

**Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet  
in Russian-Ukrainian Relations**

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## **Introduction**

The breakup of the Soviet Union has brought about numerous controversies among successor states. Russian-Ukrainian relations are seriously affected by such controversies. The range of conflict areas in the relationship between Russia and Ukraine is rather large -- the two nations have differences on ethnic, political, economic, territorial, and military issues. It has been especially difficult for many Russians to accept the secession of Ukraine. In imperial Russia, Ukraine was considered a subdivision of a larger Russia. The Bolsheviks rejected this idea and, through the Soviet era, officially acknowledged the existence of Ukraine as a separate East Slavic nation. At present, Russia has been trying to gain its role as the "elder brother" of Ukraine, while Ukraine, having gained formal political independence, wishes to establish its new identity. The search by both Russians and Ukrainians for their identities, and both Kiev's and Moscow's wishes to make as many political, economic, and military gains as possible from the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, are the main characteristic features of the relationship between the two states. Due to the large set of conflict areas in bilateral relations, and having domestic instability and a lack of democratic institutions in both states, the Russian-Ukrainian disputes are likely to be long-term ones.

In 1992-93 the two most controversial issues in the Russian-Ukrainian relationship were the disputes over Ukraine's denuclearization, and provisions to Ukraine from Russia. Since early 1994, the division of the Black Sea Fleet and developments in Crimea have become the dominant (or, at least, very significant) aspects in Russian-Ukrainian relations. The Crimean peninsula has become an arena for the duel between Kiev and Moscow on political, economic, military, and territorial disputes. The upcoming Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Russia and Ukraine was supposed to settle these disputes. However, it was decided by negotiating delegations led by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets and Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Evgyeny Marchuk in October 1994 to give this treaty a status of a "frame-work," leaving disputes over Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet unsettled. In this paper, I discuss the role

and significance of the disputes over the Black Sea Fleet and Crimea within the context of Russian-Ukrainian relations.

## **Russian-Ukrainian Relations: A General Outlook**

### **Ukraine's Independence**

In Kiev in November 1990, Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk signed a friendship treaty in which Russia and Ukraine recognized each other as sovereign states. It was a tactical alliance between two provincial leaders, who were demonstrating their opposition to Gorbachev's rule and fostering the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In a referendum on December 1, 1991, more than 90 percent of the Ukrainian population voted for independence, and within a week, Yeltsin recognized Ukraine's independence unconditionally.

Since that time, Ukraine has been an independent state, though many Russians are reluctant to recognize that fact. The prior integration of Ukraine and Russia for more than three hundred years has brought about very strong political, ethnic, economic, cultural, demographic, and psychological challenges to Ukraine's independence. The "elder-younger" brother syndrome and the propagation of Russian culture and language as "higher," as well as a historically-claimed Russian *mission civilisatrice* have produced a paternalistic Russian view of other peoples of the former Soviet Union, particularly Ukrainians and Belarussians.<sup>1</sup> These historical stereotypes, built up over centuries, are unlikely to disappear overnight. According to Roman Szporluk, "most Russians apparently never took the "Ukrainian Question" [whether Ukrainians are an independent ethnic entity with a right to national sovereignty or if they are just one ethnic branch of a larger, Russian ethnicity] seriously, and, accordingly, regarded the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as a fiction. They continued to think of Ukraine as a part of a larger and more real Russia."<sup>2</sup> Most Russians, including powerful decision-makers, can hardly

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<sup>1</sup>Kuzio, "Russia-Crimea-Ukraine: Triangle of Conflict," in *Conflict Studies*, No. 267 (January 1994), p. 2.

reconcile themselves with the idea of a free and independent Ukraine. The threats of Russia's attempts to re-absorb Ukraine were acknowledged as late as 1992 by US Ambassador Strobe Talbott who commented that:

The brutal fact is that many Russians -- notably including Russians that we would consider to be good guys, liberals, reformers -- in their government, do not accept the independence of Ukraine. And Ukrainians know that. That is one reason why Ukrainians know there is no state on the face of the earth that has more need for security guarantees against Russia than Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

Opposition to an independent Ukraine has been expressed in the statements or actions of numerous Russian politicians, which are aimed at either the re-creation, in some form, of the old Soviet Union, or re-establishment of Russian hegemony in the region. The most extreme statements against Ukrainian independence have come from Russian nationalist parties and organizations. The most significant representative of the radical imperial nationalists is Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the head of the Liberal Democratic Party. According to Zhirinovskiy, there is no Ukraine and there is no Russian Federation; there is only one big Russia.<sup>4</sup> Despite his eccentricity, Zhirinovskiy clearly represents a trend in Russian nationalism which is anti-reformist, chauvinistic, *revanshist*, and anti-Western in nature. Sergei Baburin, one of the leaders of the National Salvation Front, was quoted in May 1992 as telling the Ukrainian Ambassador in Moscow that, "either Ukraine reunites with Russia or there will be war."<sup>5</sup> Of great concern in Ukraine are trends within the Civic Union, a coalition of the "industrial lobby" headed by Arkadiy Volsky, the Democratic Party of Nikolay Travkin, and Communist Party of Russia, headed by Gennadiy Zjuganov, such as difficult economic, political and even military pressure used against Ukraine if it does not voluntarily reunite with Russia.

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<sup>2</sup> Roman Szporluk, "Belarus, Ukraine, and The Russian Question: A Comment," in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, No. 4 (October-December 1993), p. 368.

<sup>3</sup> Strobe Talbott, "Crisis or Kiosks in the Former Soviet Union," *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 22, No. 10, (December 1992), pp. 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> See Roman Szporluk, "Belarus, Ukraine, and The Russian Question," p. 368.

<sup>5</sup> *Izvestiya* (Moscow), May 26, 1992. Quoted in Martin J. Dewing, "Ukraine: Independent Nuclear Weapon Capability Rising," Naval Postgraduate School; Monterey, Calif., June 1993, p. 92.

On the whole, Yeltsin has been quite careful to avoid making statements which could evoke negative reaction in Kiev, but it is quite obvious that he has not welcomed Ukraine's independence. Yeltsin has been quoted as saying that, "Russia reserves the right to review the borders with those republics that declared themselves independent."<sup>6</sup> Sergei Stankevich, President Yeltsin's political adviser, suggested to Western diplomats in the spring of 1993 that they not bother opening embassies in Kiev as they would soon be downgraded to consulates. Stankevich also cautioned against establishing political-military ties too close to Ukraine. A senior official in the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry replied that, "Russia's attitude toward its neighbors can now be compared to Germany's in 1939."<sup>7</sup>

Many Western observers and Russian politicians have argued that concerns about extreme statements or actions emerging from Russian politicians are exaggerated or unjustified. However, most observers, scholars, and politicians in Ukraine feel otherwise. "It cannot be stressed strongly enough that without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire," states Zbigniew Brzezinski, "but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire."<sup>8</sup> The Ukrainian political elite shares these considerations and opposes the idea of any Russia-centered "confederation." Russia, with its imperialist mentality, could be viewed as the natural, historical enemy of an independent Ukraine, and there is no reason to believe that in the near future Russia will abandon its traditional view of Ukraine as an integral part of Russia.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Roman Solchanyk, "Ukraine: A Year of Transition, *RFE-RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (February 14, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> T. Kuzio, "Russia-Crimea-Ukraine," p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Premature Partnership," in *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1994, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> See Roman Solchanyk, "Ukraine: A Year of Transition," *RFE-RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (December 17, 1992), pp. 58-63.

## **What Does Ukraine Mean to Russia?**

In addition to the psychological trauma caused by Ukraine's secession, Russia has other geopolitical and strategic reasons to regret this fact. First, Ukraine shares borders with highly populated regions of the Russian Federation, such as Central, Central-Rich-Soil (Centralno-Chernozemny), and the North Caucasus.. Thus, the geographic and demographic links with Ukraine extend to the very heart of Russia and spread to the rest of the Russian territories.

Second, the Black Sea and Azov Sea ports in Odessa, Il'ichovsk, Nickolaev, and Mariupol were very important economically for the former Soviet Union. These ports provided more than 20 percent of export supplies to the Soviet Union. Trans-European gas pipelines "Brotherhood" ("Bratstvo") and "Union" ("Sojuz"), and the oil pipeline "Friendship" (Druzhba") run across Ukrainian territory. For the former Soviet Union, these facilities had significant importance as economic links with European states, and remain very important for Russia today. Ukraine's independence would, to some extent, separate Russia from Europe. Thus, one of the Russian objectives is preventing Ukraine from creating a new trading network in Europe that will bypass or compete with that of Russia.

Third, Ukraine had been making a substantial contribution to the Soviet economy. For example, in the former Soviet Union, Ukraine had been producing about 40 percent of steel, 35 percent of coal, and a considerable share of food products. According to UNESCO's estimations, Ukrainian scientific and technical capabilities comprise more than 6 percent of those of the world.<sup>10</sup> Despite the current economic difficulties in Ukraine, its industrial, agricultural, and scientific potential would add to those of Russia, should it be under Moscow's direct or indirect control.

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<sup>10</sup> Anton Filipenko, "We Are Being Pushed Aside," in *Holos Ukrayiny*, May 6, 1994, p. 3.



Fourth, Ukraine played a significant role in the Soviet military-industrial complex. Some experts assert that 25 percent of all Soviet armaments had been produced in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> All of the Soviet SS-24 missiles were manufactured at Ukrainian enterprises. Thus, Ukraine's secession breaks cooperation links in the military-industrial complex of the former Soviet Union, which may affect Russia's defense industry. Since the Russian economy has inherited military-oriented features, restoration of cooperation with Ukraine within a single military-industrial complex is one of the top priorities for the Russian leadership. Most Russian politicians speak about "restoration of the old economic cooperation," which, in fact, had been servicing mostly the military-industrial complex of the former Soviet Union.

Fifth, Ukraine is the critical region for Russia's military strategic interests in South-Western and Western Europe. In fact, overnight Russia has been thrown back to its seventeenth-century borders, with rather limited access to the Baltic and Black Seas. Re-establishing some form of "confederation" with Ukraine under Moscow's command would give Russia access to the vital sub-regions of Europe and create the superpower image that Russia has been striving for. Ukraine has a large-scale military infrastructure which serviced more than one million of the former Soviet troops. Some elements of this infrastructure are vital for Russia; for example, Sevastopol, the key naval base of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet. In fact, the city of Sevastopol was originally created as a military naval base. Protecting Russian military-strategic interests in Southwestern and Western Europe without Ukraine would require Russian creation of a completely new military infrastructure, which is extremely costly and may not be adequate for Russia's aspirations in the region. That is why Russia is very sensitive to the loss of Ukraine as a military-strategic area, and makes attempts to maintain its strategic presence in the Black Sea and control the port of Sevastopol as a key naval base for the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

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<sup>11</sup> *National Security of Ukraine: The Past and the Present*, Institute of World Economy and International Affairs Research Paper, Kiev (1993), p.75.

## **Russian Military Threat: Exaggeration Or Reality?**

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia has sought to limit national armies of the newly independent states to essentially symbolic and nominal forces integrated under Russia's command. Despite this Russian policy, Ukraine has made serious efforts to build up its independent military. Although initial estimates of the size of armed forces located on the territory of Ukraine after the breakup of the Soviet Union varied, it was not until January 1992 that a more realistic accounting of 726,000 was obtained. It was generally agreed that a force of this size had to be reduced; Ukraine needed a smaller, more affordable force for its defense. On October 19, 1993, the Rada approved the end-strength of 450,000 personnel for the Ukrainian armed forces.<sup>12</sup> This would be one of the largest armies in Europe, which might be undesirable for the countries neighboring Ukraine. Nevertheless, when estimating Ukraine's military power for preventing an external threat, one cannot fail to see Ukraine's deep military vulnerability from the Russian side.

The Ukrainian political and military elite have generally accepted that from a strategic perspective, one should not completely reject the potential threat of Russia's military aggression. These considerations prompted the former Rada and former Defense Minister Konstantin Morozov to incorporate a major change into the final draft of the military doctrine of Ukraine. While the original version stated that "Ukraine does not consider any state its adversary," the final version of the document declares that "Ukraine will consider its potential adversary to be any state whose consistent policy constitutes a military danger to Ukraine."<sup>13</sup> A large number of the former Rada deputies had been unhappy with the statement that Ukraine had no enemies, since they believed that there clearly was a potential threat from Russia.

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<sup>12</sup> For more details on the Ukrainian military, see Stephen Olynyk, "Emerging Post-Soviet Armies: The Case of the Ukraine," *Military Review*, No. 3 (March 1994), pp. 5-17.

<sup>13</sup> Ustina Markus, "Recent Defense Developments in Ukraine," in *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (January 28, 1994), p. 29.

Gaining reliable security guarantees from Russia has been a vital issue for Ukraine since the very first days of its independence. Russia's readiness to provide Ukraine with security guarantees was initially announced by Yeltsin at the January 15, 1993 meeting with Kravchuk in Moscow. Yeltsin stated that "Russia guarantees the preservation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the defense of its borders ... within the framework of the CIS ... from nuclear attack."<sup>14</sup> Ukraine found Yeltsin's statement unsatisfactory because of Russia's pledge to respect Ukrainian borders "within the framework of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States]." Ukraine has consistently opposed close ties with other members of the CIS, mostly because Russia has used the framework as a means to subordinate the former Soviet Republics. Russia's commitment to its obligations under the Trilateral Statement of January 14, 1994, stating that Russia will respect Ukrainian sovereignty, have been found unsatisfactory by many Ukrainians as well.

Ukrainian experts are almost unanimous in saying that Russian-Ukrainian bilateral arrangements could be useful, but not sufficient to guarantee Ukraine's security. To this end they suggest that Ukraine enter European security arrangements.<sup>15</sup> The former President Kravchuk believed that "Ukraine's membership in such European institutions as CSCE, NATO, and the Western European Union (WEU), would provide sufficient national security guarantees for Ukraine."<sup>16</sup> Some scholars believe that "it would be most reasonable and beneficial (for Ukraine) to move toward the European Community together with Russia, and finally to be integrated into the non-military structures of NATO."<sup>17</sup> Ukraine signed a document to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program in February 1994 that is in accordance with this trend. According to the former Foreign Minister Zlenko, Ukraine's participation in this program "would be in three

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<sup>14</sup> Roman Solchanyk, "Ukraine's Search For Security," *RFE/RL*, May 21, 1993, pp. 1-6.

<sup>15</sup> See Alexander Dergachov, "Ukraine and the International Community: Problems of National Security," in *Political Thought*, No. 1 (1993), p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, October 28, 1993, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

directions: primarily, these are joint military personnel exercises and training; participation in peace-keeping operations; and the development of these peace-keeping operations."<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, many Ukrainian experts argue that "the transition to a new relationship with Russia requires Ukraine's non-participation in military-political or military arrangements together with Russia."<sup>19</sup> The presumption for such an approach is that any military alliance with Russia would be dominated by Russia, and that Ukraine would suffer Russia's strong influence. These considerations have resulted in Ukraine, withholding its participation in the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security.

It is quite obvious that the Ukrainian leadership exaggerates concerns about a Russian military invasion, trying to present Russia as a predator state. The goal of such a policy is for Ukraine to get as many military, economic, and political advantages as possible from the West. Policymakers in Kiev believe that for the United States and Western Europe, Ukraine is too important geopolitically for its absorption by Russia to be tolerated. Alexander Motyl describes the situation as follows:

Although the possibility of war is not as far-fetched as one would like it to be, it would not work to Ukraine's disadvantage. Indeed, the emergence of a genuinely hostile Russia would translate into Ukraine's rapid integration into European economic and security structures and its concomitant transformation into a client state of the United States. As an East European version of South Korea, Ukraine would become the recipient of large-scale Western -- in particular, American -- military and economic assistance that would guarantee its stability, if not its prosperity. ...Russia's aggressiveness, therefore, could be Ukraine's salvation.<sup>20</sup>

These comments present a correct evaluation of some Ukrainian policymakers' considerations, although the supposed West European and American response to Russia's military hostility towards Ukraine is disputable. In case of rising Russian-Ukrainian controversies, the United States could try to mediate disputes and encourage the CSCE to assure

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<sup>18</sup> Radio Ukraine World Service, February 9, 1994, in FBIS-SOV-94-028, February 10, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> *National Security of Ukraine: the Past and the Present*, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, "Will Ukraine Survive 1994?" in *The Harriman Institute Forum*, Vol. 7, No. 5 (January 1994), p. 4.

minority rights on both sides of the border. It could encourage Ukraine and Russia to undertake joint economic development in heavily Russified Eastern Ukraine and nearby Russia. But it is unlikely for the United States to make Ukraine its arms supply "client state." The U.S./ Russia-oriented policy regarding Ukraine's denuclearization and Washington's reluctance to provide specific security guarantees for Ukraine leave little hope for such a scenario. The U.S. obligations under the Trilateral Statement of January 14, 1994, are the maximum assurances Ukraine has received from the United States. Also, it is unlikely that Western Europe will integrate Ukraine into its economic and security structures in the near future. At present, Ukraine's sinking economy makes full-scale economic cooperation with Europe impossible. Ukraine's participation in NATO's Partnership For Peace program is the highest level of Ukraine's involvement into European security structures so far.

Newly elected President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, like his predecessor Leonid Kravchuk, has been bargaining on many provisions of the upcoming Russian-Ukrainian Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation. Security guarantees for Ukraine is one of the provisions which stalemates the signing of the treaty. Since the very beginning of negotiations on the treaty, Russia has been clear about its opposition to clearly-defined obligations regarding Ukrainian territorial integrity. In the 1990 Russian-Ukrainian treaty, it was stated that both states had no territorial claims on each other. Nevertheless, at the present stage of negotiations on the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation, Russia is insisting on downgrading this commitment to a very unclear and vague pledge to respect Ukrainian sovereignty. This serves as a vivid example of the Russian leadership's inability to reconcile itself with Ukraine's independence and its intention to reserve room to maneuver in the future.

The threat of Russia attacking Ukraine by tank assault or air strikes and use of artillery is unlikely at present. According to the former Defense Minister of Ukraine, Vitaliy Radetsky, a war between Russia and Ukraine is "impossible," and predictions of such a war are "mere speculation."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is hard to imagine Russia attacking Ukraine by means of, say, a

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<sup>21</sup> Ukrainian Information Agency (UNIAR), February 10, 1994, in FBIS-SOV-94-032, February 16, 1994.

massive tank assault. Russia's own economy could hardly sustain such a venture; some reporters comment that "controlling Ukraine (after an invasion) would require an army of occupation far larger than the one driven out of Afghanistan. Raising such an army would sap Russia's resources."<sup>22</sup> In addition, there are numerous political and economic disincentives for a military invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the unpredictability of domestic developments in Russia and its foreign policy leaves some doubts as to Russia's wise and balanced policy towards Ukraine.

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<sup>22</sup> "The Plot to Recapture Ukraine," *New York Times*, March 14, 1994, p.A16.

## **Defining the Fate of Crimea**

### **The Crimean Constitution -- Reaction In Kiev and Moscow**

The Soviet leadership ceded Crimea to Ukraine in February 1954. But the majority of its population is Russian; many residents are retirees from the Black Sea navy. Only about 26 percent of the population of Crimea is comprised of ethnic Ukrainians.<sup>23</sup> Autonomist and separatist sentiments in Crimea increased in parallel with the sovereignty movement in Ukraine in 1990-91, and the January 1991 referendum in Crimea reflected a support of proposals for autonomy. In September 1991, the Crimean parliament declared its sovereignty albeit as a constituent part of Ukraine. A slight majority (54 percent) of voters in Crimea supported Ukrainian independence in the December 1991 referendum.<sup>24</sup>

On May 5, 1992 the Crimean parliament declared its independence, and on May 6, 1992, it voted for a Constitution establishing the independence and providing dual citizenship with Russia for the Crimean population. Also, the Crimean parliament passed a resolution calling for a referendum on independence from Ukraine. The Verhovna Rada of Ukraine responded by declaring the independence declaration invalid. It instructed the Crimean parliament to reverse its decision and review some provisions of the Constitution, or face direct presidential rule from Kiev. At the same time, the Republican Movement of Crimea, a Russian-inspired organization, was very active in gathering the requisite number of signatures needed to hold a Crimean referendum on independence from Ukraine. The Kiev leadership, including chairman of the Crimean parliament Nikolay Bagrov, did their best to prevent escalation of the conflict. Their efforts resulted in a compromise between Kiev and Simferopol. Kiev made certain concessions, adopting the Act on Division of Powers Between Authorities of Ukraine and Republic of Crimea.

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<sup>23</sup> John Jaworsky, *The Military-Strategic Significance of Recent Developments in Ukraine*, Canadian Department of National Defence, Directorate of Strategic Analysis, Project Report No. 645, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The Act has granted Crimea wide-ranging powers to determine its own foreign economic relations, as well as social and economic policies. It also proclaimed the peninsula an autonomous integral part of Ukraine, and stated that the territory can not be transferred to another state without the consent of both the Ukrainian and Crimean parliaments. For its part, the Crimean parliament abandoned its claims for complete independence and dual citizenship. The revised Constitution of Crimea was adopted on September 25, 1992.

The dispute between Kiev and Simferppol was an encouraging signal for Russian officials, who were irritated by Ukraine's independence and its consequences, particularly Ukraine's stance on the division of the Black Sea Fleet. In January 1992, Vladimir Lukin, then chairman of the Russian parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, suggested that in order to pressure Ukraine to give up its claim to the Black Sea Fleet, Russia should question Ukrainian control over Crimea.<sup>25</sup> This statement was followed by a resolution of the Russian Parliament to investigate the circumstances of Crimea's transfer from Russia to Ukraine in 1954. Finally, the Russian Parliament passed a resolution in May 1992 declaring the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine illegal. In February 1993, the former Russian Vice-President Rutskoi stated that the International Court of Justice should decide whether Crimea belongs to Russia or Ukraine. This suggestion was supported by Russia's Ambassador to Ukraine, Leonid Smolyakov, who commented at a press conference in early 1993 that Russia had received 20,000 requests for Russian citizenship from Crimeans and that if Crimea should vote to become independent, the Russian government would support the move.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jaworsky, *The Military-Strategic Significance of Recent Developments in Ukraine*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Martin J. Dewing, "Ukraine," p. 92-93.



## **The Era of Meshkov**

### *The Strive For "Crimea's Independence" -- The Initial Stage*

In early 1994, Crimea elected Yuri Meshkov as President. Meshkov, an ethnic Russian and former K.G.B. border guard, won overwhelming support from fellow ethnic Russians in a campaign managed by a reputed covert operative from Moscow. Meshkov's pro-Russian position and claims for Crimea's independence had complicated relations between Kiev and Simferopol, and between Kiev and Moscow. The first Crimean president expressed his views to reporters in mid-February 1994 as follows:

The main aspect of my policy is Crimea's independence. Independence alone will allow us to solve our economic problems. The results of the presidential elections confirmed the population's orientation to economic, cultural and other links with Russia, and to reunion with Russia....The Black Sea Fleet must be indivisible, belong to Russia and be based in Sevastopol which is an inalienable part of the Republic of Crimea.<sup>27</sup>

On February 15, 1994, Meshkov sent the order addressed to the commander of Ukraine's Navy, arguing that citizens of Crimea should undergo military service on the territory of the Republic of Crimea. In fact, this could be viewed as the beginning of raising independent armed forces in Crimea and inspiring secessionist aspirations. Representatives of Ukraine's Navy stated that they are subordinated to Ukraine's Ministry of Defense and to Kravchuk.<sup>28</sup> Also, Meshkov's statement about making the Russian ruble legal tender in Crimea was condemned by Kiev's officials as "ill-conceived and premature." According to Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Valeriy Shmarov, "the budgetary relations (with Crimea) will remain largely unchanged, ...and the Russian ruble will never be legal in Ukraine."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> INTERFAX, February 10, 1994 in FBIS-SOV-94-032, February 16, 1994.

<sup>28</sup> UNIAR, February 15, 1994 in FBIS-SOV-94-032, February 16, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> INTERFAX, February 15, 1994 in FBIS-SOV-94-032, February 16, 1994.

Another area of controversy is Meshkov's intention to call for a referendum on Crimea's independence. On March 10, 1994, Meshkov issued an order authorizing the so-called "public poll" on independence of Crimea. Kravchuk immediately abandoned the order and declared it invalid. In official statements, Kiev leaders argue that the idea of secession of Crimea runs counter to the Trilateral Statement of January 14, 1994, and to the provisions of the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. According to Vladimir Kryzhanovsky, the Ukrainian Ambassador to Russia, the idea of incorporation of Crimea into Russia through a referendum is the same as "the incorporation of Russia's Kurile Islands into Japan on the basis of a referendum by the Kurile population."<sup>30</sup>

#### *Restoration of the Constitution of May 5, 1992*

The most obvious attempt to explore the ground as to Kiev's and Moscow's approach to independence of Crimea was made by Crimean leadership in May 1994. The idea to revise the Crimean Constitution was used as a touchstone to clarify the positions of both Kiev and Moscow. As stated previously, the provisions on Crimea's independence, dual Crimean-Russian citizenship, and independent military units of Crimea were excluded from the original text of the constitution. In mid-May 1994, Yuri Meshkov suggested the Crimean parliament should restore these provisions. In response, President Kravchuk warned that "(Kiev) will act decisively and consistently, proceeding from the fact that Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine."<sup>31</sup> Despite this warning, on May 20, 1994, the parliament of Crimea overwhelmingly voted for the restoration of the text of the Constitution of May 6, 1992. Also, Meshkov refused to recognize President Kravchuk's decree which transferred the Crimean Republic's Ministry of Interior over to the Interior Ministry of Ukraine. The heads of the independent Crimean Interior Ministry, Security Service, and Ministry of Justice were elected.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> INTERFAX, February 7, 1994 in FBIS-SOV-94-026, February 8, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Radio Liberty, *News Report*, May 20, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> *Halos Ukrayiny*, May, 21, 1994, p. 4.

These developments caused a stormy reaction in Kiev. President Kravchuk and the Verhovna Rada immediately abandoned the May 20, 1994 resolution and called the Crimean parliament to bring its legislation into compliance with Ukrainian legislative acts. In his rather decisive statement, the former Ukrainian Defense Minister Radetsky pointed out that "Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine, and violators of the territorial integrity of Ukraine will be severely punished ... We will never give up Crimea."<sup>33</sup> Former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Zlenko, in an address to the UN Security Council and other international organizations, stated: "Ukraine reserves the right, should the tension in the region escalate, to take all measures necessary for preserving the integrity of its territory."<sup>34</sup>

Surprisingly, Russia was inclined toward cautious reaction to these developments over Crimea; there were at least three reasons for this. First, Moscow intended to get large concessions from NATO at talks about Russia joining the Partnership for Peace program. Russia did not want to risk ruining its slim chances of winning these concessions by being dragged into a messy Crimean venture. Second, the secession of Crimea and breakup of Ukrainian territorial integrity could set a precedent that would be extremely undesirable for Russia. Chechnya, Tatarstan, and other regions wishing to gain independence from Russia, could use the example of "independent Crimea" as an additional argument in their heated disputes with Moscow. Third, both Kravchuk and Yeltsin seemed to realize that they would not be able to completely control the developments in Crimea in the event of military conflict there. (Alexander Kruglov, an extreme pro-Russian deputy in the Crimean Parliament, has said to a Radio Liberty reporter: "In case of emergency, Russia will instantly rise up. Yeltsin will be powerless, and he will implicitly do what he is told to do."<sup>35</sup>) Therefore, Yeltsin, while stating that "Crimea is a sovereign republic in Ukraine and has the right to its own policy," added that he trusted President

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<sup>33</sup> Ostankino Television, *News Report*, May 20, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Radio Liberty, *News Report*, May 21, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> Radio Liberty *Weekly Survey*, May 22, 1994.

Kravchuk, and that developments in Crimea were solely Ukraine's internal affairs. Kravchuk also was very careful and did not bring the resolution on direct presidential rule in Crimea to vote in the Rada.

The uncompromised approach of Kiev's leadership, the reluctance of Yeltsin and the Russian Foreign and Defense Ministries to damage relationships with Ukraine, and the Western support for the indivisibility of Ukraine forced Crimean leaders to start negotiations with Kiev. On May 26, 1994, both sides decided to set up a bilateral working group for working out a mutually accepted resolution of the dispute.<sup>36</sup> However, reaching an agreement has turned out to be a very hard job. On July 21, 1994, the Crimean Parliament approved a draft law that would allow dual Crimean-Russian citizenship, ignoring the issue of Ukrainian citizenship and the Verhovna Rada's resolution of February 24, 1994, stating that Crimea, "having no state sovereignty, is not entitled to have its own citizenship." Crimean representatives insist on enacting the original text of the Crimean Constitution of May 6, 1992, and on the superiority of Crimean legislation in the peninsula. Negotiations between the Verhovna Rada and the Crimean Parliament over the peninsula's constitutional standing remain deadlocked. On July 22, 1994, the negotiating team, led by Vladymir Stretovich, Chairman of the Rada Commission on Legal Policy, and Alexey Melnicov, Deputy Chairman of the Crimean Parliament, issued a protocol, in which the Ukrainian side called upon the Crimean Parliament to recognize the supremacy of Ukraine's laws and to support Ukrainian citizenship. The same protocol also stated that "the Crimean Parliament working group does not deem it possible to adopt the suggested amendments."<sup>37</sup> Moreover, one of the members of the Crimean delegation, Sergei Nikulin, has said "(Up our sleeve), we have such a radical measure as the postponed referendum on independence."<sup>38</sup> In fact, the referendum would be a very powerful bargaining chip for Crimean

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<sup>36</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, May 26, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ian Brzezinski, "Crimea: Separatist Sentiments Steadily Rise," *Update on Ukraine*, No. 17. (August 17, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Radio Liberty, *Weekly Review*, June 12, 1994.

leaders in the negotiations with Kiev, since most Crimeans would vote for independence from Ukraine.

*"Crimea's Advance To Kuchma"*

The election of Russian-oriented Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma has been welcomed by the Crimean leadership. Kuchma's promise to improve Russian-Ukrainian relations, and particularly to deepen economic integration between the two states, won him 89.7 percent of the votes on the Crimean peninsula. In mid-July 1994, Yuri Meshkov addressed the people of Ukraine, saying: "I hope that the new President and all Ukrainian people will now recreate friendship and... the strongest possible union with Russia ... and other CIS states."<sup>39</sup> In his public statements, Meshkov argues that Kravchuk's strongly politicized approach toward Crimea put an obstacle in the way of Crimea's economic recovery. Crimea, Meshkov says, "believes it is necessary to be torn off from an unreasonable economic system and to become attached to a rational one."<sup>40</sup> According to Meshkov, the Russian economic system is more rational than that of Ukraine, which might be true. Acting in compliance with Kuchma's intention to strengthen Russian-Ukrainian economic relations, Meshkov might try to seek more independence in economic ties with Moscow.

Attempts to establish closer ties with Russia through developing bilateral economic cooperation have already been made. On May 13, 1994, the Crimean Republic signed a framework agreement on economy and trade with the Russian Federation. Kravchuk's administration officials in Kiev stated that the agreement cannot be regarded as an international agreement since Crimea has no international status. They also noted that Russia did not obtain consent from Ukraine's central authorities to conduct such relations with Crimea.<sup>41</sup> Kuchma's administration might encourage Russian-Crimean cooperation, as well as giving other Ukrainian

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<sup>39</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, July 14, 1994, p .2.

<sup>40</sup> *Novosti* , July 21, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

regions more power in economic activities. Such developments could be rather helpful for the sinking Ukrainian economy. On the other hand, closer Russian-Crimean economic ties could give Simferopol additional arguments for seceding from Ukraine.

However, sharp disputes over the Crimean militia, citizenship, and the bounds of Crimean autonomy continue to exacerbate tension between Kiev and Simferopol. Vyacheslav Lebedev, President Meshkov's spokesman, stated in mid-August 1994 that the hopes of the Crimeans on these issues had not been met so far by Kuchma, and that about 90 percent of Crimean votes for Kuchma "were given in advance to the newly elected President,"<sup>42</sup> and should be reciprocated by him later.

On November 17, 1994, the Verhovna Rada adopted a resolution nullifying all laws of the Crimean, Republic that contravene the Ukrainian constitution and its laws. The resolution called upon the President to annul the peninsula's constitutional articles and laws that violate the Ukrainian constitution and instructed the National Bank of Ukraine to stop financing Crimean institutions that violate national laws.<sup>43</sup> Responding to the Rada's resolution, President Kuchma issued a decree in January 1995 nullifying numerous Crimean laws. The same day, the Crimean Parliament passed a resolution, suspending Ukrainian national laws in Crimea related to state property. This "war of laws" is likely to continue.

### *Constitutional Crisis -- Meshkov's Decline*

The developments in the fall of 1994 have diverted Crimean leaders' attention from secessionist sentiments, since they have been preoccupied with the internal political struggle for power. On September 7, 1994, the Crimean Parliament passed a resolution, urging to bring the Act on the President into compliance with the Crimean Constitution. This could have resulted in significantly curtailing the authority of the Crimean President. In response, President Meshkov,

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<sup>42</sup> *Vseukrainskie Vedomosti*, August, 20, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Update on Ukraine*, No. 19 (December 1, 1994), p. 4.

on September 11, 1994, issued decrees immediately suspending the Parliament. Deputy Parliamentary Speaker Victor Mezhak called for "an immediate take-over of the Parliament building and the arrest of the President," and the Crimean Prosecutor General declared the suspension of Parliament to be unconstitutional.<sup>44</sup> The showdown between the Crimean Parliament and the President seemed to be resolved when President Kuchma intervened and proposed a "zero-zero" solution in which each party would withdraw its attempts to nullify each other's authority. In mid-September both sides accepted the proposal, but since that time there have been many clashes between Meshkov and the Parliament.

The constitutional crisis leaves President Meshkov a figurehead in the Crimean government, and his ability to reverse these developments appears to be limited. Meshkov's limited political authority is a consequence of the growing distance between him and significant factions of his "Russian" parliamentary block. Also contributing to Meshkov's decline has been Crimea's failing economy and allegations of corruption within his administration.

To investigate the situation in Crimea and to stop the constitutional crisis, the Rada sent its interim committee to the peninsula from September 16-20, 1994. After its investigation, the committee submitted a report to the Rada, and the Rada passed a resolution on September 22, 1994, urging "the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea to bring the Constitution and legislation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea into compliance with the Constitution and legislation of Ukraine by November 1, 1994." Otherwise, the interim committee together with the Rada's Commission on Legal Policy has "by November 1, 1994, to submit the Rada's draft resolution on adequate measures, which derive from the Constitution and legislation of Ukraine."<sup>45</sup>

The possible development of the constitutional crisis in Crimea aside, so far there have been at least two consequences that are encouraging for Kiev. First, the prestige of Russia

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<sup>44</sup> *Update on Ukraine*, No. 18 (October 24, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, September 24, 1994, p. 1.

oriented President Meshkov has declined in Crimea. As of September 21, 1994, only 27 percent of the Crimeans supported Meshkov's policy, while 56 percent of respondents have expressed their disappointment<sup>46</sup> It could give Kuchma and the Rada additional arguments for demanding Crimea bring its legislation into compliance with the Ukrainian legislation. Failing that, they would take extreme measures against the Crimean authorities. Many deputies of the Crimean Parliament seem to realize how subversive the idea of Crimean independence has been with regard to the constitutional crisis. The speaker, of the Parliament, Sergei Tsekov, stated that Meshkov "has committed a crime against the people of Crimea," and admitted that "the only way left (to end the constitutional crisis) is self-dissolution of the Parliament." Leonid Grach, the Communist leader and one of the founders of the Crimean autonomy movement, also believes that both the Crimean President and the Parliament have to resign since they have become politically bankrupt<sup>47</sup> The fact that the Crimean Parliament appointed Anatoliy Franchuk as head of the Crimean Government in early October 1994, the election of the new Cabinet on October 13, 1994, as well as the Crimean newspapers' reluctance to publish Meshkov's new decrees<sup>48</sup> have made explicit the distrust of President Meshkov and the former head of Government Evgeniy Saburov, appointed by Meshkov.<sup>49</sup>

Second, Russian officials' reaction to the developments in Crimea has been favorable for Kiev.. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who was present at the debates on the situation in Crimea in Verhovna Rada on September 22, made it quite clear that he was watching the debates on Ukraine's internal affairs. It is likely that the Russian Foreign Ministry has decided, at least for a while, not to sacrifice establishing good relations with Ukraine for a bankrupted Crimean leadership which has been losing credibility in the peninsula. Also, taking into account

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<sup>46</sup>*Izvestiya*, September 24, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Radio Liberty, *Weekly Survey*, September 25, 1994; and *Holos Ukrayiny*, September 28, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>*Izvestya*, October 15, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>*Izvestiya*, October 8, 1994, p. 2.



the fact that the constitutional crisis in Crimea coincided with military conflict in Chechnya, Russian officials preferred to refrain from support of the Crimeans in order to discourage a separatist movement in Chechnya.

### **Prospects for the Russia-Ukraine-Crimea Triangle**

Despite calls by Russian extremists to bring Crimea back to Russia, official Moscow will hardly have explicit territorial claims to Ukraine for several reasons. First, such claims would seriously spoil Russian-Ukrainian relations. Not only nationalist forces in Ukraine, but the Rada and President Kuchma would be extremely concerned about such Russian moves. Russia's territorial claims to Ukraine would be additional provocation of Ukrainian nationalists, who for the last three years have been exploring the idea of a "threat from the East." These developments could result in the weakening of Kuchma's pro-Russian policy and would run counter to Russia's interests. Russia still wishes to subordinate Ukraine economically and, potentially, politically, and is interested in preserving the pro-Russian policy of President Kuchma. The recent information about Ukraine's readiness to restore economic cooperation with Russia, to make concessions on the division of the Black Sea Fleet and leasing Sevastopol, and to more closely integrate into the CIS collective security structures, is an encouraging signal for Russia.<sup>50</sup> At the moment, territorial claims to Ukraine are the only issue which could stop the process of bringing Ukraine closer to Russia. Second, today the presumption of the inviolability of borders in postwar Europe is very strong. For so many years the two principles -- inviolability of borders and the right of nations to self-determination -- have been conflicting each other. The right of nations to self-determination, supported by many European states in the case of the former Yugoslavia, has been of much more negative effect so far. The issue of to whom Crimea belongs (to Russia, to Ukraine, or as an independent) may potentially affect the developments in the whole of Europe which may have far more serious consequences than those of the Yugoslavian case. So, it is

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<sup>50</sup> See *Uryadovy Kur'er*, July 30, 1994, p. 4; *Vseukrainskie Vedomosti*, August 20, 1994, p. 5; *Vechirniy Kiytv*, August 20, 1994, p. 1.

more likely that in the Crimean case, European countries and the United States would give priority to the principle of inviolability of borders. The UN Security Council's statement on the status of Sevastopol of July 20, 1993, as well as numerous statements of European and American officials, could serve as evidence of such priority. So, should Russia reclaim Crimea, it would face strong opposition by the world community and the CIS countries.

However, Moscow officials cannot openly ignore the hard pressure of the national extremists and their arguments, such as: (1) the fact that the majority of the Crimean population is ethnic Russian; (2) the reluctance of most Crimeans to be politically subordinated to Ukraine; and (3) the fact that Crimea never belonged to Ukraine before 1954 (although it is questionable that Crimea is the historic territory of ethnic Russians). Despite their extreme statements, Russian nationalists are unlikely to sincerely believe in the possibility that Crimea will be part of Russia.<sup>51</sup> It is more likely that they want to evoke internal instability in Ukraine by keeping the "Crimean problem" unsolved and instigating ethnic Russians in Crimea to disobey Kiev authorities. Russian officials pursue the same policy, presuming that Ukraine, with numerous internal crises and instabilities, would be easier to subordinate economically and politically. Opening Russia's consulate in Simferopol, granting Russian citizenship to the Crimeans, setting up a special permanent mission of the Russian Parliament in the Crimean Parliament as well as the Crimean Parliament's representation in the Russian Parliament are being discussed in Moscow.<sup>52</sup>

The recent Chechen war has had certain implications for the Russia-Ukraine-Crimea triangle. From the very first days of Russia's military invasion in the Chechen Republic, the Ukrainian government has considered it an internal Russian affair. The Ukrainian leadership has presumed that recognizing Chechnya to be an integral part of the Russian Federation could

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<sup>51</sup> For example, on July 28, 1994, Russian Duma deputy Sergey Baburin visited Crimea, where he appeared on television and stated, "Crimea is a part of Russia. I am concerned about Ukraine's interference in the autonomous republic's internal affairs." Ian Brzezinski, "Crimea: Separatist Sentiments Steadily Rise," *Update on Ukraine*, No. 17 (August 17, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Izvestiya*, November 23, 1994, p. 2.

facilitate Russia's recognition of Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine and lessen Russia's pressure over Crimean issues. However, there are certain doubts that Russia will meet Ukraine's expectations.

Russia's invasion of Chechnya has been supported by some factions of the Crimean Parliament which have been trying to use the Chechen war in order to enhance their political prestige. In mid-January 1995, the "Rossiya" faction submitted a draft address to the Russian President and the Russian Parliament which stated, "...actions against Dudayev can be considered a first step on the way of strengthening Russian statehood and (the) reunion of all Russian territories. It is time for Russia to put in order the situation in Sevastopol -- the main (Russian) Black Sea naval base, and in Crimea in general."<sup>53</sup> Fortunately, this address lacked five votes to be adopted.

The issue of Crimea is likely to be a "time bomb" in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Anti-Ukrainian Russian extremists evoke nationalist sentiments in Crimea, while Ukrainian nationalists try to give political priority to the exaggerated "Russian threat" in Crimea. Crimean politicians could renew their claims for more independence from Kiev and ask Russia for protection. In such circumstances, the Presidents of Ukraine and Russia would suffer pressure from Defense Ministries and parliaments. High military officials in Kiev could call for preserving the territorial integrity of Ukraine by military means, and generals in Moscow could urge the Russian Army to protect Russians in Crimea. Deputies in both parliaments could use the dispute over Crimea in their political maneuvers and struggles for power.

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<sup>53</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, January 26, 1995, p. 2.

## **Division of the Black Sea Fleet**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Newly Independent States (NIS) has brought about the problem of division of the Soviet military forces. The division of the ground and air forces of the former Soviet Union did not provoke serious controversies among the NIS. The division of the Soviet Navy, in general, was also quickly and easily resolved. The only unresolved issue in terms of the division of the former Soviet Armed Forces remains the dispute between Russia and Ukraine over the fate of the Black Sea Fleet. The dispute involves military hardware -- six cruisers, 34 frigates and destroyers, 18 submarines, 106 small combat vessels, and 140 support and miscellaneous ships -- as well as large operating bases, mainly Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>54</sup>

## **Chronology of the Dispute**

### *Debating the Idea of the Divisibility of the Black Sea Fleet*

At the very early stage of the dispute, the Russian-Ukrainian rivalry was camouflaged by the idea of subordination of the Black Sea Fleet to the CIS Joint Armed Forces, as established by the Minsk Agreement on Strategic Forces of December 30, 1991; this legally-binding agreement defined all but ground forces as part of the strategic forces which were to be under unified CIS command. However, President Yeltsin's decree on March 16, 1992, creating a Russian Defense Ministry, was the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian dispute over the Black Sea Fleet. Kravchuk responded by signing the decree in April 1992 providing for the formation of a Ukrainian navy on Ukrainian territory which would contain the Black Sea Fleet. This decree was followed by Yeltsin's proclamation that the entire fleet was under Russia's jurisdiction.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> William H. Kincade and Natalie Melnyczuk, "Eurasia Letter: Unneighborly Neighbors," *Foreign Policy*, No. 94, (Spring 1994), p. 91.

<sup>55</sup> See John Jaworsky, *The Military-Strategic Significance of Recent Developments in Ukraine*, p.120.

However, this "war of decrees" was soon suspended, and the process of bilateral negotiations on the Black Sea Fleet issues began.

The first attempt to resolve the problem was made at the Yeltsin-Kravchuk summit in Dagomys on June 23, 1992. Then, for the first time, Ukraine displayed its regard for a certain portion of the Black Sea Fleet as its own, and the rest of the Fleet as a fleet of a foreign state on Ukrainian territory; Russia tried to prove that the whole Black Sea Fleet was a part of "strategic forces" which should be under joint CIS (i.e., Russian) command. The presence of tactical nuclear weapons on its ships and planes, and its important role in defending the CIS from a maritime sector were presented as arguments to emphasize the strategic nature of the Black Sea Fleet. After numerous intensive consultations, Presidents Kravchuk and Yeltsin agreed, on June 17, 1993, to divide the Black Sea Fleet equally, starting in September 1993 and completing the division by the end of 1995. By that time the Black Sea Fleet was supposed to be under the CIS command. Ukraine made this concession, since it did not want to have a "Crimean front" in addition to miner's strikes in Donbas, which were caused by economic troubles. At that Moscow summit, the status of Sevastopol was not resolved.

This arrangement between Yeltsin and Kravchuk was welcomed neither by Black Sea Fleet officers, nor by the Russian Parliament. In late June 1993, a group of 120 fleet officers stated that the Black Sea Fleet could not be divided, and that they would not carry out the agreement. They also urged the Ukrainian and Russian parliaments to reject this agreement. This was the first sign of fleet officers becoming a separate independent power in resolving the dispute over the Black Sea Fleet. These officers' sentiments were supported by Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, who suggested a revision of the agreement between Kravchuk and Yeltsin. He also proposed that the Black Sea Fleet become the joint Russian-Ukrainian fleet.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Radio Liberty, *Weekly Survey*, July 4, 1993.

### *Russian Parliament's Resolution on Status of Sevastopol*

Encouraged by such developments, the Russian Supreme Soviet voted almost unanimously on July 9, 1993, to declare Sevastopol, the main city in Crimea and the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, as Russian territory. Dmitro Pavlychko, the Chair of the Rada's Foreign Affairs. Committee, stated that this resolution of the Russian Parliament equaled a declaration of war on Ukraine. Kravchuk called for ignoring this decree of the Russian Supreme Soviet. Yeltsin publicly rejected the resolution, and on July 20, 1993, the UN Security Council stated that the resolution of the Russian parliament on the status of Sevastopol was "incompatible" with the existing November 1990 border agreement between Ukraine and Russia and with the "purposes and principles" of the UN Charter, and was therefore "without effect."<sup>57</sup> Deputies of the Russian parliament rejected the resolution of the UN Security Council. Aggravating relations between Russia and Ukraine was hardly the main idea of the Supreme Soviet's resolution. More likely, it was a challenge to President Yeltsin, who was in a strong general confrontation with the Supreme Soviet at that time.<sup>58</sup>

### *Russia's Pressure, Kravchuk's Policy of Concessions*

The Russian-Ukrainian summit in Yalta in early August 1993 seemed to clarify the issue. The decision was made to set up both Russian and Ukrainian Black Sea Fleets, and during the transitional period, to put the Black Sea Fleet under the dual Russian-Ukrainian command. However, Russia has tried to maintain unilateral command over the Black Sea Fleet, ignoring the protests of Ukrainian officials. Black Sea Fleet commanders, most of them ethnic Russians, were in favor of an indivisible Russian Black Sea Fleet, and supported Moscow's moves; this was not surprising, taking into account the fact that about two-thirds of the crew and four-fifths of the officers of the Fleet are Russian.

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<sup>57</sup> Dunbar Lockwood, "Ukraine's Position Hardens Despite Some Positive Signs," *Arms Control Today*, September 1993.

<sup>58</sup> As of March 1, 1995, the Russian Parliament has not invalidated this resolution.

Afterward, Russian pressure against Ukraine occurred, and resulted in the appointments of a new Defense Minister of Ukraine and a new commander of the Ukrainian Navy. These developments took place following the Russian-Ukrainian summit at Massandra on September 3, 1993. The Russians and Ukrainians put out conflicting reports on what had actually been decided; Russia claimed that Ukraine had agreed to sell its portion of the Black Sea Fleet and to lease Sevastopol to Russia to pay off its energy debt to Moscow, while Kravchuk said this solution to the problem had only been proposed, not agreed upon. Former Ukrainian Defense Minister Morozov was highly critical of the outcome of the summit, and issued a statement to that effect. He opposed any proposal to sell off Ukraine's portion of the Black Sea Fleet, and any solution that would allow Russia to continue leasing bases in Crimea. Such an approach ran counter to Kravchuk's policy of concessions to Russia, and was one of the reasons for Morosov's resignation. In October 1993, Colonel General Vitalii Radetsky, formerly the commander of the Odessa Military District, was named Ukraine's new Defense Minister. Radetsky was considered more flexible than Morozov with regard to the Black Sea Fleet issue.

Almost immediately after Radetsky's nomination, a new commander of the Ukrainian Navy was appointed. The former commander, Borys Kozhyn, had been considered too uncompromising toward Russia over the Black Sea Fleet, and it was reported that pressure had been applied by Russian commanders in the fleet to have him removed. In April 1993, the Russian Ministry of Defense had agreed to release Rear Admiral Vladimir Bezkorovainy from his duties in the Russian Navy (he was a commander of Russia's elite Northern Fleet nuclear submarine flotilla), at the request of Ukraine's Defense Ministry. On October 11, 1993, Kozhyn was replaced with Bezkorovainy, who was believed to be more flexible than his predecessor on the Black Sea Fleet issues, and it was therefore hoped that progress towards the division of the fleet would be accelerated.<sup>59</sup> The appointments of Radetsky and Bezkorovainy were more favorable for President Kravchuk, who believed that Ukraine should make some reasonable

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<sup>59</sup> Ustina Markus, "Recent Defense Developments in Ukraine," p.28.

concessions to Russia to avoid a confrontation between Kiev and Moscow. "Facing a stronger adversary, one should think how to avoid conflict," said Kravchuk at the press conference following the Massandra summit.<sup>60</sup> Kravchuk also believed that some vessels which are not in use by Ukraine could be sold to Russia to pay off Ukraine's energy debt and to get money for building new vessels.

On April 15, 1994, the Yeltsin-Kravchuk summit took place in Moscow. The two presidents agreed to start negotiations on the ownership of the fleet's vessels and on Black Sea naval bases for Russian and Ukrainian navies. The bilateral negotiations on these issues started in Sevastopol shortly after the Moscow summit. Russian and Ukrainian experts have agreed that Ukraine would own 164 vessels, which constitute 18.3 percent of the Black Sea Fleet vessels. Another 31.7 percent of vessels (according to the Moscow agreement of June 17, 1993, Ukraine's share of the Black Sea Fleet is 50 percent) Ukraine would sell to Russia for world prices.<sup>61</sup> Ukrainian Defense Minister Radetsky offered to shape this arrangement in the form of an agreement, but Russian Defense Minister Grachev rejected the idea with a reference to the unsolved issue of naval bases.

### **Will Kuchma Justify Moscow's Hopes?**

It is quite obvious that, under different pretexts, Russia had been delaying resolution of the Black Sea Fleet problem until the presidential elections in Ukraine were over, because Russia preferred that Kuchma become President of Ukraine. The resolution of the dispute over the Black Sea Fleet before the elections could have raised the popularity of Kravchuk and decreased the popularity of Kuchma. Russian leaders believed that they could get more concessions from Kuchma than from Kravchuk, and for this reason did not hasten to sign an agreement with Ukraine. But surprisingly for Russia, Kuchma has not displayed any intention to make

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<sup>60</sup> Ukrainian Television, September 6, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, April 23, 1994, p.4.



considerable concessions to Russia so far. The negotiations over the most crucial issue -- leasing Sevastopol to Russia -- remain deadlocked. Kuchma rejected the idea of granting "Russian federal status" to Sevastopol, proposed by the Sevastopol City Council. "The resolution of the Council on recognition of Russian status of Sevastopol has no legal grounds," stated Kuchma.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, the most disputable issue at the moment is the fate of Sevastopol. Both Russia and Ukraine claim this key Black Sea naval base. Ukrainian experts reportedly have offered to lease naval bases at Feodosia and Donuzlav but by no means Sevastopol.<sup>63</sup> As a last resort, Ukraine agreed to share the base in Sevastopol with the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine rejected the idea of leasing the city of Sevastopol to Russia, urging that only bases on Ukrainian territory, not Ukrainian cities, be leased. In fact, in the dispute over the Black Sea Fleet, the Ukrainian stance is based not on the desire to own as many vessels as possible (most of them are too old to be combat ready), but on the desire of Ukrainian leaders to strengthen state sovereignty and international prestige. They believe that the relations should be based on a request to Ukraine to lease certain bases to Russia, rather than on direct territorial claims to Ukraine. Ukrainian politicians have been very sensitive to what they perceive as Russian officials' rude words and deeds.

For its part, Russia takes its military presence in the Black Sea for granted, and leasing Sevastopol as the "restoration of historical justice." The Russian delegation has been urging Ukraine's navy to leave Sevastopol for another base, arguing that the Ukrainian fleet does not need such a big naval base, and that sharing the same base would complicate command and control of both fleets. Also, Russia insists on leasing the whole city of Sevastopol, arguing that maintenance and servicing of the fleet require the city's infrastructure. There is one more consideration -- for a long time Sevastopol has been viewed as the city of "Russian naval glory," and the Russians are very sensitive to the idea of restricted access to the city. The Declaration on

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<sup>62</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, August 26, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, April 21, 1994, p.1.

the Division of the Black Sea Fleet, adopted by the Russian and Ukrainian negotiating delegations in Kiev in February 1995, may be considered one step forward in solving the problem. The declaration states that the naval base in Sevastopol, but not the city of Sevastopol, could be leased to Russia. The base in Sevastopol is supposed to be under Russian jurisdiction. However, the declaration says nothing about the cost and duration of the lease. These issues are currently being discussed by Russian and Ukrainian experts. To become enforceable, the declaration must be approved by both Russian and Ukrainian presidents.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Role of Crimean Authorities in Resolving the Dispute**

The Russian claim on Sevastopol is supported by both the Crimeans and Sevastopol authorities. The Prime Minister of Crimea, Evgeniy Saburov, and most ministers in the government are natives of Moscow, and it is quite obvious that the Crimean leadership supports Russia in resolving the Russian-Ukrainian dispute over the Black Sea Fleet. The cooperation between Meshkov and Black Sea Fleet Commander Eduard Baltin, who is an ethnic Russian as well, is very close. Meshkov supports the idea of the indivisible Russian Black Sea Fleet, and Baltin expressed confidence that "as the president of all Crimeans, Meshkov would protect their rights irrespective of nationality and political views, that his activities would be aimed at strengthening peace and international concord in the Crimea."<sup>65</sup> On April 26, 1994, Meshkov, Baltin and Victor Semenov, the mayor of Simferopol, issued a statement on the Black Sea Fleet issues. "In Ukraine, the struggle for political power and the presidency may turn negotiations over the Black Sea Fleet into a military conflict," the statement read. "(Kiev's leadership) may provoke instability in Crimea, impose martial law, and thus bring Ukraine and Russia to war." In order to "prevent a new Yugoslavia," the statement urged Meshkov and Semenov to take part in Russian-Ukrainian bilateral negotiations over the division of the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>66</sup> No doubt, both

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<sup>64</sup> *Kievskiye Vedomosti*, February 15, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *ITAR-TASS*, February 7, 1994, in FBIS-SOV-94-026, February 8, 1994.

<sup>66</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, April 28, 1994, p.3.

Meshkov and Semenov would be on the Russian side in this dispute, as would the Crimean Parliament, which elected its new chairman, "Rossiya Block" leader Sergei Tsekov, in mid-May 1994. Tsekov declared his support for an "indivisible Russian Black Sea Fleet" that would serve as the "guarantor of political stability on the peninsula."<sup>67</sup> Most Crimeans are likely to share these sentiments. Slogans like "The Black Sea is Russian" and "Sevastopol - Crimea - Russia" are very popular at demonstrations in Crimea.

As to the dispute over the base in Sevastopol, authorities there are implicitly pro-Russian. The Sevastopol City Council, comprised of an overwhelming majority of ethnic Russians, made a statement on April 19, 1994, offering Ukraine's leadership "to move the headquarters of Ukrainian navy from Sevastopol to some other place."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, on August 23, 1994, the Council declared Russia's legal rights to Sevastopol, having confirmed its status as the main Russian Black Sea base. The Council also addressed the presidents and parliaments of Ukraine and Russia, asking them to "make an important decision on the Russian federal status of the city of Sevastopol, and ultimately solve the problem of the Black Sea Fleet."<sup>69</sup>

The issue of Sevastopol is likely to be a lasting dispute between Ukraine and Russia. Kiev leadership will suffer pressure from both Russia and Crimea. Simferopol and Sevastopol are likely to play a more significant role in forcing Kiev to make concessions over the Black Sea Fleet. On the other hand, the Verhovna Rada and the Defense Ministry of Ukraine will resist a complete transfer of Sevastopol to the Russian navy. Until an ultimate compromise is found, lasting and heated debates will take place and some provocative moves from both sides may be made.

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<sup>67</sup> *Update on Ukraine*, No. 16, (June 22, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Nikolay Semena, "The Defense Ministers Are Trying To Divide the Black Sea Fleet," *Izvestiya*, April 21, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Holos Ukrayiny*, August 26, 1994, p.1.

## **Conclusion**

The new Verhovna Rada, elected in March-April 1994, and President Kuchma, elected in, July 1994, have inherited the problems of Crimea and the division of the Black Sea Fleet. The parliamentary elections have indicated the rise of the left-wing parties, which favor economic and political reintegration with Russia. In the new Ukrainian parliament, representatives of the Communist Party, Socialist Party, and Peasants' Party, taken together, hold about 40 percent of the seats. The head of the Socialist Party, Alexander Moroz, has been elected a speaker of the Verhovna Rada.

President Kuchma is finishing the cabinet shuffle, creating his own team which may be able to solve military and political disputes with Russia. Gennadiy Udovenko, the Ukrainian UN representative in the Gromyko era, has been appointed Foreign Minister, and Valeriy Shmarov, former vice Prime-Minister, has been appointed Defense Minister. So far, Kuchma's team has been evaluating and analyzing the disputes over Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet, as well as - Russian-Ukrainian relations. The Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Russia and Ukraine, which was initialed February 10, 1995, in Kiev by Russian and Ukrainian Deputy Prime Ministers Oleg Soskovets and Evgyenyi Marchuk, is supposed to be the culmination of this activity. However, both sides are still debating some provisions of the treaty.

One of the main obstacles is Russia's wish to have key naval bases in Crimea with fullscale access to city infrastructures, and Ukraine's opposition to this option. For Russia, this treaty is an instrument exerting pressure against Ukraine, while for Kiev it is considered to be a means of creating economic crisis and isolation. Yeltsin is unlikely to sign the treaty unless its provisions are extremely advantageous and profitable for Moscow, while Kuchma considers Russian-Ukrainian relations a top priority issue and looks ready to make concessions. As for the Black Sea Fleet, a compromise could be reached sooner or later, but it is likely to be more favorable for Russia than for Ukraine. The reaction in Kiev is difficult to' predict, but discord between the military and Defense Minister Shmarov (who is not a military man) is feasible.

As to the Russian-Ukrainian dispute over Crimea, it is likely to be a long-term one. Russian extremists will never reconcile themselves to the loss of the peninsula. They could demand to revise the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, and to hold a referendum in Crimea on independence or reunification with Russia. At present, Moscow officials are trying to introduce into the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation the provision on Russian-Ukrainian dual citizenship for ethnic Russians in Ukraine, primarily for the Crimeans. Ukrainians regard this as a "crawling invasion" of Crimea and oppose this provision.

The secessionist movements in Crimea have caused many Ukrainian politicians and academicians to feel that Ukraine should have another territorial-administrative structure. Some forms of federation with larger powers of the regions have been discussed. The dilemma is that certain regions, like Crimea or Eastern Ukraine, after being given "semi-independence," would sooner or later seek complete independence from Ukraine. In fact, the Ukrainian government has little doubt that most Crimeans would vote for independence from Ukraine. But the secession of Crimea may be followed by Eastern Ukraine, with its large Russian population, also wishing to secede. These developments would lead to the breakup of Ukrainian statehood.