

*The Coup: A Stab in the Back—
and the Intrigues of Yeltsin*

ON AUGUST 4 I went on vacation. On August 15 the July 23 draft of the Union treaty was published. But on August 19-21 the adoption of the new Union treaty was rudely interrupted by the attempted coup. Let me remind readers of what happened.

After the opponents of reform failed in their attempt on August 18 to win the president of the USSR over to their side, the coup began. At 6:00 A.M. on August 19 a statement by Anatoly Lukyanov, chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, broadcast a statement on radio and television. It contained objections to the new Union treaty. In his opinion, reconsideration of the treaty first by the Supreme Soviet and later by the Congress of People's Deputies was required. This meant, in fact, that the signing of the treaty on August 20 would be impossible. Lukyanov's declaration was dated August 16 but, as the head of the Secretariat of the Supreme Soviet later reported, it was written on August 19 before dawn.

A decree by Gennady Yanaev, the vice president, was also broadcast. It stated that he was assuming the functions of the president "since it was impossible, for reasons of health" for Gorbachev to perform these functions. Also broadcast was an appeal by the "Soviet leadership" (signed by Yanaev, Pavlov, and Baklanov) announcing the formation of a State Committee for the State of Emergency (Russian initials, GKChP) "to administer the country and effectively to implement the state of emergency"; also broadcast was an "Appeal to the Soviet People" and Decree No. 1 of the GKChP "On the Imposition of the State of Emergency." All this was based on fraud and deception. The attempted coup, of course, lasted only three days. After the defeat of the coup, in the early hours of August 22, I arrived back in Moscow. A decree abrogating the "anticonstitutional actions of the organizers of the coup d'état" was immediately published.

In my televised speech that same day, August 22, I said the following:

What happened these past few days is, to say the least, a “great lesson for us all.” It is a painful lesson, a terrifying kind of education. And all the necessary conclusions must be drawn not only in the realm of government structures but in relations among the republics, among various parties and social movements, and among nationalities and of course in economic policy and in the spiritual and moral realm. . . .

We must proceed more quickly and in a more unified way along the road of radical reform. Tomorrow I will meet with the leaders of nine republics. We will discuss and weigh everything and consider urgent measures that need to be taken as well as short-term perspectives. . . . And we will tell the country and the entire world about this. . . .

I have already spoken with the leaders of the republics about further plans for action, and it seems that in the near future a new date will be set for the signing of the Union treaty. After that will come the adoption of a new Union constitution, a new electoral law, and elections for a Unionwide parliament and president. This work must be carried out in the established time frame without delay, because delays during the transitional period, as we have seen, are dangerous for democratic change.

As you can see my intentions were quite clear—to hasten preparations for the signing of the treaty. But this turned out not to be a simple task, not by any means.

The August coup caused a breakdown in the process of formation of new Unionwide relations among the sovereign states, created complications, and spurred on the process of disintegration—no longer of the government alone but of the entire society. On August 22 Boris Yeltsin issued a decree “on ensuring the economic basis of the sovereignty of the RSFSR.” It provided for all enterprises and organizations subordinated to the Soviet Union as a whole to be transferred to the jurisdiction of the RSFSR with the exception of those whose administration had been turned over to government bodies of the USSR on the basis of laws passed by Russia. On August 24 the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine declared itself an independent democratic state and announced that *from that moment on only the constitution, laws, and decrees of the government and other legislative acts of the Ukrainian republic would be valid on the territory of that republic*. The decree stated that this step had been taken because of “the mortal danger

threatening Ukraine in connection with the coup d'état in the USSR of August 19, 1991." On August 25 Byelorussia declared its independence, followed by Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. On August 28 the leadership of the Russian Federation announced that Russia would establish its control over the USSR State Bank and the USSR Foreign Trade Bank.

These events determined the position I took and all my actions during the emergency session of the USSR Supreme Soviet, which was convened immediately after the attempted coup and called for an extraordinary session of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR without delay. Speaking before the Supreme Soviet, I said that a real threat of the Soviet Union falling apart had arisen. If this were to happen, all talk of reform would be empty chatter. Amendments needed to be made in the Union treaty, but it should not be renounced altogether.

Understanding the full danger of the new situation to prospects for democratic change, I regarded the resumption of work on the Union treaty as the top priority.

At the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, whose proceedings began on September 2, a statement was read from the president of the USSR and the top leaders of the Union republics. (It was signed by ten republics, and the republic of Georgia had helped draft the statement.) It proposed a program of urgent actions to extricate the country from its acute political crisis. It took note of the pressing need for a treaty establishing a Union of Sovereign States to be drafted and signed by all republics wishing to do so. In this Union, each republic would itself decide the form of its participation.

From the point of view of democracy, not everything at the congress went entirely smoothly, but it would have been unrealistic to expect that. Certain basic positions were developed at that congress—that a Union treaty is necessary and an economic treaty indispensable. A position favoring unified armed forces and the coordination of a common foreign policy was adopted.

After a heated and turbulent discussion, the congress passed a group of resolutions defining the tasks of *a transitional period*, including a law concerning the government bodies of the Soviet Union during that period. To arrive at agreed-on solutions to problems of foreign and domestic policy affecting the interests of all the republics a State Council was formed, consisting of the president of the USSR and the republics' top officials. One of

the first decisions of the State Council was to recognize the independence of the Baltic republics.

Immediately after the congress, work proceeded energetically along two lines: A working group began to draft a new Union treaty, and a committee for operational management of the Soviet economy began drafting a treaty of economic union. The main purpose of this union was to consolidate the efforts of the sovereign states to establish a common market and carry out a coordinated economic policy as an indispensable condition for overcoming the current crisis. The draft of this treaty provided that signing the treaty establishing the Union of Sovereign States was not a condition for joining the economic union.

As early as September 16 the State Council reviewed the draft treaty for economic union. On October 1, in Alma-Ata, there was a meeting of leaders of thirteen republics who discussed this treaty. On October 4 the treaty was initialed by the republics. On October 18 a treaty establishing an economic community of sovereign states was signed in the Kremlin by the president of the USSR and the leaders of eight republics. A few days later Ukraine added its name to this treaty. The treaty was then sent to the parliaments of the various republics for ratification.

At the same time new Unionwide government structures were established in keeping with the changing situation, new leaders were appointed, and reorganization was begun of the foreign ministry, the defense ministry, the ministry of the interior, and the state security committee (KGB). An inter-republican Economic Committee was also established.

On October 1 comments by Boris Yeltsin were sent out to supplement the draft Union treaty which had been distributed earlier to members of the Political Consultative Council (a body established by the president after the coup). The future Union was defined in the text as “the Union of Free Sovereign Republics—a united democratic state exercising government power within the limits of authority voluntarily assigned to it by the participants in the treaty.” Thus, recovering from the shock inflicted by the August coup, the leaderships of the Union and the republics resumed their work of transforming the Union along both political and economic lines. There were grounds for believing that the Novo-Ogarevo process had been restored. But only with great difficulty, many interruptions, and periodic setbacks did these efforts proceed during the autumn months of 1991.

While work on the new version of a Union treaty was under way in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin, who was in Sochi, received a document entitled

“The Strategy of Russia During the Transitional Period.” It bore the inscription “Strictly Confidential.” Here are several passages from this document, which had been drafted by a “think tank” of the Democratic Russia organization.

Before the August events the leadership of Russia, in opposition to the old totalitarian Center, was able to rely on the support of the leaders of the overwhelming majority of Union republics, who sought to strengthen their own political positions. The elimination of the old Center inevitably brings to the fore objective conflicts between the interests of Russia and those of the other republics. For the latter, the preservation of the existing flow of resources and financial-economic relations during the transition period signifies a unique opportunity to reconstruct their economies at Russia’s expense. For the RSFSR, which is experiencing a serious crisis as it is, this is a significant additional burden on its economic structures and undermines the possibility of its own economic renewal. . . .

Objectively Russia does not need an economic Center standing over it and engaged in the redistribution of its resources. But many other republics have an interest in such a Center. Having established control of the property on their territories, they seek to use the Unionwide government bodies to redistribute Russia’s property and resources to their own advantage. Because this kind of Center can only exist with the support of the republics, objectively, regardless of the personnel in the Center, it will pursue policies contradictory to the interests of Russia.

The authors of this memorandum gave two possible formulas representing two forms of unification (economic union plus immediate political independence, or economic independence plus temporary political agreement), and they unreservedly recommended that the second formula be chosen. They asserted, accordingly, that “Russia must refrain from entering into any rigid, long-term, all-encompassing economic union,” that it “has no interest in the creation of permanently functioning general bodies of economic administration standing over and above the republics,” that it should “categorically refuse to make tax payments to the federal budget,” that “it must have its own customs department,” and so on.

This conception essentially meant that Russia must renounce its role as the “nucleus” of the Union. The motivation was that by preserving its own resources, Russia could quickly grow rich. It was evident that the authors of

the memorandum perceived the disintegration of the Soviet Union (an event made possible as a result of the coup) not as a tragedy but as a kind of “victory.”

Yeltsin and I had a serious conversation about the conception embodied in this memorandum. He agreed with my arguments against it, and at the time he seemed quite sincere. But that had happened before. You could talk with him and reach an agreement about something, but the next day he would do just the opposite. And that’s what happened on this occasion. (Incidentally, that is the way he has continued to behave, as was confirmed more than once in the years from 1992 through 1998.)

On October 23, at the Congress of People’s Deputies of the RSFSR, Yeltsin presented a range of measures that he proposed be taken. De facto these measures would undermine the treaty establishing an economic community that had just been signed, or at least they conflicted with it. Yeltsin said, “The inter-republican government bodies are called on to play only a consultative-coordinating role. Real power is now being exercised by the republics. And therefore the Russian Federation must pursue an independent policy and operate on the basis of national interest, not on the basis of some pattern imposed from the outside.”

Immediately after Yeltsin’s speech I was interviewed by the editor in chief of *Moscow News*, Len Karpinsky. The interview went as follows:

KARPINSKY: For some reason, in the new situation an old formula that is now false is being mechanically repeated. It is said that if there is going to be a Center, unavoidably it will be the kind we have had to deal with for decades, and even, alas, right up until recently, the kind that represents a constant danger to our country’s freedom-loving nations and nationalities and to their national state systems. The false alternatives presented are that either the republics are independent and thus there can be no Center, or, if the Center is preserved, then say good-bye to independence. But why not imagine a kind of Center little known to us in the past, one that would be different in principle, a structure for expressing and coordinating the interests of the republics, a mechanism for arriving at consensus?

GORBACHEV: I completely agree with your line of argument. You have touched on the central problem. In many respects, what we may expect in the future depends on how we resolve this problem.

The alternative is not, on the one hand, whether the republics will become sovereign states (they already are) or, on the other, whether the

Unionwide Center will be preserved. The real question is whether we will find a way out of our common difficulty and move ahead together or whether we will rush helter-skelter in all directions. By no means is it only the corridors of power that link the republics with one another, not just the artificial limb, so to speak, of a bureaucratic party and government apparatus. The ties between the republics have grown up over the years and now permeate the entire fabric of life of all the republics. Thus our interaction will be either through conflict and dissension or through civilized cooperation. The totalitarian bureaucratic Center, which embodied a policy and ideology of great-power chauvinism and forced unification, has already fallen apart. That is good for everyone, but that fact should not be confused with allowing the other ties binding our Union to collapse. Consequently we are talking about a new kind of Center, one in a different mold, not a despot ordering the republics around but a coordinating body authorized to play an intermediary role and provided with the resources to do that by the republics themselves. . . .

Among certain groups of politicians in Russia, including those in Boris Yeltsin's circle, there are those who think that Russia should secede "just like everyone else." It should shake itself loose from the burden of having "special responsibility" for others and instead should rely on its own natural resources, its own economic and intellectual potential, and begin to live independently. This is just another academic utopia—and a very dangerous one. . . . Let me speak frankly: Russia cannot extricate itself alone, because it is also dependent on the other republics. The danger of this extreme separatist plan flows from the present situation itself. Perhaps a few years from now Russia could cope with its problems in isolation. But that could only occur after several years. For the other republics, including Ukraine, isolationism would be a catastrophe.

KARPINSKY: On the other hand, why can't Russia, acting as the "legal heir" of the USSR, assume all the worries and concerns bequeathed to us by the former Soviet Union? In the last analysis, does it really matter where the magnetic center for consolidation is located?

GORBACHEV: As soon as Russia tried, let's say, to give direct orders to the republics, all the sovereign republics would immediately flare up: What's this, trying to revive the empire? The majority of nations and nationalities are ready to accept Russia's leadership but only in the form of a new Union and through Unionwide institutions in which Russia would in fact play its

part. Such Unionwide institutions are necessary—above all, for Russia itself. So that its role and image would be perceived naturally as that of an equal partner.

KARPINSKY: From what you said, you obviously understood very well the significance of Russia's position and the danger it represented, the fact that this position de facto created serious obstacles to continued work on the Union treaty. Nonetheless you kept insisting that the treaty be signed as soon as possible. Wasn't that an illusion?

GORBACHEV: Yes, I understood all this. But I based my view, as before, on the fact that a Union is necessary for all the republics, including Russia. My conviction was that it is necessary to persist in the work we began, work that has come very far.

During this time I made a short trip to Madrid in connection with the start of a conference on the Middle East. There, on October 29–30, I met with leaders of the United States and Spain (George Bush, Juan Carlos, and Felipe Gonzalez), and later, in the south of France, with Francois Mitterand. Those with whom I met expressed their conviction that the quickest possible signing of a Union treaty was essential. They could not understand what was going on with us. When I evaluated these discussions, I realized that the most essential item discussed was the fact that it was in our best interests and those of the West for us to undergo reform and renewal but, without fail, to preserve the Union as one of the fundamental supporting structures for peace in today's world.

Considering all aspects of the matter, I tried to speed up this effort. On November 4, at the regular session of the State Council, I made a sharp pronouncement: to delay the signing of the treaty any further would be intolerable.

The transcript of my speech at that time has been preserved. The following is the essence of what I said:

We are in a serious situation, indeed a formidable one. I believe that given the potential we gained after the coup, as a result of the decisions made on the basis of the joint declaration of leaders of the republics, that we handled this question too light-mindedly and not in the responsible manner it deserves. We all hoped at the time that we could deal with the situation, that we could take it in hand and lead the country confidently down the road of reform and out of the crisis.

At the time we felt intensely that disintegration of our state was impermissible. We had looked over the edge, so to speak, and seen the abyss into which we could plunge if that were to happen.

The first few weeks of collaborative effort reinforced our certainty about that. The people and the country supported our approach. But after the first few weeks there were delays in our response, and political intrigue resumed. The economic treaty is experiencing a painful birth. Our country is gasping for breath, lacking any clarity on these most important questions. This is all very dangerous.

On the eve of the November 4 session of the State Council I had one more meeting with Boris Yeltsin. There was a sharpness to the conversation. I posed all questions bluntly, particularly the question of what line Russia would follow regarding the treaty for an economic commonwealth. Yeltsin gave assurances that Russia would operate within the framework of the economic treaty and that Russia would even play an initiatory role. At the State Council meeting itself Yeltsin on the whole adhered to that position, stressing that his orientation was in favor of a “new treaty—a Union of Sovereign States.”

On November 14 the State Council considered the draft treaty for the Union of Sovereign States, which had been updated based on the comments or objections of the various republics. Here is the brief transcript of that session’s proceedings:

State Council. Novo-Ogarevo. November 14. Decision is made to go through the text. The preamble is quickly agreed to. There is an argument over the name—Union of Sovereign Republics or Union of Sovereign States.

YELTSIN: Union of Sovereign States.

M. s.: So let it be Union of Sovereign States. We must still solve the main question: Will we create a Union that is a state entity (*gosudarstvo*) or not?*

* Translator’s Note: In the present excerpt from a transcript of November 14, 1991, and in the next excerpt, from a transcript of November 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev argues for a renewed form of Union that would retain some significant aspects of central governmental authority while ceasing to have the highly centralized character of the former Soviet state. It has been suggested that in this context the phrase “state entity” best conveys in English what Gorbachev was advocating. The Russian term he used is *gosudarstvo*, normally translated as “government” or “state.”

YELTSIN: The intention is to create a Union.

NAZARBAEV: What kind of Union do we want?

M. S.: What is your opinion?

NAZARBAEV: It's very complicated to talk about a federation. Perhaps a confederation?

M. S.: A Union state entity. I categorically insist. If we do not create a state entity, I predict disaster, I tell you . . .

YELTSIN: We will create a Union of states.

M. S.: If it is not a state entity, I will not participate in this process. I can leave you all right now. (M. S. rises and begins to gather his papers together.) This is my position in principle. If there is not to be a state entity, I consider my mission to have been exhausted. I cannot come out in favor of something amorphous.

SHUSHKEVICH [head of the Byelorussian republic] tries to persuade Gorbachev to stay.

M. S.: I want you to believe that I do not have any ambitions and I do not aspire to any new posts.

YELTSIN: Let's call it plainly a confederation.

M. S.: You decide. I cannot force you. You have no less responsibility than I; in fact you have more.

YELTSIN: It must be done in such a way that Ukraine doesn't leave.

SHUSHKEVICH: I think they will come into a confederation.

There is a break.

M. S.: Well then, it seems we have found a compromise: "a confederated democratic state exercising power . . ."

It was then agreed that the treaty would be initialed on November 25.

After the session a press conference was held. Here Yeltsin said: "It is hard to say what number of states will join the Union, but I have the firm conviction that a Union will exist." Shushkevich said: "In my opinion, the probability of the formation of a new Union has substantially increased. I think there will be a Union." The leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tadzhikistan also spoke in favor of a Union.

I took the floor last and said that a treaty for a Union of Sovereign States was simply indispensable as a basis for reforming our unitary multinational state. It was also indispensable in order to solve our most urgent problems. Without an agreement among the republics, the reforms would go no further. We had to have agreement and coordination because that was how our fates had taken shape and nothing could be done about that. For us to separate now, while trying to guess whether that would turn out well, was simply impossible. If we go our separate ways as nationally distinct states, then even within the framework of a commonwealth the process of coordination and cooperation would become extraordinarily complicated.

It seemed that we had taken a significant step forward. Of course there were moments that caused one to sit up and take notice. These had to do in particular with the position taken by the Ukrainian leader Kravchuk. He had not taken part in the State Council meeting of November 14. But on November 8, when he returned to Kiev from Moscow, he held a press conference where he stated the following:

- What is most important is the referendum on Ukraine's independence (scheduled for December 1).
- The economic crisis must be overcome.
- Ukraine needs to establish its own national army.
- Ukraine also needs its own separate currency.
- Independent foreign relations are necessary; there is no need for the existence of a Unionwide foreign ministry.

Regarding the Union treaty, Kravchuk took the following position:

Let's stop all the talk about the Novo-Ogarevo process. And let's make it clear, finally, exactly what a Union is. And exactly whom would the Supreme Soviet of the Union represent? Would it be fifteen republics, as before, or would it be a Union of seven, as it has now become? And exactly what would Gorbachev's position be? The Novo-Ogarevo process is now in the pluperfect [i.e., a thing of the past]. . . . We will oppose any attempt to create central government bodies. We will not ratify a treaty if central government bodies of any kind whatsoever are hidden behind it. Indeed no Center of any kind should exist other than coordinating bodies that would be established by the states participating in the treaty process.

Clearly Kravchuk did not want a real Union. He was only willing to support something amorphous and undefined. But at that time he was the only

one taking that position, although—as was evident in the transcript of the State Council session quoted above—Yeltsin’s comments and proposals were largely in harmony with Kravchuk’s views.

The next session of the State Council was held, as agreed, on November 25. The following is a transcript of that meeting’s proceedings:

M. S.: As we agreed at the previous session of the State Council, the question for consideration at today’s session is the initialing of the Union treaty.

YELTSIN: Unfortunately some formulations have shown up that we have not come to agree on.

M. S.: Well, let’s go through the text. On the preamble there are no objections. On the principles. First . . .

YELTSIN: We have to come back to this.

M. S.: But we already reached an agreement here. We debated for four hours.

YELTSIN: I understand. But we held exploratory discussions in several committees of the Supreme Soviet. The majority agree that there should be no Union after all, that is, not a confederated democratic state but a confederation of democratic states.

An argument breaks out.

YELTSIN: Since I still have objections, I will submit a statement for the minutes while initialing the treaty.

Once again, a harsh discussion erupts between YELTSIN and GORBACHEV.

NIYAZOV (the first to intervene): I think we have to consider Boris Nikolavich’s [Yeltsin’s] proposal. It seems to me that the essence of the matter does not change.

M. S.: It does change. There is no state entity.

KARIMOV: Our parliament also expressed the sentiment that the draft treaty should not be initialed until it is discussed in committee.

YELTSIN: There is another important aspect. Signing the treaty without Ukraine is useless. There would be no Union. Let’s wait for Ukraine. That would also show Ukraine our respect.

M. S.: As someone said, “Gorbachev has become obsolete.” Apparently that is your opinion as well. Therefore reach an agreement among yourselves. I do not wish to link myself with the chaos that stands behind your vague and formless position. If the intention is not to establish a Union, say so.

The decision is made to send the text of the treaty to the Supreme Soviets of the republics by decision of the State Council. An argument follows about how to formulate the submission.

M. S.: We should say that we consider ourselves in agreement on the text of the treaty and that we are submitting it for the consideration of the Supreme Soviets.

YELTSIN: I think we should be more concise: "The present draft is being submitted for consideration . . ."

M. S.: What's the difference?

YELTSIN: The difference is the phrase "agreed on."

M. S.: But if it is not agreed on, it shouldn't be sent out.

Once again an argument breaks out.

M. S.: I hold that the leaders of the republics, at a moment requiring great responsibility, are engaging in unnecessary maneuvering.

SHUSHKEVICH: I will not accept that with regard to myself. My view is that we initial the treaty ten days from now, but not today.

M. S.: Listen, let's do this. You stay here and come to an agreement among yourselves, without any witnesses; we will leave you. I ask the rest of you to stay.

GORBACHEV leaves and goes downstairs. After twenty-five minutes YELTSIN and SHUSHKEVICH come downstairs also. Together they have worked out a formula. After a break they resume.

The proposed text is as follows: "Resolved by the State Council of the USSR to submit to the Supreme Soviets of the Sovereign States and to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR the draft treaty that has been worked out for a Union of Sovereign States and to request that the Supreme Soviets consider this draft, with the idea of preparing the draft to be signed during the current year."

M. S.: Also add: "The draft is to be published in the press."

Yeltsin's statement for the minutes is then gone through page by page. In the main his comments are accepted.

And so the draft treaty was not initialed. Why did Yeltsin, and those following him, not want to take this action? I think his advisers persuaded

him that he needed a free hand to make further corrections “behind the scenes” while work on the treaty continued. I do not exclude the possibility, however, that the Russian president already knew at the time that the document would not go into effect, and therefore he did not want to endorse it.

Immediately after this session of the State Council another press conference was held. This time the representatives of the republics did not want to participate. I summarized for the journalists the exchange of opinions that had taken place. I emphasized that all the primary clauses in the draft treaty had remained unchanged. I concluded my remarks as follows:

We returned once again to a discussion on the question of a confederation, whether that is a Union or a state entity? The formula that had been agreed on at the previous session of the State Council was left untouched, namely, that a Union of Sovereign States is a confederated democratic state. That conception was present in all parts of the draft treaty. Thus the very difficult, highly responsible work at this important stage, represented by the State Council’s consideration of the treaty, has been completed. . . . The leaders of the republics to some extent have left themselves room for maneuver and are correct in stating that the process must still be completed by the Supreme Soviets of the republics.

On November 27 the new draft treaty was published.

The discussion at the State Council on November 25, and what happened at that meeting in general, left me with a sense of foreboding. It seemed no accident that Boris Yeltsin had dismissed what we had agreed on concerning the main points in the new treaty, and that he had suddenly made public, for all the world to see, certain theses from the past that completely overturned the points we had agreed on. Evidently, even then, he had a completely different plan in mind.

We now know that Yeltsin had indeed adopted a course aimed at dissolving the Union, that in fact he had done so long before November 25. Leonid Kravchuk, in his book *The Last Days of the Empire*, states that there had been secret agreements and coordinated actions among Yeltsin and the leaders of Ukraine and Byelorussia and that this collaboration had long been established, virtually from the moment when preparations for the Union treaty began. According to Kravchuk, the “threesome” tried “not to attract excessive attention,” which “was assured by the very narrow circle involved.” As I have said, this only became known later. At that time, on

November 25, I had doubts about Yeltsin's position, but that was all. I wondered whether he was playing a double game.

On December 1 the referendum for Ukraine's independence was held, resulting in 90.32 percent of voters favoring independence. Kravchuk was elected president of the republic. And on December 2 Yeltsin recognized Ukraine's independence.