenum had finished its business. The plenum declared the CPU's complete independence and nominated a group of deputies to represent the Party's interests until it could resume its activities.²⁷ On the following day, Kravchuk would claim that he had resigned from the CPU back on 19 August.

Meanwhile, the reaction in Moscow to Ukraine's declaration of independence, even among democratic circles, was hardly encouraging. In quick succession, on 26 and 27 August, President Yeltsin's press secretary, Pavel Voshanov, and the mayors of Leningrad and Moscow, Sobchak and Popov, either raised the issue of reviewing Russia's borders with Ukraine or, like Gorbachev, expressed anxiety about the implications of Ukrainian independence for the Union. The Soviet president even threatened to resign if the republics did not agree to sign the Union treaty. But it was Voshanov's statement which caused the most damage: his assertion that Russia reserved the right to review its borders with all neighbours that decided to leave the Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltic states, generated resentment and unease not only in Ukraine, but also especially in Kazakhstan, and dented Yeltsin's reputation.²⁸

Kravchuk was quick to respond and told journalists on 27 August that 'Territorial claims are dangerous things.' He also took the opportunity to declare that Ukraine would not consider the issue of the revised Union treaty until after its referendum on independence.²⁹ That same day in Moscow, Lviv's Bratun protested in his speech to the USSR Supreme Soviet 'about the anti-Ukrainian and anti-republics hysteria concerning the review of borders'. He reminded the deputies that the Western Ukrainians, who were still being described by some speakers as 'extremists' and the source of

²⁷ Lytvyn, *Political Arena*, p. 273.

²⁸ For further details, see Roman Solchanyk, 'Ukraine and Russia: Before and after the Coup', *Report on the USSR* no. 39 (27 September 1991), pp. 13-17.

²⁹ AP, 27 August, and AFP, 29 August 1991.

Ukrainian 'nationalism', had rallied to the support of Russian democracy, also referring in his speech to the provisions of the Russo-Ukrainian treaty. Reflecting the new spirit in Ukraine, he declared: 'We will not give up our independence. Remember that. And to speak today of a new Union treaty is obsolete. The empire is not to be!'³⁰

Now that the USSR was clearly in a state of dissolution, and Ukraine intended to assert control over the military units based on its territory, an important new issue appeared: the fate not only of the Soviet armed forces but also of the huge Soviet nuclear arsenal, significant parts of which were to be found outside of Russia in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus. There was alarm both in Moscow and in the West. As far as Ukraine was concerned, though, the republic had pledged to become a nuclear-free state and no one was advocating a different position. Besides, even the number of nuclear weapons in Ukraine was still a military secret and few people seemed to have any idea of the costs and technical difficulties that their retention, removal or destruction would involve. Ukraine's official position during these days, as expressed by its ambassador to the United Nations, Hennadii Udovenko, and by Kravchuk himself, was that their country did not want to own nuclear weapons. Rukh's leaders concurred but also made clear their unhappiness with the idea of Russia remaining a nuclear power.

In Moscow, there did not seem to be a clear line on how to deal with problem of potential 'loose nukes'. Russia's Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi came out with a rather odd argument linking the nuclear arsenal with the need to preserve some form of Union. He warned on 26 August that if Russia alone were to keep nuclear weapons, it 'would mean the rebirth of the Russian empire. To avoid this happening a Union treaty must be signed.' On 28 August, however, Yeltsin announced that 'In view of the fact that Ukraine has declared itself a nuclear-free republic, its nuclear weapons will be moved to the Russian Federation.' It is unclear if he had consulted with the Ukrainian leadership before making this statement.³¹

With the implications of Ukraine's declaration of independence becoming apparent and strains developing in Russian — Ukrainian

³⁰ Soviet television, 27 August 1991.

³¹ See Bohdan Nahaylo, 'The Shaping of Ukrainian Attitudes towards Nuclear Arms', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 2, no. 8 (19 February 1993), pp. 21-45.

relations, on the morning of 28 August Sobchak proposed that the USSR Supreme Soviet send a delegation for talks with the Ukrainian parliament. 'Our main aim', he told the Soviet deputies, 'is not to allow the uncontrolled disintegration of the Soviet power structures. Today this is a far more important question than all the talk about the Party.'³² That afternoon, also in full *view* of the television cameras, the deputy chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, Ivan Laptev, added to the drama by suddenly announcing that, in connection with 'an emergency situation', a delegation from the RSFSR headed by Vice-President Rutskoi, and also including Yeltsin's adviser Sergei Stankevich, and the economist Grigorii Yavlinsky, was already on its way to Kyiv. He requested that approval be given for a delegation from the USSR Supreme Soviet to be sent also. The confused deputies agreed and a group led by Sobchak also hurriedly departed for Ukraine.

News of the impending arrival in Kyiv of the two delegations from Moscow caused anxiety in the Ukrainian capital and many thousands instantly responded to calls from Rukh's leaders to 'greet' the unexpected visitors. Both at Kyiv's Boryspil Airport and at the Ukrainian parliament building, the delegations encountered huge demonstrations in support of Ukrainian independence. Initial attempts by Rutskoi and Sobchak to appeal to a sense of Slavic unity completely fell through and only drew shouts of 'Independence!' and 'Ukraine without Moscow!' Passions began to subside only after it became clearer that the Russian delegation had not arrived with threats but was seeking to clear the air and, in Rutskoi's words, to 'stabilize relations' between the two countries during this transitional period.

The Ukrainian delegation was headed by Kravchuk and included among others, Masyk, Yukhnovsky, Pavlychko and Yemets. Sobchak's delegation from the USSR Supreme Soviet acted as observers. The outcome after nine hours of intense negotiations was a joint Ukrainian-Russian communique, signed by Kravchuk and Rutskoi, which in many ways was a prototype of the arrangement on which the Commonwealth of Independent States would be based. It recognized the 'inalienable right' of Ukraine and Russia to 'state independence' and reaffirmed the validity of the bilateral treaty signed in November 1990, emphasizing especially the provision

³² Soviet television, 28 August 1991.

dealing with mutual recognition of one another's territorial integrity. Both sides pledged cooperation to avoid 'the uncontrolled disintegration' of what was described for the first time in an official document as 'the former Soviet Union'. In the interests of security and of avoiding economic dislocation, the two sides declared that they considered it 'necessary to create temporary inter-state structures that interested states -subjects of the former USSR, regardless of their current status - could join on the basis of representational parity'. The communique also acknowledged 'the special significance of military-strategic problems'. The two sides agreed 'not to adopt unilateral decisions' in this sphere and on the need for 'a reform of the armed forces of the USSR and the creation of a system of collective security'. The document also affirmed the adherence of both states 'to commitments by the USSR in international relations', including arms control agreements, and significantly, emphasized their readiness to deal with matters stemming from previously made international commitments through direct negotiations with 'members of the international community'. Finally, the two states agreed to exchange 'empowered envoys'.³³

At a press conference held at the end of the talks in the early hours of 29 August, Kravchuk expressed his satisfaction with what had been achieved. He stressed that by referring for the first time to 'the former USSR', the two sides had recognized the new political reality, that the communique effectively recognized Ukraine's declaration of independence, and that the negotiations would stop the recent wave of anti-Russian feeling.³⁴ Later that day, seemingly chastened by his experience in Kyiv, Sobchak reported back to the USSR Supreme Soviet that 'Ukraine, like other republics, has firmly taken the path towards genuine independence, genuine freedom, the formation of its own statehood, and no one can force it to diverge from this path.'³⁵

Gorbachev, however, continued to suggest that if Ukraine left the Union the republic would split along ethnic lines and, therefore, despite its declaration of independence, would sign the revised Union treaty. He told a Ukrainian journalist:

There can be no Union without Ukraine, I feel, and no Ukraine

³³ *Molod Ukrainy*, 30 August 1991.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ TASS, 29 August 91.

without the Union. These Slavic states, Russia and Ukraine, were the axis along which, for centuries, events turned and a huge multinational state developed. That is the way it will remain. I am convinced of it³⁶

As soon as relations with Russia had been patched up and the Russian delegation had left Kyiv, the Ukrainian leadership moved ahead with consolidating the republic's independence. Security issues were at the top of the agenda and on 29 August, the Presidium of the parliament met with the commanders of the Soviet military forces stationed in Ukraine to discuss questions connected with the creation of a Ukrainian Ministry of Defence and national armed forces. The challenges facing the Ukrainian leadership were daunting: the huge military force deployed on Ukraine's territory was now estimated to be anywhere between 12 million and 15 million strong. Moreover, the majority of the officers were Russian and, as it was later to be confirmed, Ukrainians constituted under half of the military personnel.

While the discussion with the generals continued, the Presidium was pushed by the enormous public pressure being generated by the disclosures about the role of the CPU during the attempted coup to take another decisive step - to ban, on 30 August, the Party and nationalize its property. The Communist Party had in any case been placed in an untenable position the day before when the USSR Supreme Soviet had voted to suspend its activities throughout the USSR and to freeze its assets. Ironically then, Ukraine -where the Party had managed to retain its grip on power for longer than in many other republics - was the first after the Baltic republics to ban outright the Communist Party on its territory. While there were protests from some of the Communist deputies about the 'undemocratic' and 'illegal' nature of this move, by and large the bulk of the Communist rank and file who had not broken with the discredited Party reluctantly accepted the verdict.³⁷ At least, as Yukhnovsky had proposed, there were no purges and former Communist officials retained their positions.

³⁶ *Molod Ukrainy*, 30 August 1995.

On 4 September, Fedir Panasyuk submitted a motion on behalf of ninety Communist deputies calling for a repeal of the ban on the CPU. When it came to vote, however, only fifty-four deputies supported it. Radio Kyiv, 5 September 1991.

In the space of a dramatic week then, Ukraine had declared its independence, seemingly laid the basis for normal bilateral relations with Russia, banned the Communist Party and begun creating a national army. When, on 4 September the Communist majority in the parliament voted to dissolve itself and deputies agreed that the blue and yellow flag should be raised over the legislature building, it only underscored that a new chapter in the history of Ukraine had begun. The hopes raised by the break with the past and the determination to make a success of independence were to grow over the following months as Ukraine's decisive referendum approached and the Soviet Union continued to disintegrate.