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«TO PRESERVE IMPOSSIBLE TO DESTROY»: 1991 SOVIET UNION REFERENDUM ON THE PRESERVATION OF THE SOVIET UNION AND ITS HOLDING IN THE UKRAINIAN SSR

Summary. *The purpose of the article is to analyze the political circumstances in which the preparation and holding of the Soviet Union referendum in 1991 on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR took place as prerequisites for the containment of disintegration processes in the Soviet Union and its preservation as a union state. To describe the actions of democratic forces to block the holding of a referendum on the territory of the republic, to investigate the efforts of the new political parties and the «People's Council» opposition parliamentary bloc, aimed at achieving political consensus with the communist majority of parliament and the conduct of the national plebiscite in the Ukrainian SSR as a means of protecting republican sovereignty. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism, systemicity, scientific objectivity, as well as the application of general scientific (analysis,*

synthesis, deduction, induction, generalization), so specialhistorical (problemhistorical, historicalsystemic, problem chronological, historical and typological) methods. **The research novelty** of the study is the attempt, for the first time in Ukrainian historiography, to consider the political processes that took place in the Ukrainian SSR around the March 1991 plebiscite on the reform of the Soviet Union, the signing of a new Union Treaty and the preservation of the Soviet regime, as well as to study the activities of the political forces of the republic to strengthen political and economic independence of the republic. **Conclusions.** In December 1990, the Soviet leadership, concerned about the sovereignty processes in the union republics, succeeded in political and legal measures aimed at reforming the state political structure of the USSR. The legal instrument that would legitimize the existence of a union state was the Soviet Union referendum in March 1991. The political transformations of Moscow Center caused a sharp political debate in the Ukrainian society between supporters of the preservation of the USSR and supporters of Ukraine's state independence. The proposed version of the Union Treaty by M. Gorbachev was strongly criticized by the anti-communist opposition and received full support from the Communist Party leadership. In order to defend their own political initiatives, democratic forces resorted to mass protests in the republic and the formation of a broad anti-Kremlin front at the All-Union level. Under the influence of democratic forces, the vector of public opinion in Ukraine gradually shifted towards supporting real sovereignty of the republic. Because of the opposition of the conservative part of the parliament, a democratic parliamentary opposition was unable to block the holding of a union referendum on the preservation of the «renewed federation» or to hold a poll in its place concerning the full state independence of Ukraine. In parliamentary polemics, a political compromise between the democratic forces and the «sovereign communist» part of the communist majority of parliament was achieved in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Holding a parallel republican poll minimized the political and legal consequences of the results of the March referendum in 1991 for the political life of the republic. Despite the support of the majority of the referendum members for the idea of preserving the USSR, the results of the Republican plebiscite have shown the desire of Ukrainian society to increase the state status of the Ukrainian SSR.

Key words: Soviet Union, Soviet Union referendum, Union Treaty, sovereignty, «renewed federation», People's Council, parliamentary opposition.

«ЗБЕРЕГТИ НЕ МОЖНА ЗРУЙНУВАТИ»: ВСЕСОЮЗНИЙ РЕФЕРЕНДУМ 1991 Р. ЩОДО ЗБЕРЕЖЕННЯ РАДЯНСЬКОГО СОЮЗУ І ЙОГО ПРОВЕДЕННЯ В УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ РСР

Анотація. **Мета дослідження** – проаналізувати політичні обставини, за яких проходила підготовка і проведення Всесоюзного референдуму 1991 р. на території Української РСР як передумови для стримування дезінтеграційних процесів в Радянського Союзу і його збереження як союзної держави. **Методологія дослідження** базується на принципах історизму, системності, наукової об'єктивності, а також застосуванні як загальнонаукових (аналіз, синтез, дедукція, індукція, узагальнення), так спеціально-історичних (проблемно-історичний, історично-системний, проблемно-хронологічний, історично-типологічний) методів. **Наукова новизна** дослідження полягає у спробі вперше в українській історіографії розглянути політичні процеси, що відбувались в Українській РСР докола березневого плебіситу 1991 р. щодо реформування Радянського Союзу, підписання нового Союзного договору і збереження радянського режиму, а також дослідити заходи політичних сил республіки для зміцнення політичної і економічної самостійності республіки. **Висновки.** У грудні 1990 р. радянське керівництво, занепокоєне суверенізаційними процесами у союзних республіках, вдалось до політико-правових заходів, спрямованих на реформування державно-політичної структури СРСР. Юридичним інструментом, який би легітимізував існування союзної держави, мав стати березневий всесоюзний референдум 1991 р. Політичні трансформації московського Центру спричинили в українському суспільстві гостру політичну дискусію між прибічниками збереження СРСР і прихильниками державної незалежності України. Запропонований М. Горбачовим варіант Союзного договору зазнав різкої критики з боку антикомуністичної опозиції й отримав повну підтримку керівництва КПУ. Для відстоювання власних політичних ініціатив демократичні сили вдалась до масових акцій протесту в республіці й формування широкого

антикремлівського фронту на всесоюзному рівні. Під впливом демократичних сил вектор громадської думки в Україні поступово зміщується у напрямку підтримки реального республіканського суверенітету. Через протидію консервативного крила парламенту демократична парламентська опозиція не змогла заблокувати проведення союзного референдуму щодо збереження «оновленої федерації», або провести замість нього опитування щодо повної державної незалежності України. У ході парламентської полеміки у Верховній Раді України було досягнуто політичний компроміс між демократичними силами і «суверен-комуністичним» крилом комуністичної більшості парламенту. Проведення паралельно республіканського опитування мінімізувало політико-правові наслідки результатів березневого референдуму 1991 р. для політичного життя республіки. Незважаючи на підтримку більшістю учасників референдуму ідеї збереження СРСР, результати республіканського плебісциту засвідчили прагнення українського суспільства до підвищення державного статусу Української РСР.

Ключові слова: Радянський Союз, всесоюзний референдум, Союзний договір, суверенітет, «оновлена федерація», Народна Рада, парламентська опозиція.

Problem statement. In December 1990, the Soviet leadership, concerned about the measures of the national republics to improve their state legal status, took decisive steps to curb disintegration processes and create the preconditions for reforming the Union state. The Fourth Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR adopted a constitutional and legal reform, which transformed the Soviet Union into a «renewed federation of equal republics», and appointed a referendum on the future of the Soviet Union (Ob obeshchei kontseptsyy, 1990, p. 3). On 16 January 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR included question in the bulletin for a secret ballot on a referendum the, «Do you consider it necessary to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedoms of a person of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?» The referendum was scheduled for 17 March 1991. These decisions of the Union deputies sharply aggravated the political debate in the Ukrainian society regarding the state prospects of the Union, which soon formed the form of a protracted confrontation between the supporters of the preservation of the Union in the virtually unchanged form and supporters of the real realization of sovereign rights by the republic.

The analysis of sources and recent researches. Nowadays in Ukrainian historiography there are no studies devoted to the analysis of political and legal aspects of the preparation and holding of the Soviet Union referendum in 1991 on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. A number of fundamental scientific works on the history of Perestroika relate mainly to the analysis of the general political processes of the republic's social life in 1988–1991. Some tendencies in the development of the political situation in the country on the eve of the popular plebiscite and the republican poll were highlighted in the monographs of O. Haran (Haran, 1993) V. Lytvyn (Lytvyn, 1994), O. Boiko (Boiko, 2002). In the works of M. Mykhalchenko and V. Andrushchenko (Mykhalchenko, Andrushchenko, 1996), T. Batenko (Batenko, 1996), V. Derevynskyi (Derevynskyi, 2011), written in the genre of political biography, where against the background of political activity of L. Kravchuk, B. Horyn and V. Chornovil, separate pages of the political confrontation of the party and democratic forces concerning the transformation of the national state system of the union state and strengthening of the sovereignty of the republic are considered. The regional aspects of the activities of the opposition forces during the referendum period are most widely reflected in the monographs of O. Muravskyi (Muravskyi, 2011) and F. Turchenko (Turchenko, 2009).

The publication's purpose is to analyze the political circumstances in which the preparation and holding of the Soviet Union referendum in 1991 on the territory of the

Ukrainian SSR took place as prerequisites for the containment of disintegration processes in the Soviet Union and its preservation as a union state.

Statement of the basic material. In January-March 1991, both in Ukrainian society and in the republican parliament, there was a heated debate about two issues: the draft of the new Union Treaty and the Soviet Union referendum.

The draft of the new Union Treaty (the so-called presidential version of 25 November 1990) (Soyuznyi dogovor, 1990, p. 1–2) actually kept the same powers of the Union Center that it had during the period of undivided domination of the administrative command system. The proposed draft of the Treaty and the question put forward at the referendum were unconditionally supported by the leaders of the Communist Party of Ukraine and the conservative communist majority of the Verkhovna Rada (Hurenko, 1991, p. 1–2). One of its leaders, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CC CPU) Anatolii Savchenko, declared, «The Union Treaty is a key prerequisite for the realization of the interests of the republic development. Except for the reactionaries and obscurantisms, no one in the world wants to weaken the USSR» (Savchenko, 1991, p. 7). The direction of the leadership of the CPU to Moscow Kremlin on the future of the Union State was subsequently confirmed by the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Leonid Kravchuk, «Hurenko (the first secretary of the CC CPU – *Author's note*) tended to a rigid scheme that included the same Soviet Union, only slightly painted and with a different name» (Kravchuk, 2002, p. 80).

The variant of the Union Treaty proposed by M. Gorbachev was strongly criticized by the anti-communist opposition, since almost all of its legal norms contradicted the Declaration on State Sovereignty (adopted on 16 July 1990 – *Author's note*). Representatives of the Democratic Politics subjected to reasoned criticism all the main provisions of the Union Treaty draft concerning the prospects of state, economic and legal or military construction, as well as the relations between the subjects of the future federation and the participation of the republics of the Union in international relations.

The legal instrument, which, according to Moscow plan, would legitimize the preservation of the union state and would confirm the Kremlin variant of the Union Treaty, was to be the Soviet Union referendum (Pro orhanizatsiiu i zakhody, 1991, p. 79).

Strongly denying the idea of a referendum, the democratic community underlined its legal insolvency and emphasized the fact that the Ukrainian side did not participate in the preparation of the Union Treaty draft or in the process of its approval. «The very fact of holding a referendum without coordination with the republics is disrespect for them. The Center looks at us as vassals», emphasized Oleksandr Yemets, chairman of the Commission on Human Rights (Yemets, 1991, p. 2). Deputy Speaker of the People's Movement of Ukraine Mykola Porovskiy sharply spoke out against the referendum, who stated, «The referendum is an attempt by the Center to impose republics and peoples not only an old but a worse version of the unitary empire» (Porovskiy, 1991, p. 89).

In their numerous speeches at the session and at the sessions of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, deputies from the non-communist minority, argued the legal unlawfulness of a referendum. Deputies V. Shyshkin, I. Zaiats, V. Nosov and others stated that the issue of the referendum artificially united a number of problems, in particular, the preservation of the «renewed federation» and the guarantee of human rights and freedoms, in order to achieve the result acceptable to the Kremlin leadership. The conclusions were also agreed by the head of the parliament L. Kravchuk, who stated, «Previously, I had a conversation with the deputies Kotsuba, Shyshkin, Nosov. ... I could not refute their legal evidence. I did not succeed!» (Kravchuk, 1991, p. 17).

Not being able to block the holding of the Soviet Union referendum on the preservation of the «renewed federation» (this was done by the parliaments of the three republics of the Baltic, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova) because of opposition from the conservative part of the parliament, or to hold polls on the full state independence of Ukraine (the latter was proposed by people's deputies, and at the same time, by the leaders of opposition parties and organizations Levko Lukianenko, Viacheslav Chornovil, Stepan Khmara, etc.), a non-communist minority in parliament was forced to seek political maneuver, which would level out, or at least minimize the political and legal implications of the projected victory of the Center, and keep the chance to continue the struggle for independence of Ukraine.

In this situation, the only possible option was to reach a compromise with separate deputies from the communist majority of the parliament (the so-called «sovereign communists» – *Author's note*), who also did not suit the version of the Gorbachev project, which, according to L. Kravchuk, «gave us the status of novices». The manifestation of the parliamentary compromise could have become a variant of the referendum question that was prepared by the leadership of the Verkhovna Rada. Thus, according to the suggestion of the Presidium, citizens had to make a choice between the «renewed federation» and the «Union of Soviet sovereign states»; however, this project did not find approval from the deputies. The attempt to «stamp» the initiative of the Center in the parliament failed, and the communists, orthodox from the pro-Kremlin group «For Soviet sovereign Ukraine», actively called for it, and they lacked enough votes. However, this time the «sovereign communist» fraction of this group declined to give legitimacy to the Union referendum on the territory of the republic. Such political games could testify to only one thing: in the ranks of the parliamentary majority there was a split regarding the future status of the republic as part of the «renewed» USSR.

A compromise formula for the direct expression of the will of the people proposed by the People's Council (Pavlenko, 1991, p. 2), the parliamentary opposition bloc, and which was finally adopted by the Verkhovna Rada, a proposal was made to conduct a national poll in parallel with the Union referendum on the transformation of the USSR into the «Union of Soviet sovereign states on the principles of the Declaration on State Sovereignty» (Pro provedennia referendumu, 1991, p. 129). Arguing this decision of the Verkhovna Rada L. Kravchuk declared, «There is their right, there is our right. There is a war of laws. ... Therefore, we should not interfere in the formulation of that bulletin (Union one – *Author's note*). But we cannot close our eyes to the fact that our sovereign rights are violated and they do not want to take us into account» (Kravchuk, 1991, p. 17).

The bulletin, approved by the Verkhovna Rada, stated, «Do you agree that Ukraine should be part of the Union of Soviet Sovereign States on the principles of the Declaration on State Sovereignty?» That is, if the Soviet Union referendum was to determine whether the USSR was to be a «renewed federation», then the Republican poll should give an answer to which Ukraine sees the future Union Treaty.

The questions put to the referendum and the nationwide poll caused a sharp political debate in the republic, simultaneously highlighting their ambiguous perception in the opposition camp. If the opposition's reaction to the «Gorbachev» bulletin was consolidated, then the decision to hold the republican plebiscite became a «stumbling block» and revealed serious contradictions in the state of the opposition political apparatus. Thus, the head of the Ukrainian Republican Party L. Lukianenko suggested not supporting any formulation, or boycott the referendum. The head of the URP faction in the parliament believed that the figures in the referendum were only indicators of the mood of the population and called for demonstrating that «among these sentiments there is

also one that demands full independence of Ukraine», therefore, the referendum boycott would be the best solution (Lukianenko, 1991, p. 3). The leader of the Radical fraction in the parliament, S. Khmara, also called for a «boycott of the referendum on imperial treaty» and an indefinite political strike.

The head of Lviv Regional Council, V. Chornovil, who did not support the issue of the republican bulletin, and at the same time proposed to hold regional plebiscite and to invite citizens to support the idea of complete state independence of Ukraine, took a realistic position. The initiative of the chairman of Lviv deputies was supported by the delegates of the Galician Assembly – a body set up to coordinate the activities of the Councils of the three Western regions of the republic (Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine – CSAPO of Ukraine, f. 1, d. 32, c. 2899, p. 114). However, a people's deputy from Rivne region V. Chervonii expressed warning about the initiative of the Galician resident, «An additional Galician bulletin is not necessary... In Volyn, I'm not talking about the Great Ukraine, this idea will not find a support» (CSAPO of Ukraine, f. 1, d. 32, c. 2899, p. 108).

The Democratic Party of Ukraine also offered citizens to answer «No» to the question of the union bulletin. At the same time, the Democrats noted that inevitable transitional period was necessary to achieve state independence; therefore they supported the idea of the Commonwealth of Independent States as a new formation on the USSR and called for the approval of the Republican Initiative (Zaiava Demokratychnoi partii Ukrainy, 1991, p. 2). A similar argument and the identical answer to all questions were proposed by the Party of Democratic Revival of Ukraine (Referendum, 1991, p. 1). Also the faction of non-partisans in the People's Council expressed its position. Members of the faction appealed to the referendum participants to leave «No» in the Moscow bulletin and approve the issue of the Verkhovna Rada bulletin. «The answer «Yes» in the Ukrainian bulletin», as it was noted in the appeal of the faction, «completely does not guarantee Ukrainian statehood, but opens the way to it and gives us a chance ... to fight Ukraine as a state» (Yak holosuvaly, 1991, p. 1).

The outcome of the broad political debate in the republic was summed up by the parliamentary opposition coalition, which, on the eve of the referendum, adopted a consolidated statement and called for «No» to be answered to the «unitary state» under the guise of the «renewed federation», and proposed «to support the idea of a sovereign states community in which our republic could continue to fight for complete independence» (Zvernennia, 1991, p. 2).

For organizational agitation preparation of democratic forces for a referendum, a number of public organizations and political parties the Committee «Referendum: Sovereign Ukraine» was created on 19 February 1991. The Committee included the Party of the Democratic Revival of Ukraine (PDRU), the Democratic Party of Ukraine (DemPU), the People's Movement of Ukraine (PMU), the Ukrainian T. Shevchenko Society, the Green Party of Ukraine (GPU), the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party (USDP), the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (SDPU), Ukrainian society «Memorial», etc. O. Yemets was elected Chairman of the Committee. In its statement, the Committee noted, «Preservation of the USSR as a renewed federation may mean: preservation of the current «equal» disability of the republics; preservation of the current, but somewhat renewed, totalitarian administrative command system; the use of military force against republics which do not want to be in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics», and strongly called on Ukrainian citizens to say «No» to the question of the All-Union Parliament (Zaiava Komitetu, 1991, p. 2).

In an effort to secure the widest public support of their demands, the opposition acted as the initiator and organizer of numerous rallies, demonstrations and pickets, the motto of which was the slogan «Union – No!» On 10 and 16 March 1991, in many cities of Ukraine, there

were political actions «No» – to the question of the Union referendum». In order to explain the position of the people's opposition on the future will of the citizens, numerous propaganda and information groups conducted mass events, which called for the rejection of the question of the Soviet Union referendum and support the formulation of the republican parliament. In particular, on 9 March 1991, rallies organized by the Democratic Odesa bloc in the oblast center and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy took place, in which people's deputy O. Yemets spoke (Yemets, 1991, p. 54). People's deputies participated in similar rallies: V. Filenko – in Kharkiv, V. Kolinets and L. Horokhivskiy – in Ternopil, M. Holubets – in Kremenets, M. Porovskiy – in Rivne region.

The scale of the protest actions of the opposition caused a great concern to the leadership of the Communist Party. In his speech on television, the leader of the Ukrainian Communists, S. Hurenko, said, «The distinction between supporters and opponents of the preservation of our multinational state is becoming clearer. Many citizens have not yet been determined. It is for this part of the population that is targeted at various kinds of political actions, that, in recent times, are held by those who are trying to tear Ukraine away from the Union» (Hurenko, 1991, p. 3). As countermeasures against opposition rallies, the Communist Party of Ukraine proposed to the communists of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus to hold a joint action «Unity». At the same time, the Communist Party regional committees received instructions to organize rallies in support of the Center's initiatives, in particular under the slogans «For Unity and Civic Consent, the Integrity of the USSR» (State Archive of Kharkiv Region – SAKhR, f. P. 2, d. 207, c. 722, p. 7–8, 11).

Thus, the Soviet Union referendum on the future of the USSR took place on the wake of a political confrontation in the republic, which, however, not only affected the participants, but most likely, increased the participation of society in the poll. Altogether 31.5 million people came to the referendum on polling station, which was 83.5% of the number of voters included in the lists. 70.2% of them voted for the preservation of the Union as a renewed federation (76.4% in the USSR). Residents of different regions of the republic reacted diametrically opposite to the question of the bulletin. So, if 85–88% of voters voted in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Crimean regions, for the preservation of the Union, then in the west of the republic (in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil regions) only 16–19% supported the preservation of the «unified and indivisible» USSR. The residents' opinion of the Ukrainian capital was distributed almost equally, however, the majority wanted changes in the Soviet state political structure, and therefore only 44.6% of Kyivans supported the proposal of Moscow Center. The Republican poll found much more supporters among the inhabitants of the republic, since 80.17% of the citizens who participated in the voting voted for broader sovereign rights of the Ukrainian SSR (Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine – CSAHAA of Ukraine, Kyiv, f. 1, d. 28, c. 120, p. 5). Only in Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions the majority voted «against», since local political forces focused on the full state independence of the republic. The results of the local poll in three Halych regions were fully predictable – 88.0% of the inhabitants of the region voted for the independent status of Ukraine (Protokol zasidannia, 1991, p. 1).

Prejudging comments from Moscow on the results of the referendum, well-known Ukrainian scholars, lawyers and scientific organizations stated in the press about the legal, logical failure of the referendum issues, their political tendentiousness. «Question of the Soviet Union referendum cannot be considered sociologically correct, and the received answers – reliable», this is exactly the conclusion from the analysis of the results of the referendum made by the Group of sociological research led by prof. V. Ossovskyi.

In assessing the results of people's will, representatives of two political camps differed in their emphasis. Again, as after the March 1990 elections, both the opposition and the ruling party

considered the results of the referendum as their victory. The Democratic community claimed that the Republican poll crosses the results of the union bulletin. In turn, the secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine S. Hurenko hastened to declare that «during the referendum the idea of the Union won» (Dmytrenko, 1991, p. 1). The Republican sovereignty of the communist leader saw no attributes of self-government, in particular, the national army or Ukrainian money, since «neither one nor the other determined the main direction of solving urgent socio economic problems» (Hurenko, 1991, p. 1). The essence of the current moment was rather thinly outlined by People's Deputy O. Suhoniako, «Politically, if desired, the results of the referendum can be interpreted arbitrarily: both as Gorbachev's support, both as a support of Kravchuk, and as support for the independence. But their essence lies in the fact that they are ambiguous, as the ambiguous situation in the empire itself. And this ambiguity cannot be held on for a long time: either the center will suppress national liberation movements by force, or an organized, agreed upon republics, dismantling of the empire should take place. There is chaos in the middle» (Suhoniako, 1991, p. 3).

It was precisely around the issue of the referendum and the Union Treaty that the final dividing of the two main parts in the Communist Party was completed: «orthodox» (conservative) and «sovereign communist» («national communist»). Subsequently L. Kravchuk recalled that at the turn of the 1990s «a group of people who sought greater political independence for Ukraine was formed in the depths of the Communist Party of Ukraine. And the number of those tired of «younger brothers» feeling, the silent performers of another's will, was imperceptibly, but steadily growing» (Kravchuk, 2002, p. 55). Gradually, part of the party state establishment, on the one hand, as a result of national democratic processes, aroused the awakening of political consciousness on the one hand, and on the other, under the influence of sovereignty steps of other republics, in particular, Russia, a sense of «republican secrecy» was formed. Thinking of the tendencies of weakening the Center, and having felt the «taste of power», the republican state party apparatus sought to secure as much freedom as possible in accepting initially administrative and subsequently political decisions (Kuzo, 1994, pp. 32–33). This was done by party soviet leaders of all levels, under certain conditions, potential allies of democratic forces in ensuring the sovereignty of the republic. The exact nature of this interdependence, referring to the deputies of the People's Council, was defined by O. Moroz, «The situation will force us to cooperate, because the contradictions concerning Ukraine's sovereignty will be strengthened, they will demand that the communists be not only internationalists, and the anti-communists to re-examine their intentions» (Moroz, 1993, p. 73).

Although, in general, the participants of the Soviet Union referendum in Ukraine supported the idea of the «renewed Union», but the positive answer to the question of a republican consultative poll (on joining the Union on the basis of the Declaration on State Sovereignty), confirmed the desire of the absolute majority of the inhabitants of the Ukrainian SSR to increase the state legal status of the republic. The results of the referendum provided the Ukrainian leadership with a broad field for political maneuver in relations with Moscow Center, and in particular, allowed to postpone the final decision on signing a new Union Treaty, which envisaged the creation of a unified federal state.

Conclusions. In December 1990, the Soviet leadership, concerned about the sovereignty processes in the Union republics, managed political and legal measures aimed at reforming the state political structure of the USSR. In order to determine the parameters of the device of the «renewed Union», a draft of the new Union Treaty was prepared. The Soviet Union referendum should have become a legal instrument that would legitimize the existence of both Soviet power and the Union state itself. The political transformations of Moscow Center led to a sharp

political debate in the Ukrainian society between supporters of the preservation of the Soviet Union in a virtually unaltered form and supporters of Ukraine's status as a state. The proposed version of the Union Treaty by M. Gorbachev was strongly criticized by the anti-communist opposition and received full support from the Communist Party leadership. The democratic community stressed the non-participation of the Ukrainian side in the process of drafting the Union Treaty and argued the legal inability of the forthcoming referendum. Under the influence of democratic forces, the vector of public opinion in Ukraine has gradually shifted towards supporting real sovereignty of the republic. In order to defend their own political initiatives, the popular opposition has resorted to mass protests in the republic and the formation of a broad anti-Kremlin front on the all-Union level. In the opposition political environment there were different approaches to tactics of action during the Soviet Union referendum and the Republican poll offered by the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR. The elaboration by the democratic forces of a consolidated position on the political dilemmas that the March plebiscite had to resolve drew up a significant part of its participants in support of Ukraine's state prospects. The achievements of the same political compromise between the «sovereign communist» part of the Verkhovna Rada and the democratic parliamentary bloc minimized the political and legal consequences of the results of the March referendum in 1991 and laid the foundation for further struggle for the sovereign status of Ukraine.

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