

# Declaration by Slavic Republics Is Called 'Illegitimate, Dangerous'

By Margaret Shapiro  
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Dec. 9—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev tonight rejected the dissolution of the Soviet Union announced Sunday by the leaders of three Slavic republics, saying they did not have the authority to take such an action.

"It is illegitimate and dangerous to declare that the union's legal norms are no longer valid. It can only intensify chaos and anarchy in society," Gorbachev said in a statement read on national television. "Of course, every republic has the right to withdraw from the union, but the fate of the multinational state cannot be determined by the will of the leaders of three republics."

Gorbachev indicated he would convene a session of the Congress of People's Deputies, the highest Soviet legislative body, to consider the issue and also said he "would not rule out a nationwide referendum" on the matter. A group of legislators already has begun collecting signatures needed to convene the congress to "adopt measures to restore constitutional order on the whole U.S.S.R. territory," the Tass news agency said.

The statement by Gorbachev, coming a day after the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia pronounced the union dead and declared themselves part of a successor commonwealth, set the stage for a major confrontation over the future of this frayed, but still nuclear-armed superpower.

In Washington and in Europe, officials were reacting with concern to the dispute between Gorbachev and the Slavic leaders. Russian spokesmen, in trying to reassure the West on the key nuclear issue, offered statements that failed to lift uncertainties over who will control Soviet nuclear arms.

After the apparent definitiveness of Sunday's declaration of a commonwealth, Gorbachev's rebuff reinforced the state of confusion and indecision that has gripped it since last August's failed hard-line coup.

Gorbachev's power has been vastly diminished since then. Most republics already have declared their independence and much of the central government has been eliminated by order of Russian President Boris Yeltsin. So it is far from clear what resources Gorbachev will have to combat what he de-

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Applauding  
their own  
declaration of a  
commonwealth on  
Sunday are  
Ukrainian  
President  
Kravchuk, left,  
Byelorussian  
Chairman  
Shushkevitch  
and Russian  
President  
Yeltsin.

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# Gorbachev Says No to Commonwealth

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scribed as a "hasty" decision that "causes bewilderment."

Gorbachev has been trying for months to persuade leaders of the republics to adopt a treaty he drafted that in many respects is similar to the commonwealth announced by the three Slavic leaders but that would preserve more of a role for him and the central government.

Tonight, Gorbachev said the legislature of each republic should compare his treaty and the document approved by Yeltsin, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk and Byelorussian assembly Chairman Stanislav Shushkevitch, which he said had some positive aspects, including provisions for coordinated defense and economic policy.

Gorbachev made his statement after an 80-minute meeting in the Kremlin with Yeltsin and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, a key political figure who appeared miffed at having had no advance warning of Sunday's announcement.

Nazarbayev described Gorbachev as "upset" about the latest developments and told a press conference he continued to support the president and his treaty. "In these difficult times, Gorbachev has not exhausted his possibilities. . . . I think he is needed," the Kazakhstan leader said.

The three Slavic republics' leaders, after their meeting Sunday in a hunting lodge in Byelorussia, announced the liquidation of the Soviet state and the establishment of a "Commonwealth of Independent States" in its place, subject to the approval of their legislatures.

In a joint communique, the three republics claimed the right to dissolve the union as cosigners of the 1922 treaty that created it. In its place, they agreed to a loose commonwealth coordinating foreign and military policies and radical economic change aimed at creating a free market. They also announced that the new headquarters would be in Minsk, the Byelorussian capital.

There was no immediate reaction from Yeltsin, the recently elected Kravchuk or Shushkevitch to Gorbachev's statement. Yeltsin is expected to address his assembly on the issue Thursday.

In a press conference earlier in the day, top officials in Yeltsin's government made clear they were quickly pressing ahead with plans for implementing the commonwealth and taking control over the remnants of the central government. "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is no longer a subject of international law and no longer exists, and the Commonwealth of Independent States is its legal successor," said Gennady Burbulis, deputy prime minister of Russia.

He and others also sought to reassure Western governments

that the Soviet nuclear arsenal would remain under centralized control. In addition, they invited other republics, and even Eastern European countries, to join.

Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian was the only other leader of a republic to indicate an interest in the commonwealth, saying his republic would study the issue. According to news reports here, Gorbachev telephoned the leaders of several republics today, including those of Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said he hoped members of the central government, presumably including Gorbachev, would "recognize the reality" of the new situation and "provide a civilized handover of property" and power. "I hope they have the courage to recognize reality," he told a press conference.

In an interview with the German Bild newspaper, Kozyrev also said a place in government would be found for Gorbachev. "Gorbachev doesn't have any contagious diseases. We will find work for him, too," Kozyrev is quoted as saying.

Kravchuk, at a press conference in Kiev, played down the possibility that Gorbachev could somehow derail the commonwealth and said there would be no plebiscite on the issue in Ukraine.

"There will be no referendum in Ukraine because it is an independent state," Kravchuk said, referring to the election there last week

in which people voted overwhelmingly to leave the union. That vote set the stage for the agreement this weekend in Byelorussia.

Kravchuk said that a future role for Gorbachev did not come up at Sunday's meeting. "We did not discuss it," he said. "It is not our problem."

However, one of Gorbachev's spokesmen, briefing reporters during the meeting among Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Nazarbayev, said there had been some discussion of a possible presidential post in the new commonwealth.

Kravchuk's views were not winning unanimous support at home. A strongly nationalist legislator, Stepan Khmara, attacked him for signing any agreement with Russia. Many Ukrainians' votes for independence were aimed at ending Russia's historically controlling role in their land.

Meanwhile, other countries were scrambling to come to grips with the new political situation here. Several decided to dispatch high-level representatives to assess the situation, with particular focus expected to be the control over the nuclear arsenal.

U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III is scheduled to arrive in Moscow Saturday for a visit that will also include trips to Minsk and Kiev. The British government and the European Community were also planning to send representatives to those three cities this week.