

Andrzej Gil*

First attempt. Crimea: between Ukraine and Russia (1989-1997)

Pierwsza próba. Krym: między Ukrainą a Rosją (1989-1997)

Summary: The article deals with the problem of Russia's aspirations to revise the geopolitical system created in Soviet times using Crimea as an example. It shows the activities of both local political circles and the central authorities of the Russian SFSR, and later the Russian Federation, aimed at revising the existing borders and integrating the Crimean peninsula into Russia. The article covers the years from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the 1997 agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

Keywords: Crimea, Ukraine, Russia, conflict

Streszczenie: Artykuł porusza problem dążeń Rosji do rewizji wytworzonego w czasach radzieckich układu geopolitycznego na przykładzie Krymu. Ukazane zostały działania zarówno lokalnych środowisk politycznych, jak i władz centralnych Rosyjskiej SFRR, a później Federacji Rosyjskiej, mające na celu rewizję dotychczasowych granic i włączenie Półwyspu Krymskiego do Rosji. Przedział czasowy artykułu obejmuje lata od upadku Związku Radzieckiego do układu między Rosją i Ukrainą z 1997 roku.

Słowa kluczowe: Krym, Ukraina, Rosja, konflikt

The emergence of a tendency to revise existing borders between some of the Soviet Union's administrative units was one of the manifestations of the crisis that swept across that country in the second half of the 1980s. This concerned both individual Union Republics (such as the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh) and their constituent elements (the centrifugal tendencies of some North Caucasus republics vis-à-vis the Moscow centre)¹. Many of the tensions and conflicts that existed in the USSR in the late 1980s

* Andrzej Gil – Prof., The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6415-8339>, e-mail: andgil@kul.pl.

1 K. Strachota, *Konflikty zbrojne na obszarze postradzieckim. Stan obecny. Perspektywy uregulowania. Konsekwencje*, „Prace OSW” 2003, no. 9, pp. 6-7.

and early 1990s led to the creation of so-called para-states, such as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (Transnistria), South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which not only posed a problem for the states (former Soviet Union republics) from which they were separated but were also an effective means of pressure on these states on the part of the Russian Federation. From the perspective of just a few decades, however, it can be concluded that the key problem with the greatest current negative consequences, not only for the post-Soviet space but also for Eurasia and even, in some respects, the entire globe, was the tendency to revise the borders between – first, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), and after 1991, now-independent Russia and Ukraine. Undoubtedly, the fundamental source of those tendencies was both greater Russian nationalism (the “русский мир” concept) and post-Soviet nostalgia, expressed by the Russian political elite.

Twice, the issue of revising the borders between the two constituent elements of the Soviet state – Russia and Ukraine – has become apparent in Soviet history. The first time was in the period immediately following the formal establishment of the USSR, when as a result of adjustment processes resulting from the need to reconcile the aspirations of the republican political elite with the ideological requirements of the Moscow centre (acting not as a party but as a peacemaker), a new boundary line was drawn in 1924, which was less favourable to the Ukrainian SSR (it lost the eastern part of the Donbass)². The second time, the borders of Soviet Ukraine at the section with the Russian SFSR were contested during the period of the Soviet Union’s collapse, when the Crimean question came to the fore³.

The axis of the dispute, engulfing wide social circles in both republics, was the consequences of Nikita Khrushchev’s decision. The First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the decisions of the Pereiaslav Council

- 2 A. Gil, *Granica między Ukraińską SRR a Rosyjską FSRR w latach dwudziestych XX wieku. Przyczynnik do realizacji bolszewickiej polityki narodowościowej*, “Limes. Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej” 2018, vol. 9, pp. 129-139; A. Gil, *Granice Ukrainy w latach 1917-1940*, [in:] *Sojusz Piłsudski – Petlura w kontekście politycznej i militarnej walki o kształt Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*, T. Stępniewski, A. Górak, M. Kruszyński (eds.), Lublin–Warsaw 2020, pp. 203-209.
- 3 A. Gil, *Kwestia krymska w relacjach ukraińsko-rosyjskich przed 2014 rokiem. Uwarunkowania i konteksty*, “Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej” 2019, vol. 17, issue 2, pp. 240-241.

(1654), celebrated as the unification of Ukraine with Russia, excluded Crimea from the Russian SFSR and transferred it to the Ukrainian SSR (formally, the transfer was carried out by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR by its decree of 19 February 1954, signed by its chairman Kliment Voroshilov and secretary Nikolai Pegov)⁴. In the situation at the time, this act had only formal meaning because the policy of Sovietization and Russification was being implemented throughout the Soviet Union, hence the Ukrainian-ness of Crimea was expressed almost exclusively through its administrative affiliation⁵.

The political thaw, symbolised by Gorbachev's "perestroika" and "glasnost", provided communities dissatisfied with the previous *status quo* with an opportunity to articulate their own aspirations, manifested also through actions for fundamental political and territorial changes. Crimea's numerically dominant Russian and Russian-speaking population demonstrated its concern both for the prospect of possible real Ukrainian autonomy (not yet independence) and for the ethnic changes associated with the ongoing return to the peninsula of the Crimean Tatars who were deported in 1944⁶. The local social elites, which previously existed under the conditions of a specific Soviet and Great Russian culture and practically ignored the fact that Crimea belonged to Soviet Ukraine (they treated Moscow, not Kyiv, as their centre), began discussing the future of Crimea in the late

- 4 Ukaz Prezidyuma Verkhovnoho Soveta SSSR „O peredache Krymskoi oblasti iz sostava RSFSR v sostav USRR”, „Vedomosti Verkhovnoho Soveta Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik” 1954 [Указ Президиума Верховного Совета СССР „О передаче Крымской области из состава РСФСР в состав УССР”, „Ведомости Верховного Совета Союза Советских Социалистических Республик” 1954], no. 4, p. 1. The text of the decree was as follows: „Учитывая общность экономики, территориальную близость и тесные хозяйственные и культурные связи между Крымской областью и Украинской ССР, Президиум Верховного Совета Союза Советских Социалистических Республик постановляет: Утвердить совместное представление Президиума Верховного Совета РСФСР и Президиума Верховного Совета УССР о передаче Крымской области из состава Российской Советской Федеративной Социалистической Республики в состав Украинской Советской Социалистической Республики”.
- 5 O.G. Shevchuk, *Transformatsiia administrativno-teritorialnogo pristoiiu Krimu v drugii polovini XX – pochatku XXI stolittia*, [in:] *Etnokulturniie i mezkhkonesionalniie otnosheniia v Krimu: sbornik nauchnikh trudov*, V.G. Tur (ed.), Simferopol 2012 [О.Г. Шевчук, *Трансформації адміністративно-територіального пристрою Криму в другій половині ХХ – початку ХХІ століття*, [в:] *Етнокультурні та міжконфесіональні відносини в Криму: збірник наукових трудов*, В.Г. Тур (ed.), Симферополь 2012], pp. 182-183.
- 6 R. Wiśniewski, *Przemiany etniczne na Krymie – od inkorporacji do Rosji carskiej po aneksję przez Federację Rosyjską (1783-2014)*, „Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski” 2016, no. VII/2, p. 81.

1980s. Depending on the degree of determination and political imagination, the following solutions were advocated: gaining far-reaching autonomy within the Ukrainian SSR, incorporation into the Russian SFSR (two options were envisioned: Crimea as a simple administrative oblast or a unit with some autonomy), the establishment of a new union republic or, in the most radical approach, the establishment of an independent state⁷.

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In the autumn of 1989, meetings of several local party committees, during which the future of the peninsula was debated, took place in a number of Crimean cities (Sevastopol, Simferopol, Kerch). This trend of events culminated in the resolution of the Regional Council of Deputies in Simferopol of 12 November 1989 on the right of local nations to establish the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic as an entity within the Soviet Union. The legal basis for the decision was to be a referendum in which the population of the peninsula was supposed to express its opinion⁸.

During that time, the situation on the Crimean Peninsula was the subject of consideration at the level of the decision-making centre in Moscow. In view of the growing national issues in the USSR, the highest authorities sought to pacify them by meeting at least some of the demands of ethnicities (including Crimean Tatars) deported during the Stalinist period. On 28 November 1989, the conclusions of a special committee for Volga Germans and Crimean Tatars were published. As for the future of Crimea, it was postulated that it should be given an autonomous status, but within the borders of Ukraine⁹ (it is interesting that the chairman of this committee,

7 A.A. Formanchuk, A.V. Maligin, *Krim v period sotsialno-politicheskikh izmenenii v SSSR. 1985-1989*, [in:] *Istoriia Krima*, A.V. Yurasov (ed.) [A.A. Форманчук, А.В. Мальгин, *Крым в период социально-политических изменений в СССР. 1985-1989*, [в:] *История Крыма*, А.В. Юрасов], in two volumes, vol. 2, Moscow 2019, pp. 688-693.

8 W. Łysek, *Krym w polityce mocarstw: pogranicze – konflikt – destabilizacja*, "Przegląd Geopolityczny" 2015, vol. 11, p. 49.

9 *Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR ot 28 noyabria 1989 g. № 845-I „O vyvodakh i predlozheniakh komisii po problemam sovetskikh nemtsev i krimsko-tatarskogo naroda”*, "Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR" 1989 [Постановление Верховного Совета СССР от 28 ноября 1989 г. № 845-I „О выводах и предложениях комиссий по проблемам советских немцев и крымско-татарского народа”, "Ведомости Верховного Совета СССР" 1989], no. 25, p. 495.

who signed the above-mentioned resolution, was later the leader of the August 1991 putsch – Gennady Yanayev). Undoubtedly, however, neither the committee nor, even more so, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, envisioned any other option than keeping the republic as part of the Soviet state.

A few months later, on 16 July 1990, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR adopted the “Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russian SFSR”¹⁰. The declaration was met with a negative reaction in Crimea, where local advocates of the political Soviet *status quo* coupled with efforts to formally link the peninsula with Russia not only did not lose their previous prominence but also gained their obvious representative in the person of the new chairman of the Crimea Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (as part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) – Nikolai Bagrov. This circle of events led to the all-Crimean referendum conducted on 20 January 1991. The following question was subject to voting: “Do you support re-establishing the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as a subject of the Union SSR and a participant of the Union Treaty?” The referendum was attended by 1,441,019 voters (81.37% of the total eligible population), of which 1,343,255 (92.26% of voters) provided a “yes” answer¹¹. In response to the January referendum, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR passed the decision “Про відновлення Кримської Автономної Радянської Соціалістичної Республіки” on 12 February 1991, under which local legislative and ex-

The text of the resolution: „Восстановление прав крымско-татарского народа не может быть осуществлено без восстановления автономии Крыма путём образования Крымской АССР в составе Украинской ССР. Это соответствовало бы интересам как крымских татар, так и представителей других национальностей, проживающих ныне в Крыму”

10 [Deklaratsia o gosudarstvennom suverenitete Ukrainy ot 16 iulya 1990 g., [in:] S.M. Shahray (ed.), *Raspad SSSR. Dokumenty i fakty (1986-1992 gg.)*, in two volumens, vol. 2: *Arkhivnye dokumenty i materialy*, Moskva 2016 [Декларация о государственном суверенитете Украины от 16 июля 1990 г., [в:] *Распад СССР: Документы и факты (1986-1992 гг.)*, in two volumens, *Архивные документы и материалы*, С.М. Шахрай (ed.), vol. 2, Москва 2016], pp. 589-593. This declaration, in section 5, devoted to preserving the territorial uniformity of Ukraine, stated the following: „Украинская ССР осуществляет верховенство на всей своей территории. Территория Украинской ССР в существующих границах является неприкосновенной и не может быть изменена и использована без ее согласия. Украинская ССР самостоятельно определяет административно-территориальное устройство Республики и порядок образования национально-административных единиц”.

11 P. Andrusieczko, J. Prokopiuk, *Flota Czarnomorska i Krym w kontekście bezpieczeństwa Ukrainy*, “Przegląd Naukowo-Metodyczny. Edukacja dla Bezpieczeństwa” 2010, no. 3, pp. 68-69.

ecutive bodies were to be established in the future¹². The decision consisted of two clauses, and it read as follows: “1. Відновити Кримську Автономну Радянську Соціалістичну Республіку в межах території Кримської області в складі Української РСР. 2. Кримську обласну Раду народних депутатів тимчасово, до прийняття Конституції Кримської АРСР і створення на її основі конституційних органів державної влади, визнати найвищим органом державної влади на території Кримської АРСР і надати їй статус Верховної Ради Кримської Автономної Радянської Соціалістичної Республіки”. The decision was signed by the then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Leonid Kravchuk. The Supreme Council of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was headed by the aforementioned Nikolai Bagrov, and the post of chairman of the Council of Ministers was held by Vitaly Kurashyk (he came from Belarus, but for many years he had been professionally connected – first with the Donbass and later with Crimea)¹³.

The awareness that the balance of power within the Soviet Union itself had come to an end led some high-level Russian party activists to be willing to revise existing borders. This stood in stark contrast to the agreement between the Russian SFSR and the Ukrainian SSR, adopted on 19 November 1990. Clause 6 of that agreement guaranteed the territorial consistency of both parties, with the reservation, however, that they remain within the USSR¹⁴. This was clearly highlighted by the then foreign minister of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Andrei Kozyrev, during the ratification of that agreement by the RSFSR on 23 November 1990. Andrei Kozyrev stated that if the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent Ukrainian statehood were

12 *Zakon Ukrainiskoi radianskoi sotsialistichnoi respubliki „Pro vidnovlenia Krimskoi Avtonomnoi Radianskoi Sotsialistichnoi Respubliki”* [Закон Української радянської соціалістичної республіки „Про відновлення Кримської Автономної Радянської Соціалістичної Республіки“], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/712-12> [30.06.2022].

13 A.A. Formanchuk, A.V. Maligin, op. cit., pp. 693-695.

14 *Dogovor mezhdru Rossijskoysovetskoj Federativnoj Sotsialisticheskoy Respublikoy i Ukrainskoj Sovetskoj Sotsialisticheskoy Respublikoy*, “Vedomosti s’yezda narodnykh deputatov RSFSR i Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR” 1990 [Договор между Российской Советской Федеративной Социалистической Республикой и Украинской Советской Социалистической Республикой, “Ведомости съезда народных депутатов РСФСР и Верховного Совета РСФСР” 1990], no. 27, p. 353.

to occur, the question of the boundary line would be posed anew. In this way, the Russian government signalled its claim to those areas of Ukraine that it considered illegally incorporated during the formation of the Soviet state in the early 1920s¹⁵.

The dissolution of the USSR in December 1991 gave the Russian Federation a pretext to make demands, for example with regard to Crimea. On 23 January 1992, the Supreme Soviet of Russia passed a resolution to investigate the legal basis for the 1954 transfer of the peninsula. It was no surprise that after several months, on 21 May 1992, the legislative body of the Russian Federation decided that the decision to transfer the Crimean region from the RSFSR to the USSR was invalid from the moment it was taken. At the same time, deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation called on the Ukrainian authorities to hold talks on the further status of the region with the participation of the region's residents, whose representative – according to Moscow – was the Republican Movement of Crimea, which openly sought its incorporation into Russia¹⁶.

Another source of tension was the question of the status of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet. Despite objections from Ukraine, which wanted to work on the issue in a bilateral format, the Russians invited representatives of local Crimean authorities to the talks, which led to a crisis over the issue¹⁷. In the absence of an agreement, the two countries made unilateral decisions on the issue. On 5 April 1992, President Leonid Kravchuk issued the relevant decree. Just two days later, President Boris Yeltsin issued his decree on jurisdiction over the Black Sea Fleet. This peculiar “war of decrees” ended with a preliminary agreement, signed by the two leaders on 23 June 1992 in Dagomys, Krasno-

15 O. Liubovets, *Ukraińsko-rosiiski superechnosti shchodo viznachennia statusu Krimu ta m. Sevastopol (1990-ti roki)*, [in:] *Krim vid antichnosti do siokhodennia. Istorichni studii*, V. Smolii (ed.), Kyiv 2014 [O. Любовець, *Українсько-російські суперечності щодо визначення статусу Криму та м. Севастополь (1990-ті роки)*, [в] *Крим від античності до сьогодення. Історичні студії*, В. Смолій (ed.), Київ 2014], pp. 624-625.

16 E. Mironowicz, *Rosja – Ukraina. 25 lat między ograniczoną współpracą a ograniczoną konfrontacją*, “*Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*” 2014, issue 2, pp. 202-203.

17 Z. Błażewicz, P. Krzykowski, M. Żyła, *Półwysep Krymski – strategiczny element relacji rosyjsko-ukraińskich*, Warsaw 2018, p. 97.

dar Krai. The deal provided for further negotiations, which dragged on for another five years¹⁸.

The irredentist part of the political spectrum in Crimea was finding support among the Russian establishment. In the spring of 1992, the peninsula was visited by a delegation from the parliament of the Russian Federation headed by the then vice president, Alexander Rutskoy, who expressed support for the idea of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. In response to such calls, the Ukrainian authorities started to limit the political independence of the Crimean peninsula's regional authorities. This was reflected in the adoption of the resolution "Про статус автономної Республіки Крим" by the Verkhovna Rada in Kyiv on 29 April, under which Crimea became an autonomous constituent element of Ukraine. In doing so, the central authorities reserved the right to fill positions within the local Prosecutor's office and the Security Service¹⁹.

The law received a critical opinion from pro-Russian forces gathered in the Coordinating Council of the All-Crimean Movement of Electors for a Crimean Republic. The relevant objections of the Coordinating Council were brought to the Supreme Council of Crimea (Verkhovna Rada of Crimea), which at its meeting on 5 May 1992 passed the "Акт о провозглашении государственной самостоятельности Республики Крым" with a huge majority (79% of its membership). The above-mentioned Act was accompanied by the decision "On holding the all-Crimean referendum" of 2 August 1992²⁰, in which two questions were to be posed: 1. Вы за независимую Республику Крым в союзе с другими государствами?; 2. Вы утверждаете Акт о провозглашении государственной самостоятельности

18 *Rossija–Ukraina 1990–2000. Dokumenty i materialy*, in two volumens, vol. 1: 1990–1995, Moskva 2001 [Россія–Україна 1990–2000. Документи і матеріали, in two volumens, vol. 1: 1990–1995, Москва 2001], pp. 18–24.

19 *Zakon Ukraini „Pro status avtonomnoii Respubliki Krim”*, "Vidomosti Verkhovnoii Radi Ukraini" 1992 [Закон України „Про статус автономної Республіки Крим”, "Відомості Верховної Ради України" 1992], no. 30, pp. 1013–1015.

20 *Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Krima „Ob. Akte O provozglashenii gosudarstvennoii samostoiatelnosti Respubliki Krim”*, "Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta Krima" 1991–1992 [Постановление Верховного Совета Крыма „Об Акте О провозглашении государственной самостоятельности Республики Крым”, "Ведомости Верховного Совета Крыма" 1991–1992], no. 6, p. 243.

Республіки Крим?²¹ A day later, the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea adopted the text of a constitution that clearly emphasised the peninsula's connection to Ukraine. However, it was based on separate treaties and agreements. This provoked huge opposition from supporters of the region's union with Russia. Nonetheless, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea Nikolai Bagrov stood against the diktat and entered into a dialogue with Kyiv. This attitude brought a compromise in the form of a new law: "Про розмежування повноважень між органами державної влади України і Республіки Крим" (30 June 1992)²². The agreement was an unqualified success for the Crimean government. The peninsula gained great independence from the political centre in Kyiv. At the same time, relations between the peninsula's authorities and the Tatar minority were normalised. Crimean Tatars were promised greater influence over the staffing of the local Verkhovna Rada²³.

The year 1993 passed in the shadow of the conflict over the Black Sea Fleet. The Russian government linked this issue to the Crimean question, seeking a convenient solution for itself. Moscow unilaterally announced that it was taking over all the Fleet vessels of the former USSR, which naturally was not recognised by Ukraine. On 9 July 1993, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation passed a resolution on the federal (Russian) status of the city of Sevastopol and at the same time it identified it as the main base of the entire Black Sea Fleet. A day later, Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada rejected the claims as completely unjustified²⁴.

21 *Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Krima „O provedenii obshchekrimskogo referendum“*, "Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta Krima" 1991-1992 [*Постановление Верховного Совета Крыма „О проведении общекрымского референдума“*, "Ведомости Верховного Совета Крыма" 1991-1992], no. 6, p. 244.

22 *Zakon Ukraini „Pro rozmezhuвання povnowazhen mizh orkhanami derzhavnoi vladi Ukraini i Respubliki Krim“* [Закон України „Про розмежування повноважень між органами державної влади України і Республіки Крим“] <https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/view/t229900?an=1> [04.07.2022].

23 D. Riabushkhin, *Poloticheskaia istoriia Krima (1989-2007)*, [in:] *Regioni Ukraini. Khronika i rukovoditeli*, 3: *Krim i Nikolaievskaiia oblast'*, K. Matsuzato [Д. Рябушкин, *Политическая история Крыма (1989-2007)*, [в:] *Регионы Украины. Хроника и руководители*, 3: *Крым и Николаевская область*, К. Мацузато (ed.)], Sapporo 2009, pp. 40-45.

24 S. Padalka „*Krimskie pitannia*“ v *politichnikh realiakh nezaleznoi Ukraini (I polovina 90-kh rokiv XX stolittia)*, [in:] *Krim v istorichnikh realiakh Ukrainii: Materiali naukovoi konferentsii „Krim v istorichnikh realiakh Ukraini: Do 50-richchia vkhodzhennia Krimu do skladu URSR“* (Kyiv, 19 liutokho 2004 r.), V.A. Smolii (ed.), Kyiv 2004 [С. Падалка, „Кримське питання“ в політичних реаліях незалежної Укра-

In January 1994, a strongly pro-Russian politician Yuriy Meshkov became the first president of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. His political backbone was the “Россия” bloc, which consisted of two groups: the “Республиканская партия Крыма” and the “Народная партия Крыма”. The new president wanted to return to the variant of the local constitution containing the text from before the agreement with the Ukrainian government, which would definitely bring Crimea closer to Moscow. However, his opponent turned out to be the new chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea, Sergei Tsekov. Tsekov began his own political game aimed at rapprochement with Kyiv, where, in turn, Leonid Kuchma built his position as president of Ukraine²⁵. Kuchma was strongly determined to break Crimean separatism. At Kuchma’s request, on 17 March 1995, Ukraine’s Verkhovna Rada passed two laws: the Act on the Abolition of the Constitution and Certain Laws of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Act on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The most major changes primarily concerned the status of Crimea, which was increasingly becoming an autonomous administrative and territorial unit within Ukraine. Furthermore, the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was subject to approval by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and the prerogatives of the local Verkhovna Rada could be limited under certain specified conditions. In the process, the status of Sevastopol was also clarified – a separate city that is directly subordinate to Kyiv. Faced with these developments, and finding no support in Crimea itself, President Yuriy Meshkov abandoned his office and went to Russia²⁶.

іни (I половина 90-х років ХХ століття), [в:] *Крим в історичних реаліях України: Матеріали наукової конференції „Крим в історичних реаліях України: До 50-річчя входження Криму до складу УРСР”* (Київ, 19 лютого 2004 р.), В.А. Смолій (ed.), Київ 2004], pp. 342-343.

- 25 D. Akselrod, „Ya sdalsa. Ya ne stal voievat’”. *Vzlet i padeniie pervogo prezidenta Krima Meshkova* [Д. Аксельрод, „Я сдался. Я не стал воевать”. *Взлет и падение первого президента Крыма Мешкова*], <https://ru.krymr.com/a/vzlet-i-padenie-pervogo-prezidenta-kryma/30864983.html> [04.07.2022].
- 26 A. V. Malgin, *Krim posle raspada SSSR: mezhdru Rossiiei i Ukrainoi. 1991-2004 gg.*, [in:] *Istoriia Krima*, A. V. Yurasov (ed.) [А.В. Мальгин, *Крым после распада СССР: между Россией и Украиной. 1991-2004 гг.*, [в:] *История Крыма*, А.В. Юрасов (ed.)], in two volumens, vol. 2, Moscow 2019, pp. 709-714.

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After consolidating his power, Leonid Kuchma brought about the adoption of Ukraine's new constitution on 28 June 1996. Under the Basic Law adopted at the time, the issue of Crimean autonomy found its place in line with the course taken the year before. Crimea was devoted to the tenth chapter of the Constitution (articles 134-139), which discussed both its political issues and the powers of local authorities – the Supreme Council (Verkhovna Rada) and the Council of Ministers (the judiciary remained unitary)²⁷. According to this Law, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was to be fully controlled by central authorities. From such a perspective, any centrifugal tendencies associated with the pro-Moscow resentments of local Russian/Soviet elites seemed to be overcome, and it seemed that these elites would slowly find a place for themselves in the Ukrainian political and economic space, especially as the process of its oligarchization intensified in Ukraine. The agreement (commonly referred to as the “grand agreement”) concluded between Russia and Ukraine on 31 May 1997, and signed by Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kuchma, was to become a sort of culmination of the completion of this process²⁸. After nearly a decade, the Crimean question was to be completely resolved, and the two countries – Russia and Ukraine – were to develop slowly but effectively in the spirit of democracy, as flawed, oligarchic and corrupt as it was.

This apparent consensus, however, lasted only three years. Yeltsin's resignation and the election of Vladimir Putin as Russian president reopened not only the question of Crimea's belonging or, more broad-

27 Konstytucja Ukrainy, <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tekoi/txt/konst/ukraina.html> [04.07.2022]; M. Gołda-Sobczak, *Krym jako przedmiot sporu ukraińsko-rosyjskiego*, Poznań 2016, pp. 160-161.

28 *Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i partnerstve mezhd Rossijskoj Federatsiei i Ukrainoi* [Договор о дружбе, сотрудничестве и партнерстве между Российской Федерацией и Украиной], <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/1902220> [04.07.2022]; *Dogovir pro druzhbu, spivrobitnitstvo i partnerstvo mizh Ukrainoyu i Rosiys'koju Federatsieju* [Договір про дружбу, співробітництво і партнерство між Україною і Російською Федерацією], https://zakon5.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_006 [04.07.2022]. Section 3. of this Agreement read as follows: „Высокие Договаривающиеся Стороны строят отношения друг с другом на основе принципов взаимного уважения, суверенного равенства, территориальной целостности, нерушимости границ, мирного урегулирования споров, неприменения силы или угрозы силой, включая экономические и иные способы давления, права народов свободно распоряжаться своей судьбой, невмешательства во внутренние дела, соблюдения прав человека и основных свобод, сотрудничества между государствами, добросовестного выполнения взятых международных обязательств, а также других общепризнанных норм международного права”.

ly, the permanence of the Russian-Ukrainian border but, as it turned out after 24 February 2022, the existence of Ukraine as such. From this perspective, the attempts to change Crimea's statehood in the late 1980s and early 1990s appear not as one-off incidents but as a well-thought-out strategy whose goal was and is to fundamentally revise the post-Soviet geopolitical system and create a new map of Eurasia with a dominant role for the Russian Federation.

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