

**Sergey M. Shakhray (ed.), Collapse of the USSR: Documents and Facts (1986-1992). Vol. I: Legal Acts. Official Communications**, comp. by *Stanislav N. Stanskikh*; The Contemporary History Fund. Moscow: Wolters Kluwer, 2009, 1120 p.

**Shakhray/Stanskikh, Myths and Facts about the Collapse of the USSR** (Introductory article)

### Part I

Despite the ample literature on the reasons underlying the collapse of the Soviet Empire, certain circumstances surrounding this historical event have not been properly addressed.

The first reason is economic and political. For decades preceding the collapse of the country, 88 kopecks of each ruble of manufactured production were spent on manufacture and purchase of arms. The USSR failed to economically digest the armaments race. The other important factor of the economic breakdown was the “accord” between the USA and Arab countries, which reduced the price for oil to 8-9 dollars for barrel (practically lower than or equal to its production cost in the USSR). At the last crucial moment, the Western countries (including Germany) refused to grant credits to M.S. Gorbachev. The economy of the country finally broke down.

The second reason was sleeping like a time bomb in the article of Soviet constitutions that provided the Soviet republics with the right to voluntarily withdraw from the USSR.

The third reason was the “information virus” of envy that showed itself in full force at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. Having failed to stand the test of the vicious crisis, people began to grudge the food for their neighbours and hoped to survive by their own. In Tbilisi

and Vilnius, they spoke “no more work for Moscow”, in the Urals they demanded to stop “feeding” the Central Asian republics etc.

The fourth reason was the process of so-called autonomization. The restructuring policy began to fail by the beginning of 1990s. With political and economic weakening of the central power, autonomous republics were growing more and more independent from the centre. The political struggle between B.N. Yeltsin and M.S. Gorbachev made obvious the weakness of the President of the USSR elected only by the Congress of People’s Deputies and not directly by population. Therefore, his position was less legitimate and authoritative than the position of any president of a Soviet republic.

However, M.S. Gorbachev still had the bureaucratic machine on his side and, besides, he had experience in political intrigues. The so-called autonomization plan emerged in the Central Committee of the CPSU. It was suggested to raise the status of autonomies in the RSFSR to that of Soviet Republics in order to weaken Russia and the “democratic” B.N. Yeltsin. The “autonomization plan” was justified by the ultimate purpose to create, instead of the federation of 15 union republics entitled to voluntary withdrawal from the Union, the new association of 35 republics (15 union republics and 20 autonomous republics) but without the right of secession. The experiment with the change of state foundation in the period of great economic and political crisis was doomed to fail. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted the appropriate Act on April 26, 1990 – the “autonomization” mechanism was set up. Should it be implemented, the map of the RSFSR would be like a piece of cheese with great holes – Russia would lose 51 % of its territory with all strategic resources and almost 20 million people.

As the danger of actual collapse of the RSFSR was realized, Russian Congress of People's Deputies by vast majority of votes (907 for, 13 against and 9 abstained) adopted the Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on June 12, 1990, in order to provide for viability of the republic. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this Declaration does not contain a word about withdrawal of the RSFSR from the USSR. On the contrary, RSFSR clearly declared its intention to remain constituent part of the renewed Union.

In this political situation, the great monolith of the CPSU came to an end. Now one seldom remembers that, unlike other union republics, the RSFSR had no republican party organization. Having established the Communist Party of the RSFSR at the crucial moment for the party as opposed to the union structures, I.K. Polozkov, G.A. Zyuganov and others thereby made a great contribution to the collapse of the CPSU and, accordingly, to the collapse of the USSR.

In order to remove M.S. Gorbachev from the office of the General Secretary of the CPSU and the President of the USSR, a more conservative side of the CPSU and the party machine were preparing for the extraordinary congress of the CPSU and the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in September 1991. M.S. Gorbachev asked leaders of union republics to help him and promised them to radically broaden their powers and sign the new Union Treaty ahead of schedule – already in August 1991. The attempted coup d'état in the form of the State Committee for Emergency Situation (GKChP) was made in order to overturn the President and the heads of union republics.

However, contrary to the widespread opinion, the aborted August coup d'état was not the major reason but the last straw

which tipped the balance in favour of the collapse of the USSR.

On August 29, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in its description of the situation which took place in the country as a result of the coup d'état stated the great political and economic damage that was incurred to the country, actual failure of execution of the Union Treaty (Souznyi Dogovor), breach of fragile balance achieved by the republics.

Being the offspring of the central party machine and regional CPSU structures involved in the coup, GKChP predetermined the collapse of the party and made its reform impossible, which excluded the possibility of any attempts to reform the union state step-by-step.

As a result of events of 19-21 August, 1991, the activity of republican committees of the CPSU was suspended or terminated and a part of their property was sealed and/or transferred to the ownership of several union republics. This process partly influenced the position of M.S. Gorbachev who instructed the Soviets of People's Deputies on August 24 “to take the property of the CPSU under protection” and “to take measures for the employment and social security of employees of those party committees which terminate their activity” and also he made the Statement on Abdication of Powers of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU in which he called the Central Committee of the CPSU “to make the difficult but honest decision on voluntary dissolution” and recommended that “the destiny of republican communist parties and local party organizations” shall be determined by those parties and organizations themselves. On August 29 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR “with regard to the existing information on participation of management bodies of the CPSU in preparation for and carrying out of the coup on 18-21 August, 1991” ordered “the suspen-

sion of the activity of the CPSU in the whole territory of the USSR and charged the bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with providing for safekeeping of its valuables and archives, and that banking institutions shall terminate all operations with the monetary funds of the CPSU". From August to November of 1991 communist parties of all union republics and the CPSU as the allunion organization ceased to exist.

It is quite logical that the unity of the state was falling like an avalanche almost at the same time with the collapse of the CPSU structures. In August 1991 decisions on independence were made by Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Estonia,<sup>1</sup> in September – by Armenia and Tajikistan, in October – by Turkmenistan. Even earlier, in 1990 and in the spring of 1991, by Lithuania and Georgia. Thus, by December 1991 almost all union republics, except Russia and Kazakhstan, have withdrawn from the USSR.

It is these dates (August to November 1991) that most of the republics considered and/or consider as the dates of independence of their states, and the Russian authorities officially congratulate them on that.

This destructive work was finally put to rest by the results of the Ukrainian referendum conducted on December 1, 1991, when the absolute majority of citizens of the republic supported the Declaration on the Ukraine's independence.

The former assistant of the USA President J. Carter Z. Brzeziński noted not once that American strategists assigned to Ukraine a crucial part in the collapse of the

<sup>1</sup> Russia represented by the President of the RSFSR acknowledged the independence of the states of Latvia and Estonia on August 24, 1991, and on August 30, 1991, these republics submitted applications for entering the United Nations. Only Lithuania applied to the UN the day before.

USSR at this stage: "It was Ukrainian actions – the Ukrainian declaration of independence in December 1991, its insistence in the critical negotiations in Belavezha that the Soviet Union should be replaced by a looser Commonwealth of Independent States, and especially the sudden coup-like imposition of Ukrainian command over the Soviet army units stationed on Ukrainian soil – that prevented the CIS from becoming merely a new name for a more confederal USSR. Ukrainian political self-determination stunned Moscow and set an example that the other Soviet republics, though initially more timidly, then followed".<sup>2</sup> For party leaders of union republics escape from the CPSU and USSR was the way of keeping power for themselves and their groups.

Thus, the Agreement signed on December 8, 1991, by the heads of three Slavic republics (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) marked the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which already took place to a large extent by that moment.

Could an RSFSR Declaration of State Sovereignty cause the breakup of the nuclear state with the great army and powerful state security structures, as the most of Russians suppose? Hardly so.

However, why it all happened in Belavezha (Viskuli) and so rapidly and suddenly that there were rumours about the "secret deal behind Gorbachev's back"? In fact, there was no secret. Special services, which were securing Viskuli regularly, reported to the President of the USSR.

At first B.N. Yeltsin and S.S. Shushkevich still hoped to persuade L.M. Kravchuk to keep the Union in some form. (Really, it is known that at one time B.N. Yeltsin not only said "Union shall exist!" but even initiated the draft Union Treaty

<sup>2</sup> Brzezinski Z., *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, 1998, p. 92.

on August 17, 1991, and planned to sign it on August 19, 1991). However, the Ukrainian President did not want even to hear the word "Union". At last, they found the words – "Commonwealth"<sup>3</sup> as the way of co-existence of states in one economic, political and military framework.

Contrary to the widespread opinion that the Russian delegation arrived at Viskuli with a ready text, there were no text and even no computers and Xerox machines: manuscripts were printed on the electric typewriters and reproduced in three copies by the telefax.

According to memories of one of the authors (*S.M. Shakhray*), the presidents ordered the experts to prepare documents in accordance with the Commonwealth model. The general sense was clear but it was important to find the appropriate legal form. The fact that three of four republics which founded the USSR in 1922 (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) were represented in Viskuli played the decisive role. The fourth was the Trans-Caucasus Federation which ceased to exist in 1936 and all members of the former TCSFSR had already withdrawn from the Union (Georgia on April 9, Azerbaijan on August 30 and October 18, 1991, Armenia on September 21/23, 1991). It is obvious that three of four "founding fathers" had the right to discuss the destiny of the Union.

The formula of the agreement that was finally reached consisted of two parts. First: founding states acknowledged the

fact of death of the state founded by them – the USSR. Second: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (again, as founders) declared the establishment of the new association – Commonwealth of Independent States.

When the agreed draft of the text was at long last finalized, it was reproduced by telefax in three copies and those rolls were brought through the corridor to the other room where B.N. Yeltsin, L.M. Kravchuk and S.S. Shushkevich were alone. At that moment they had neither experts nor advisers with them. Papers were returned from the presidents with questions, notes and suggestions. Pages were adjusted again and reproduced – and so several times until it was concluded: yes, there it is, solution to the deadlock.<sup>4</sup>

Then they decided to get in touch with N.A. Nazarbaev, President of Kazakhstan, and ask him urgently to fly in. It was important to rely on support of such an authoritative leader. However, N.A. Nazarbaev did not arrive, notwithstanding the invitation: he stayed in Moscow, in the residence of M.S. Gorbachev. It was said that M.S. Gorbachev then promised to N.A. Nazarbaev the office of the prime minister of the USSR, and more to that, both presidents refused to believe that the Union was on its way out.

B.N. Yeltsin, L.M. Kravchuk and S.S. Shushkevich did not wait for the President of Kazakhstan and signed the Agreement for Establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States. Upon signing the Agreement, they decided to call M.S. Gorbachev and G. Bush Senior. Operators of the "special switchboard" searched for the Kremlin master for quite a long time,

<sup>3</sup> E.g., in the middle of 1989 calls were heard for the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR "to transform the centralized USSR to the commonwealth of really free and sovereign republics", in 1990 the word "commonwealth" was used as official term ("transformation of the USSR from the unitary state to the true commonwealth of nations") and in the end of 1990 the Plenum of the CK CPSU suggested to "establish the special "Commonwealth" channel on the Central Television for coverage of problems of nationality relationships and life of peoples of Soviet republics".

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that a "printing error" was made in one document at the next stage of founding procedure, on December 21, 1991. Thus, the Decision of the Council of Heads of States of the Commonwealth of Independent States dd. December 21, 1991, [On Membership of Commonwealth States in UN and Other International Organizations] is called "Protocol" in the text.

while the White House connected almost at once. As a result, part of conversation was parallel: B.N. Yeltsin talked to G. Bush and S.S. Shushkevich to M.S. Gorbachev.

When M.S. Gorbachev found out what happened, he turned to the army at once. Up to his voluntary retirement on December 25, 1991, he phoned to commanders of districts and urged marshal E.I. Shaposhnikov for support. But the military did not respond. All that was very much like the story of Nikolay II in 1917 when the tsar applied the army from the General Headquarters and the military unanimously gave their voices for abdication.

One of the authors (S.M. Shakhray) as the immediate participant of those events remembers that the Russian delegation was going back from Minsk to Moscow in the contradictory mood. On the one hand, members of the delegation understood that they managed to prevent the course of events pursuant to the “Yugoslavian scenario”, that is, bloody interethnic armed conflicts between the parts of one state. Indeed, the first rings of this massacre were already heard then in the whole territory of the country – in Nagorny Karabakh and Trans-Dniester, North Ossetia and Checheno-Ingushetia. On the other hand, there was the feeling of great, irretrievable loss and anxiety...

The legal execution of the collapse of the USSR was completed by the Supreme Soviets of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, which almost unanimously ratified the agreement for establishing the Commonwealth of independent States. Most of union republics soon joined the CIS as co-founders. The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Georgia joined the CIS in 1993.

On 24-26 December 1991, the chambers of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR confirmed the fact of collapse of the USSR

and voted for termination of powers of union authorities (except the Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR, which was not legally relinquished).<sup>5</sup>

But the “divorce” process and the process of each unit’s finding its own statehood continued until the middle of 1992 when the problems of property and budget of the former USSR as well as military and humanitarian issues were resolved.

The important stage thereof was the acknowledgement of the independence of the former union republics and arrangement of UN membership for the new independent states. Here one must take into account that Belarus and Ukraine were already members of the UN by 1991; the Baltic republics entered the UN on September 17, 1991; Russia as the successor of the USSR became member of the UN in the end of December, 1991; and most of republics (8) entered the UN only on March 2, 1992, and Georgia on July 31, 1992.

Thus, the dimensions of the story of dissolution just presented exemplify the complexity, variability and vagueness of issues relating to the collapse of the USSR.

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<sup>5</sup> On December 27, 1991, the Russian President decided to establish the Private Law Research Center and set aside for its work the building of the Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR (Ilyinka street, 8), and on July 14, 1992, the State Committee of the RF for Management of State Property was ordered to execute the transfer to the Center of this building “with equipment, communication means, office devices and other property located in the building which was previously owned by the former Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR”. The former Chairman of the Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR S.S. Alexeev was appointed Chairman of the Council of the Center. ... and the orders of the President of the Russian Federation dd. December 27, 1991, No. 133-rp “On Private Law Research Center”; dd. July 14, 1992, No. 360-rp “On Providing for Activity of the Private Law Research Center”.

The study of documents and materials of that time may be the key to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of that process.

## Part II

There is a substantial literature (academic research, memoirs, and textbooks) dedicated to the collapse of the USSR, including documentary collections. Nonetheless, there remain subjective and objective reasons why the problem is not sufficiently studied. Subjective reasons are often connected with the interpreter's personal involvement in the political process, his direct connection with the Soviet past, and particular interpretation of events. Authors are not an exception to this rule. Objective reasons include incomplete documentary basis of research and disregard or inconsistent treatment of available materials.

All this sometimes leads to mythologization or unfounded interpretation of facts and events relating to the collapse of the USSR (like "three men gathered in the forest and ruined the great country").

The task for the community of persons interested in these events is to create the documentary basis for objective textbooks on contemporary history from reliable data, and the leaders of the country have recognized this. In order to preserve and inject into current discussions key documents relating to the transformation of the USSR and the process of its collapse the attempt, this collection has been prepared within the series "The History of the Contemporary Russia" of the Contemporary History Fund.

One might ask what is wrong with earlier compilations of materials on these events. Nothing at all, they have been carefully produced. However, one must take the following into account.

First, such publications are rare and they were usually published in a very limited number of copies.

Second, some of them treat only a certain aspect of the collapse of the USSR that corresponds with the trends of "economic" or "national" determinism in consideration of these issues that have dominated in scholarly literature of the last decade (1990s), as noted by Z.A. Stankevich.<sup>6</sup> This is true, for example, of the remarkable compilation by A.V. Shubin made in the Institute for World History of the Russian Sciences Academy in 500 copies where the nationality issue often prevails.

Third, the chronological frames of earlier compilations do not always cover the whole process of collapse of the USSR or its final part (1991). Thus, the last documents in the respectable compilation of documents on sovereignty prepared in the Institute of Theory and History of Socialism at the CK CPSU have been published just before the August coup (or just after it) end with June 1991.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, some books suffer from particular biases and too much subjectivity. Thus, the compilation of the Gorbachev Foundation "The USSR Could Have Been Saved" (called the "White Paper" in the Western style) emphasizes the policy of the President of the USSR M.S. Gorbachev.<sup>8</sup> A.S. Chernyaev in his preface criticizes without

<sup>6</sup> Stankevich, Z.A., Historical and Legal Aspects of Collapse of the USSR. Dissertation of doctor of legal sciences. Spec. 12.00.01, Moscow State Social University, 2002, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> To the Union of Sovereign Peoples. Compilation of CPSU Documents, Legal Acts, Declarations, Addresses and Presidential Decrees Relating to the Problem of National and State Sovereignty. Compilation and foreword by A.I. Doronchenkov, chairman of ed. Board E.A. Bagramov. Moscow, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> The USSR Could Have Been Saved. White Paper: Documents and Facts on Policy of M.S. Gorbachev Concerning the Reform and Safekeeping of the Multinational State. 2nd ed., rev. Moscow, 2007.

the desirable degree of tolerance the “pharisaism” of certain persons who were allegedly guilty in breakdown of the union state. In addition, the White Paper often provides only excerpts from important archival materials or simply mentions them.

To this list of reasons may be added the absence of inter-disciplinary approach which is typical in this research. For example, historians practically do not use the decisions of the Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR and other official documents while jurists sometimes disregard the acts of the CPSU and official communications which were published, for example, in the *Vedomosti* of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR).

However, the relevance of this collection of documents stems not only from the “historical” reason. One cannot be sure how the ideas connected with the preparation of the Union Treaty will be understood in the future, under new historical conditions.<sup>9</sup> The experience of the USSR concerning the demarcation of powers and other issues is already relevant to the building of a new Europe in the form of the EU. At the same time the fact deserves attention that the Lisbon Treaty sets forth the right of withdrawal from the EU without specifying a procedure for exercise of this right. This recalls the problems faced once by the union republics when they sought to withdraw quickly from the USSR – problems which were not treated in the Lisbon Treaty.

All this underscores the relevance of this collection of documents, which is to be published in two volumes.

The first volume is dedicated to legal documents and some crucial official com-

munications relating to the collapse of the USSR. The second volume is planned to include archival documents and supplementary materials not included in the first volume.

It is worthwhile to note that this edition does not pretend to full and comprehensive coverage of the history of collapse of the USSR but represents only the next step toward this purpose.

The first volume includes mainly acts of state and party bodies and official communications for the period 1986 to 1992 concerning interethnic conflicts, “the parade of sovereignties”, issues of economic sovereignty of the republics and the reform of the national (union) economy, procedures for the distribution of powers between the USSR, union republics and the autonomies, the drafting of the new Union Treaty, the State Emergency Committee, the transformation of the union structures to inter-republican ones and their collapse, the legal framework for the collapse of the USSR, formation of the CIS etc. Those include forgotten acts of the CPSU, congresses of people’s deputies, supreme soviets, presidents of the USSR and RSFSR, USSR Constitutional Supervision Committee, official communications that were published in the *Vedomosti* of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and some acts of union republics and autonomies. Special attention is paid to acts and communications which were published in the *Handbook for Party Officials* (*Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika*), the last edition of which (no. 30) was published in 1991 and contained the materials for 1989. This guide from the CPSU Central Committee contained crucial materials for communist leaders to be used in their work.

Of course, any classification is conventional, and this applies to this volume. Documents and materials are arranged according to subject and chronological order. However, each researcher has his own

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Z.A. Stankevich brings that to notice (*Op.cit.*, p. 5).

chronology of the collapse of the USSR and turning point dates are sometimes controversial or even mythologized. Many scholars name December 25, 1991, the last day of the USSR, as if they have found a symbol to which they now adhere, whether or not consciously. It is stated that way in one of the well-known textbooks on Contemporary Russian history: “On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev signed the decree on abdication of powers of the President of the USSR and made the statement thereof on TV. On the same day at 7:38 pm, the red flag of the USSR was pulled down and the three-color flag of Russia raised above the Kremlin. A new page was opened in the history of the country and the whole world”.<sup>10</sup>

Other researchers even stop their observations at the date of final formation of the CIS – December 21, 1991.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, one of chambers of the Supreme Soviet was still working on December 26, 1991, though not all members were present. The official communication on the work or the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR published in the third section of the *Vedomosti* of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR states in particular that “on December 26 the Soviet of Republics conducted its last meeting and adopted the Declaration in relation to the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States” and declared that “the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has terminated its activity”. The text of the Declaration is often missed by researchers, maybe because it was included in issue of the *Vedomosti* for December 25 at the last moment and there-

fore placed after the name index of materials published in 1991.<sup>12</sup>

Although the most prominent book for contemporary Russian history teachers contains a rather good section on the constitutional reform of the Union, its author (A.V. Filippov) mixed up one chamber with the other when he stated that “on December 26 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR by resolution of one chamber (Soviet of the Union, chairman K.D. Lubchenko) officially acknowledged dissolution of the USSR and liquidated itself”.<sup>13</sup>

However, after December 26, 1991, the process of termination of activity and/or transformation of the Union structures continued. The issues of the union budget, property, debts, defense etc. were considered up to the middle of 1992. Some union republics became the UN members only in spring of 1992. That is why this compilation contains documents of this final period of collapse of the USSR and formation of the CIS.

A still more difficult question is the dating of the collapse of the USSR. A case could be made for each of the dates 1986, 1988 and 1991, all part of the period of perestroika.

For the purposes of this compilation, it was decided to precede contemporary materials with excerpts from earlier documents on the formation of the USSR and subsequent constitutional execution of the

<sup>10</sup> Pikhoya R.G., Sokolov A.K., *Contemporary history of Russia: Crisis of Communist Power in the USSR and Born of New Russia. End of 1970s – 1991.* Moscow, p. 412.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Z.A. Stankevich goes this way: *USSR at the Final Stage: Erosion and Collapse of the Union State (Historical and Legal Problems)*, Moscow: RAGS, 2009, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> It is worthwhile to note the solid character of one source-book on contemporary history of Russia in which the chief editor and compilers included, in particular, the text of the mentioned Declaration: *Source-Book on History of Russia. From the USSR to the Russian Federation. 1985-2001*, chief ed. A.B. Bezborodov, comp. N.V. Yeliseeva, Ya.L. Pisarevskaya, L.P. Afanassieva, A.Ju. Martynova, Moscow 2003.

<sup>13</sup> *History of Russia, 1945-2008: teacher's book* [A.V. Filippov, A.I. Utkin, S.V. Alexeev and others], ed. by A.V. Filippov, 2nd ed., rev. Moscow, Prosveshchenie, 2008, p. 332.

right of union republics to withdrawal from the USSR (first section).

The policy of perestroika led to renewed attention to nationality issues, and therefore it is useful to start the documents on these matters with the new program of the Communist Party of the USSR of 1986, and with information on interethnic and other conflicts in Alma-Ata and other localities, as well as the reform of the economic system. This “pre-collapse” section ends chronologically with the XIX party conference, which is traditionally considered as the beginning of the union constitutional reform (second section).

The lack of attention paid to Estonian suggestions at this conference became one of the reasons for radical decisions of the Estonian Republic in November 1988 which, on one side, induced the union authorities to begin (though not always masterly) the reform of the Federation and on the other side, laid the foundation of the great “parade of sovereignties” (and broader, “expansion of competence” for issues governed by the union or by union republics). This group of documents stresses the problem and shows the war of laws began long before June 12, 1990, when the RSFSR adopted the Declaration on state sovereignty. The third section begins with the problem of sovereignty of the republics and contains (year-by-year) documents on domestic and nationalities policy, the union economy and economic sovereignty, inter-republican relationships and foreign policy issues and ends with the formation of the State Committee for Emergency Situation. The large number of legal acts of the RSFSR acts is grouped in a section on the Union Treaty, which also includes interesting materials about the competition for the best draft concept of a Union Treaty arranged by the Interregional group of deputies in April 1990.

There is no clear opinion on the role of the GKChP in the collapse of the USSR.

However, it is generally recognized that the August coup radically changed the balance of power and situation in the country. During and after the GKChP begins the transformation<sup>14</sup> and then collapse of party and state structures. Union republics began to declare their independence in an avalanche-like manner. The Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR acknowledged on October 11, 1991, “the USSR has actually ceased to exist in its previous form and new forms of association of sovereign republics are not yet determined”. Then the Congress of People’s Deputies of the RSFSR on November 2, 1991, already took into account the situation existing “in connection with the fact that the USSR as a single state ceased to exist in its previous form”. Thus, the Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR was dissolved, and the union bodies were, transformed to inter-republican ones, which were then liquidated because of formation of the CIS. Again, the acts of the RSFSR on withdrawal from the USSR are placed separately from other materials on this subject. This fourth section contains several documents connected to the recognition of the new states by international community.

Thus, upon careful study of documents the collapse of the USSR appears not as a one-step act or fact but as a complex continuous process with its own variables and unknowns.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note the following little-known fact. On August 30, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR stated, among other urgent measures for prevention of attempts to carry out the coup, to introduce for consideration of the extraordinary fifth Congress of people’s deputies of the USSR amendments on introduction of accelerated procedure with short terms for consideration of urgent issues by the Constitutional Supervision Committee of the USSR and suggested that the Committee “introduce to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR draft laws for a Constitutional Court of the USSR and on the introduction of appropriate amendments to the Constitution of the USSR”.

The first volume ends with annotations and a summary of contents and introductory article in English. Space considerations did not allow inclusion of materials of the constitutional reform at the union and republican levels (acts on establishing constitutional commissions and presidential power). The process of creation of constitutions in union republics often moved ahead of work of the union Constitutional Commission. As noted by certain authors, the establishment of the office of President was another factor that played its role in the weakening of the Soviet statehood (structure de l'Etat).

References to the sources of published documents and materials and the compiler's notes are contained in footnotes at the bottom of the appropriate page. If a document is cited not by original source, the source used is named first and then, if possible, the original source.

The edition is designed for broad range of readers as well as for professors, researchers and students.

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