

# Gorbachev's union hopes crumbling

Seamus Martin

*The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Aug 27, 1991;*

ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Irish Times (1859-2010)

pg. 1

# Gorbachev's union hopes crumbling

From Seamus Martin,  
in Moscow

DESPITE his dramatic shift towards reform at the post-coup meeting of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, President Gorbachev's attempt to retain a USSR presidency with a modicum of power appears to have failed. His future is now likely to be that of the head of an interim government prior to the formulation of a new confederation treaty among the republics.

Clinging to his belief in a Union Treaty followed by the election of a president and a Soviet parliament, he found the rug pulled from under him by the president of Kazakhstan. Mr Nursultan

Nazarbayev, who announced yesterday that his large and powerful republic wanted a confederation and would not join a union which had its own parliament.

And the Russian president, Mr Boris Yeltsin, not to be left out of things, added a chilling note to a very confused situation when his office stated that Russia may want to readjust its borders with other republics if they declare independence from the union.

In his speech to the Supreme Soviet, Mr Gorbachev saw a new Union Treaty being worked on very quickly, followed by elections for a parliament and a president. Mr Yeltsin, on the other hand, spoke of no Union Treaty until the republics, such as

Ukraine, held referendums on independence.

In the clearest statement of what a new Soviet Union might be like, Mr Nazarbayev addressing the Supreme Soviet said that he looked to a confederation treaty in which each republic would have its own army which would send detachments to defend the union against common threat.

The republics would, he said, be joined by economic agreements. None of the 15 republics, including those like the Baltic states which have already effectively left the union and others who intend to leave, stood to gain anything economically from the union's immediate dissolution.

## INSIDE

**Pages 4 and 5: Fair-weather friends now flock to Baltics; 'Death knell sounding for communist movement'; 'Ninth man' in the spotlight; Unemployed Russian seeks suitable reign.**

There should be no new cabinet and no all-union parliament other than delegations from the republics." This is the moment of truth", he said, "I cannot see another basis on which Kazakhstan would be willing to join the union".

Coming from a man who was among the foremost supporters of the old Union Treaty, his change of position since the coup further highlighted President Gorbachev's tardiness in keeping pace with events and made speculation about the composition of a new cabinet redundant.

The question of finding a Soviet vice-president to replace the disgraced Mr Gennady Yanayev does, however, have to be resolved. Mr Gorbachev hinted that his choice might be his former aide, Mr Alexander Yakovlev, and the latter did not deny such suggestions. Both men spent a considerable time together yesterday.

Mr Nazarbayev said the coun-

try had gone through what was not only a period of time but "an epoch which has divided us from our past. . . There are new historical realities which we cannot pretend do not exist", he said.

Among the functions he saw being delegated to the union were transport including aviation, communications and the defence of common borders.

The Russian Federation, however, gave a hint of what may be real danger in the future when it issued a statement saying that it reserved the right to question its borders with any Soviet republic which left the union, other than Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

The statement, issued by Mr

Yeltsin's press secretary, Mr Pavel Voshchanov, said it reserved the right to raise the question of reviewing its frontiers with republics which become independent.

Ukraine and Byelorussia, which declared their intention to become independent during the week, have direct frontiers with the Russian republic. So, too, has Kazakhstan, whose northern and western regions along with western Ukraine are inhabited mainly by Russians.

It is apparent, therefore, even at this early stage, that the tensions between the republics are very real. With the development of their own armed forces and the

possible questioning of borders by Russian, a further element of instability has been added to an already very unstable situation.

As for President Gorbachev himself, he did at one stage in his speech yesterday use the phrase "While I am President", indicating that he at least envisaged a time when he would not be.

The Congress of People's Deputies which meets on Monday has the power to sack the president and there will undoubtedly be some calls for this to be done. There were signs yesterday, however, that some parliamentarians, while gravely disappointed, were rowing back from outright condemnation.