

STUDY GUIDE

State Council of the Union of Sovereign States

The New Union Treaty, the August Coup, and an Alternate 1991

Background Guide

Historic Crisis Committee X

Point of Divergence: 19 August 1991: the August Coup never takes place

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A Note on This Guide

This committee is a historic, counterfactual simulation. It is built on real events, real people, and a real document — the New Union Treaty of 1991 — but it departs from history at one precise point: the August Coup of 19–21 August 1991 does not happen. Everything up to that point in this guide is factual and drawn from the historical record. Everything after that point, in Section 4, is the committee's invented timeline, and participants are expected to know the difference.

The guide is organised in four parts:

1. The real history leading up to 19 August 1991 — why the Soviet Union needed a new treaty, who negotiated it, and what the country looked like on the eve of the signing.
2. What the New Union Treaty actually said — its structure, its principles, and the questions it left unresolved.
3. What really happened — the coup, its failure, and the Soviet collapse it triggered, so that delegates understand precisely what this committee is being spared.
4. The committee's own timeline — the world delegates will inhabit, the roster of delegations (including the autonomous republics), and the open questions the committee must resolve.

Delegates are strongly encouraged to read Sections 1 through 3 as factual history — independent of the committee — before treating Section 4 as the operative premise of the simulation.

Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

We, the Executive Board of Committee X at WHIS MUN 2026 welcome you. This year's Committee is the State Council of the Union of Sovereign States, our take on an alternative history version of the USSR's legendary split.

This committee is a labour of love and creativity, we have spent countless hours meticulously planning various parts of this committee to be entertaining as well as academic, so we truly hope that you enjoy the journey we're all about to go on!

Every time a history-adjacent committee is simulated, a conundrum delegates often face is whether to follow the historical timeline or to deviate from it and attempt to improve upon it. We present you with an opportunity to create a new timeline, one which we have begun through our Zeroth Crisis Update and the contextual framing of this alternative history, and one whose future will now rest entirely in your hands.

Unlike a conventional historical committee, this simulation does not begin with the assumption that history will inevitably arrive at the outcome recorded in textbooks. The collapse of the Soviet Union is no longer a certainty. The decisions made by the individuals represented in this room will determine whether the newly created Union survives, reforms itself, fragments further, or evolves into something entirely unforeseen.

The year is 1991. The August Coup has never taken place. The New Union Treaty has been signed. In place of a rapidly disintegrating Soviet Union stands a new political arrangement: the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, a federation that seeks to balance the competing demands of republican sovereignty and federal unity. Yet the very questions that brought the Soviet Union to the brink of dissolution remain unresolved.

The Union leadership in Moscow seeks to preserve a functioning federal state. The Sovereign Republics demand greater authority over their economies, resources, and institutions. The Autonomous Republics seek guarantees for their political futures and constitutional rights. Questions of military command, nuclear weapons, territorial disputes, natural resources, ethnic tensions, and constitutional authority continue to divide the Union at every level.

It is in response to these challenges that the State Council has been convened. As members of the State Council, you will find yourselves at the centre of every major decision confronting the Union. The choices you make will influence not only the fortunes of your individual portfolios, but also the political, economic, and constitutional future of an entire continent.

We encourage you to approach this committee with creativity, strategic thinking, and a willingness to engage deeply with the complexities of the world before you. This is a committee built to reward initiative, negotiation, and imagination, and we hope that each of you leaves it having contributed to a story that is entirely your own. We look forward to seeing where you take it.

So, for the Union and For History, we hope : Mischief (Shall Be) Managed.

Aashay Inamdar and Athang Shinde,

Co Chairpersons,

Committee X.

Section 1 — Historical Background to the New Union Treaty

1.1 The Soviet Crisis, 1985–1990

Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 and almost immediately began a programme of reform built on two linked ideas: perestroika (“restructuring”) of the stagnant planned economy, and glasnost (“openness”), a loosening of censorship and political control intended to expose and correct the failures of the system from within.

Both reforms had effects Gorbachev had not fully anticipated. Glasnost gave long-suppressed nationalist, religious, and historical grievances a public platform for the first time in decades. Perestroika, by dismantling central planning faster than it built functioning markets, produced shortages, inflation, and falling output, which fed directly into the nationalist argument that individual republics would be better off managing their own economies than waiting for Moscow to fix a failing one. Annual oil revenues, which had propped up the Soviet budget through the 1970s, also collapsed after the 1986 price crash, removing one of the last cushions against the consequences of economic mismanagement.

By 1988, nationalist and pro-independence movements — first in the Baltic republics, then spreading to the Caucasus and elsewhere — were openly arguing that the existing 1922 Union Treaty (the founding document of the USSR) needed to be renegotiated or replaced outright. The idea of a new union treaty did not originate with Gorbachev; it was forced onto the agenda by the republics themselves.

1.2 The “War of Laws” and the Parade of Sovereignities

Through 1990, a so-called “war of laws” broke out between the Union centre and the republics. One after another, republican legislatures passed declarations asserting that their own laws took precedence over All-Union legislation on their territory. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) — by far the largest and most important republic — adopted its own Declaration of State Sovereignty on 12 June 1990, asserting the supremacy of Russian law within Russia itself. Other republics followed in quick succession.

This wave became known as the “parade of sovereignities.” Crucially, it was not confined to the fifteen Union republics. Many of the autonomous republics (ASSRs) — administrative units nested inside the larger Union republics, home to numerically smaller nations such as the Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, and Abkhaz — joined the parade too, declaring their own sovereignty and demanding to be treated as equals to the Union republics that contained them. This autonomous-republic dimension of the crisis is easy to miss in summary accounts, but it became one of the most contentious threads of the treaty negotiations (see 1.6) and is central to this committee’s premise.

By July 1990, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia had already moved toward outright independence rather than renegotiation; Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova were close behind, each contending with serious internal conflicts (Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Armenia and Azerbaijan with each other over Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova with Transnistria and the Gagauz minority) that made participation in a Moscow-led treaty process politically untenable for their governments.

1.3 The Novo-Ogaryovo Process Begins

At the 28th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in July 1990, Gorbachev proposed a fundamentally less centralised federal structure as the only way to keep the Union together. A first draft of a New Union Treaty was submitted to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 23 November 1990, and a dedicated drafting committee began detailed work on the text on 1 January 1991.

The negotiations took their name from Novo-Ogaryovo, a government estate outside Moscow where Gorbachev met repeatedly with republican leaders to hammer out the treaty's language — hence “the Novo-Ogaryovo process.” The Supreme Soviet's Soviet of the Union approved the broad concept on 6 March 1991, and a revised text was published in Pravda and Izvestia on 9 March 1991 for republics to consider.

Six of the fifteen Union republics declined to take part in the drafting from the outset: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (all pursuing restoration of pre-1940 independence), and Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova (each pursuing independence while also consumed by internal or external conflicts). The remaining nine — Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan — stayed at the table.

1.4 The March 1991 Referendum

To build a popular mandate for the treaty, Gorbachev called the only nationwide referendum ever held in Soviet history, on 17 March 1991. The question put to most voters was:

“Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?”

Turnout across the participating territory was roughly 80%, and about 76–78% of valid votes were cast in favour, depending on whether the count is taken across the whole USSR or only the nine participating republics — in absolute terms, roughly 113.5 million “yes” votes out of 148.5 million ballots cast. Support was strongest in rural areas and the Central Asian republics and weakest in large cities, with Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev recording the most “no” votes and the most local opposition.

Some republics attached additional local questions to the same ballot. Russia asked voters whether to create a popularly elected Russian presidency (approved — this vote underpins Boris Yeltsin's later election as Russian president in June 1991). Ukraine asked whether it should be part of “a union of Soviet sovereign states” on the basis of its own Declaration of Sovereignty, which 81.7% endorsed — a result later cited by both pro-treaty and pro-independence camps to support contradictory conclusions. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan added similar sovereignty riders.

Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania officially boycotted the referendum, and their governments organised no official vote. This is the detail of greatest relevance to this committee: in Georgia, the referendum was not held in Tbilisi-controlled territory, but it was held in the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in defiance of the Georgian government's boycott. Moldova's central authorities likewise refused to organise the vote, but unauthorised pro-Union referenda were nonetheless carried out in Transnistria and the Gagauz areas, with overwhelming “yes” results reported, albeit on a turnout the Soviet Central Referendum Commission did not formally certify.

Why this matters for the committee

This is the real historical precedent behind one of the dais's key rulings for this simulation: that Abkhazia, as an autonomous republic that voted to preserve the Union even as its parent republic (Georgia) boycotted the process entirely, can plausibly diverge from Georgia's path in this timeline. South Ossetia followed the same pattern but was an autonomous oblast rather than an ASSR, and Transnistria/Gagauzia were not autonomous units of any kind in 1991 — those are committee-discretion extensions of the same logic, not direct treaty participants, and the dais has not seated them as separate delegations.

1.5 The 9+1 Agreement

On 23 April 1991, Gorbachev met at Novo-Ogaryovo with the leaders of the nine republics that had taken part in the referendum. The result was a short joint statement of principles, generally called the 9+1 Agreement (or the Novo-Ogaryovo Memorandum). It was not itself a treaty — contemporaries and later historians have described it as little more than “an agreement about the need for an agreement” — but it was a genuine breakthrough in that it explicitly recognised the sovereignty of the nine republics and committed all parties to drafting a real Union Treaty that would recast the USSR as a much looser federation, built around a common president, a shared foreign and defence policy, and substantially devolved everything else.

Progress after April was slow and contested. In June 1991 the Ukrainian parliament voted to postpone its own participation in further negotiations until after mid-September, a decision that would prove consequential: Ukraine never formally approved the August draft, even as eight of the other nine republics did so with various reservations.

1.6 The Fight Over Autonomous Republics' Status

One of the most contentious and least-remembered threads of the Novo-Ogaryovo process concerned the Soviet Union's twenty Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) — sub-units nested within the larger Union republics, generally organised around a non-Russian or non-titular ethnic minority. Sixteen ASSRs sat inside the RSFSR alone (including Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Checheno-Ingushetia, Dagestan, and North Ossetia), with two more inside Georgia (Abkhazia and Adjara), one inside Azerbaijan (Nakhchivan), and one inside Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan). A new Crimean ASSR had also just been reconstituted within Ukraine by a February 1991 referendum, restoring an autonomous status Crimea had lost in 1945.

During the parade of sovereignties, most of these autonomous republics declared their own “sovereignty” in 1990–91 and pressed to be treated as direct, equal parties to the New Union Treaty — not merely as subdivisions of the Union republics that contained them. This was a serious structural threat to the larger republics, especially Russia, since granting Tatarstan or Bashkortostan equal treaty status to Russia itself would have effectively dissolved the RSFSR from within.

The matter came to a head on 12 July 1991, when the USSR Supreme Soviet passed a resolution on the draft Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States affirming that the constituent subjects of the federation — “both the sovereign states (the republics) and the republics incorporated within them on a treaty or constitutional basis” — possessed the right to sign the treaty text. In practice this was a fudge: the final compromise allowed a republic to join the Union “as part of” another republic with some delegated rights, but reserved formal signing authority for the nine Union republics alone.

Eighteen of the twenty 1977-era ASSRs took part in the drafting process in some capacity (every one except Adjara and Nakhchivan, whose populations and leaderships were comparatively quiescent), and the new Crimean ASSR joined them — nineteen autonomous entities in all, engaging with a process from which they were ultimately excluded as formal signatories. That exclusion, and what might have happened had it gone differently, is the second pillar of this committee's premise.

1.7 The Final Draft and the Planned Signing

The final pre-coup draft, still titled the Treaty on the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, was published on 15 August 1991. On 29–30 July, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev met privately and agreed that the signing would proceed in stages beginning 20 August 1991, with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan signing first in Moscow. Reporting on the exact lineup for that first day varies — some accounts add Belarus and Tajikistan to the first wave — but every source agrees Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan were expected to follow in September, and that Ukraine, still observing its self-imposed pause from June, had not committed to sign at all.

Gorbachev announced the date in a televised address, promising that the new treaty would help the country overcome its crisis and that the Union would endure as “a great power.” Hardliners in the Communist Party, the military, and the KGB read the same draft and reached the opposite conclusion: that it would mean the effective end of centralised Soviet power. The State Emergency Committee that launched the coup met to study the treaty text on 17 August, two days before acting — the clearest possible evidence that the coup was a direct, deliberate attempt to stop the signing, not a coincidence of timing.

Section 2 — The New Union Treaty: What It Actually Said

2.1 A New Name for an Old Union

The August 1991 draft would have replaced the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR in its entirety. Under it, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was to be renamed the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics — keeping the same Russian acronym, CCCP (and the same English initials, USSR), while replacing “Socialist” with “Sovereign.” This was a deliberate piece of continuity: the new state could present itself to its own citizens and to the world as the same country under a quietly transformed constitution, not as a successor state.

The treaty's own preamble defined the new entity as a sovereign federal democratic state, formed through the voluntary association of equal republics, exercising only the state power voluntarily vested in it by the treaty's parties. This single sentence inverted the legal logic of the 1922 treaty, under which the republics had derived their authority from the Union; in the new treaty, the Union derived its authority from the republics.

A later, further-decentralised draft — produced after the coup, once the political mood had shifted decisively toward confederation — renamed the proposed state again, to the Union of Sovereign States, dropping “Soviet” altogether and abandoning the historic acronym. That second renaming belongs to the real post-coup timeline covered in Section 3, and never applies in this committee's premise, since the August draft is the one that gets signed.

2.2 Foundational Principles

The treaty's text opened with a numbered list of principles. Summarised faithfully:

5. Sovereignty of republics. Each republic party to the treaty is recognised as a sovereign state in its own right. The Union exercises only the powers the republics voluntarily delegate to it.
6. Republican self-determination. Republics retain the right to resolve all questions of their own development independently, and must guarantee equal political rights to every people living on their territory; the parties commit to opposing racism, chauvinism, and nationalism.
7. Primacy of human rights. Citizens' rights are guaranteed in line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other recognised norms of international law, including language rights, freedom of religion, and free access to information.
8. Civil society and a market economy. The parties commit to building a civil society founded on free choice of forms of ownership, a Union-wide market, and principles of social justice — a direct break from the planned economy.
9. Full plenitude of political power. Republics may independently determine their own internal state structure, administrative divisions, and organs of government, delegating only specific powers upward; the Union is to be built as a rule-of-law state, explicitly as a safeguard against any future drift toward totalitarianism.
10. Preservation of national traditions. The parties commit to supporting national culture, education, science, and health care, and to encouraging exchange between the Union's many national cultures.

11. International continuity. The Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics is defined as the legal successor to the USSR in international relations, retaining the existing seat, treaty obligations, and stated aims of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

2.3 Structural and Institutional Provisions

Beyond the preamble, the operative articles set out a genuinely confederal structure:

- Voluntary, equal membership. Membership in the Union is voluntary, and every signatory republic has equal rights and equal duties, regardless of size or population.
- Right of secession. Republics retain the right to freely secede from the Union, through a procedure the parties themselves would establish — the treaty did not abolish the USSR's old (largely theoretical) constitutional right to secede; it gave it real procedural teeth.
- Dual citizenship. Every citizen of a constituent republic is automatically also a citizen of the USSR.
- Independent foreign relations. Republics may establish direct diplomatic, consular, and trade relations with foreign states, exchange representatives, sign international treaties, and join international organisations in their own right, provided this does not breach the Union's existing international commitments or harm the interests of other republics.
- A republican veto on Union law. A republic may formally protest any Union law that conflicts with the treaty itself, with the republic's own constitution, or with laws the republic has validly passed within its own sphere of competence.
- Joint and exclusive powers. The treaty distinguished matters reserved to the Union (defence policy and the armed forces, border security, a single currency and customs service, foreign policy, the gold reserves and the Diamond and Currency Reserves) from matters jointly exercised by the Union and republics together, and left everything else to the republics alone.
- New central institutions. A Presidential Council of republican leaders chaired by the Union president would replace much of the old Politburo's coordinating role; a new USSR Supreme Soviet would sit as two chambers — a Soviet of the Union and a Soviet of Republics; and a Union Constitutional Court would arbitrate disputes over the treaty itself.
- Relations with non-signatories. The treaty explicitly addressed republics that chose not to sign: their relations with the Union would continue to be governed by existing Soviet law and whatever bilateral agreements the two sides separately negotiated — in effect, a managed, negotiated form of departure rather than a unilateral declaration.

2.4 Practical and Economic Commitments

The treaty was paired with a separate Economic Agreement for 1991, under which republics and the Union centre would continue to honour existing budget and supply commitments through the transition. The draft promised that a new Union constitution, reflecting the treaty's principles, would be presented to the new bicameral parliament within six months of signing, and that the deeply unpopular 5% nationwide sales tax introduced in 1991 would be repealed once the treaty took effect.

2.5 Unresolved Questions Left to Implementation

The treaty as published on 15 August 1991 was deliberately a framework, not a finished constitution, and left several major questions for the post-signing period to resolve — questions this committee inherits directly:

- The exact division of tax revenue, debt, and natural-resource control between the centre and the republics.
- The final legal status of the autonomous republics that had sought, and been denied, direct signatory status (Section 1.6).
- The precise mechanics of the promised common currency and Union-wide market, at a moment of severe inflation and collapsing interrepublican trade.
- The future role, financing, and legal status of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union itself, which the treaty's text never once mentions by name.
- The treaty's actual procedure for secession, which Article provisions referenced but never spelled out in operative detail.

Section 3 — How Real History Unfolded

3.1 The August Coup (18–21 August 1991)

On 4 August 1991, Gorbachev left Moscow for his usual summer holiday at a state dacha at Foros, on the Crimean coast, intending to return in time for the 20 August signing. On 17 August, a group of senior hardliners — including Vice-President Gennady Yanayev, Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, Defence Minister Dmitry Yazov, KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, Interior Minister Boris Pugo, and several others — met at a KGB guesthouse and studied the treaty text, concluding that it would strip them of authority and accelerate the Union's breakup. They resolved to act.

On 18 August, a delegation flew to Foros to demand that Gorbachev either sign decrees imposing a state of emergency or resign in favour of Yanayev. Gorbachev refused both and was placed under effective house arrest, cut off from outside communication. On 19 August, the plotters — now styling themselves the State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP) — announced on state television that Gorbachev was incapacitated by illness and that Yanayev was assuming presidential power, alongside a nationwide state of emergency and the deployment of troops and tanks into Moscow.

The coup collapsed within three days. It was poorly coordinated, never secured full backing from the military, and met immediate, organised resistance led by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who climbed onto a tank outside the Russian parliament (the “White House”) to denounce the plotters and rally crowds in central Moscow. Three civilians — Dmitry Komar, Vladimir Usov, and Ilya Krichevsky — were killed in a clash with armoured vehicles near the Garden Ring on the night of 20–21 August; their deaths became a galvanising symbol of the coup's failure. By 21 August the plotters' authority had evaporated, and Gorbachev was flown back to Moscow on 22 August.

3.2 Gorbachev's Diminished Return

Gorbachev returned to a capital he no longer controlled in any meaningful sense. Yeltsin, not Gorbachev, had organised the resistance, and it was Yeltsin who now held real authority in Moscow. Within days, Yeltsin suspended the Russian Communist Party's activities on Russian soil; the USSR Supreme Soviet itself voted to suspend the CPSU across the whole Union shortly afterward. Gorbachev remained nominal head of state, but the coup had permanently broken the assumption — central to the entire Novo-Ogaryovo process — that he still spoke for a functioning central government.

3.3 The Race to Independence

The coup convinced most remaining republics that no negotiated treaty could protect them from a repeat attempt by Moscow hardliners, and that full independence was now the only reliable guarantee. Estonia and Latvia (which, with Lithuania, had already asserted independence in 1990) formalised full independence within days. Ukraine's parliament declared independence on 24 August, subject to confirmation by referendum; Belarus followed on 25 August, Moldova on 27 August, Azerbaijan on 30 August, and Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on 31 August. By the end of that month, only Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan-in-practice (with Uzbekistan itself declaring shortly after) had not declared outright independence, and by November Russia and Kazakhstan stood essentially alone in still entertaining serious union with the centre.

3.4 The Union of Sovereign States — A Last Attempt

Gorbachev did not abandon the treaty idea immediately. On 1 October 1991, thirteen republics (all but Lithuania and Estonia) met in Alma-Ata and agreed to a treaty establishing an economic community to preserve some shared economic space. On 18 October, Gorbachev and the leaders of eight republics — Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Armenia — signed a Treaty on the Economic Community, intended to preserve a common ruble zone, with Ukraine and Moldova signalling they might join later.

In parallel, Gorbachev pushed a much looser political successor to the New Union Treaty: the Union of Sovereign States, which dropped “Soviet” from the name entirely and envisaged a confederation without even a shared constitution. On 14 November, Gorbachev and the leaders of seven republics pre-agreed in principle to sign this new treaty. A full text was published in *Izvestia* on 25 November, but the signing session that day collapsed in disagreement, and the republics revised the text once more without Gorbachev present. The Union of Sovereign States was never signed.

Ukraine proved the decisive obstacle throughout. Its parliament had already resolved in June (before the coup) to delay treaty negotiations, and after the coup it refused to engage further until its own independence referendum had taken place.

3.5 Ukraine's Referendum and the Belavezha Accords

On 1 December 1991, more than 90% of Ukrainian voters (on turnout above 80%) confirmed the parliament's independence declaration. The result effectively ended any realistic prospect of a renewed Union treaty of any kind, since no version of the Novo-Ogaryovo project had ever been designed to work without Ukraine, the second-largest and second-most-populous republic.

One week later, on 8 December 1991, the leaders of Russia (Yeltsin), Ukraine (Leonid Kravchuk), and Belarus (Stanislav Shushkevich) met at a hunting lodge in Belavezhskaya Pushcha, Belarus, and signed the Belavezha Accords. The Accords declared that the USSR had ceased to exist “as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality,” repudiated the 1922 Union Treaty outright, and established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in its place. On 21 December, eight further republics joined the new Commonwealth at Alma-Ata.

3.6 The End, 25–26 December 1991

On 25 December 1991, Gorbachev resigned as President of the USSR in a televised address, transferring control of Soviet nuclear launch authority to Yeltsin. That evening, the Soviet flag over the Kremlin was lowered for the last time and replaced with the Russian tricolour. The Soviet Union ceased to exist as a state on 26 December 1991, when the Supreme Soviet's upper chamber formally voted itself, and the Union, out of existence.

3.7 The Irony of the Mandate

The defining irony of 1991 is that the Soviet Union dissolved despite an overwhelming popular vote, only five months earlier, to preserve it in some renewed form. The August Coup was launched in the name of saving the Union from the New Union Treaty — and instead destroyed the political conditions that had made any version of that treaty possible. Historians continue to debate whether the treaty, had it been signed as scheduled on 20 August, could have held even a smaller union together for any meaningful length of time, or whether the centrifugal forces

already in motion — Ukraine's hesitation chief among them — would have pulled the country apart regardless. What is not in serious dispute is that the coup foreclosed the experiment before it could be tried.

Why this section exists

This committee exists to run that experiment. Section 4 picks up at the exact moment Section 3 describes the coup beginning to unfold — and simply has it fail to happen at all.

Section 4 — Committee X: Our Alternate Timeline

Everything below this point is the committee's invented premise, not historical fact. It is built to diverge from real history at the smallest plausible point — a single failed conspiracy — and to let every other historical pressure (nationalism, economic collapse, the autonomous-republics question, Ukraine's ambivalence) continue to operate exactly as it did in reality, but now inside a Union that has a signed treaty instead of a coup.

4.1 The Point of Divergence

On 17–18 August 1991, the same hardliners who historically formed the GKChP — Yanayev, Pavlov, Yazov, Kryuchkov, Pugo, and others — again study the treaty text and again conclude it threatens everything they have built their careers on. In this timeline, the conspiracy still forms, but it fails to execute: intelligence reaches Gorbachev's security detail in time, the plotters cannot secure the backing of key military units, or simply lose their nerve at the final moment. The committee does not need to dramatise the reason; the only fact that matters for the simulation is the outcome. Gorbachev remains in Moscow, in full command, on 19 August 1991.

4.2 The Signing Ceremony, 20 August 1991

On 20 August 1991, the Treaty on the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics is signed in Moscow, in a televised ceremony presided over by Gorbachev. For the purposes of this committee, the staggered real-world signing schedule (Section 1.7) is treated as resolved rather than ongoing: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan sign on 20 August as planned, and Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan follow within the originally-announced September window, all without incident.

Ukraine is the one genuine point of committee licence. Historically, Kravchuk's government had not committed to sign by August, and when asked directly by Gorbachev in the autumn, Kravchuk privately indicated he would — only for the coup's aftermath to remove the question entirely. This committee's premise assumes that, absent the coup and the wave of post-coup independence declarations it triggered, the domestic pressure inside Ukraine to delay or reject the treaty is significantly weaker, and that Kravchuk follows through on signing within the same window as the other eight. Delegates should understand this as the single largest counterfactual liberty the premise takes, and should expect Ukrainian sovereignty, language, and resource questions to remain some of the most sensitive items on the committee's agenda precisely because that liberty is fragile, not because it is settled.

4.3 Birth of the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics

With the treaty signed, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is formally renamed the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, retaining the historic СССР / USSR initials. The new Union is constituted exactly as the August 1991 text describes it: a confederal state built on the voluntary association of sovereign republics, holding only the powers those republics have chosen to delegate (foreign policy, defence, a single currency and customs union, and border security), with everything else — economic management, language and cultural policy, internal administration — reserved to the republics themselves.

The CPSU's status is the new Union's first live political fight. The treaty never mentions the Party once, and the 12 July 1991 Supreme Soviet resolution that resolved the autonomous-republics question (Section 1.6) is silent on it too. Conservative elements of the Party apparatus

and the military, denied the coup that would historically have given them one final (failed) throw of the dice, remain in place, discontented, and politically dangerous — a standing source of crisis for the committee to manage rather than a settled historical fact.

4.4 Status of the Non-Signatory Republics

Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania never joined the Novo-Ogaryovo process and are not parties to the treaty. Consistent with Gorbachev's own stated position at the time — that republics wishing to leave should be allowed to negotiate their departure rather than be forced to stay — the new Union treats these six as having effectively exited, and opens (or continues) negotiations on the terms of separation: borders, military basing rights, the status of ethnic-Russian and other minority populations, and shared infrastructure and debt.

These six republics are independent states from the committee's first session and are not directly represented in the room. They remain relevant only as the subject of the new Union's foreign policy and as the parent states of certain autonomous territories addressed below.

4.5 The Autonomous Republics Question — Resolved Differently

This is the premise's second major departure from the historical record, and the one this committee is built around. Historically, the 12 July 1991 Supreme Soviet resolution gave the autonomous republics a right to participate in drafting the treaty but stopped short of formal signing authority, reserving that for the nine Union republics. In this timeline, the absence of the coup allows the unresolved compromise to tip the other way during the final week of negotiations: the autonomous republics that had taken an active part in the Novo-Ogaryovo process are admitted as direct, signing parties to the treaty in their own right, joining as full constituent members of the new Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics alongside (rather than merely inside) the republics that formerly contained them.

This is not a small change. It means Tatarstan and Bashkortostan sit in the new Union on the same formal footing as the Russian Federation that surrounds them; Karakalpakstan sits alongside Uzbekistan; and so on. It is the central structural conceit of the committee, and it is the reason delegate portfolios exist for these entities at all. Two further points of committee discretion follow directly from it:

- Abkhazia. Abkhazia voted to preserve the Union in the real March 1991 referendum even as Georgia, its parent republic, boycotted the vote entirely (Section 1.4). In this timeline, that divergence hardens into a full split: Abkhazia signs the treaty and joins the new Union as a constituent member in its own right, while the rest of Georgia remains outside the Union as an independent state. This mirrors a real historical fracture line, not an invented one — it simply resolves it in the Union's favour rather than letting it dissolve into the unresolved war and frozen conflict that followed in actual history.
- Crimea. The Crimean ASSR, only just reconstituted within Ukraine by referendum in February 1991, joins the new Union directly as well, alongside (not beneath) Ukraine. Because Ukraine itself is also a signatory in this timeline (Section 4.2), Crimea's status is a live internal question for the committee — a constituent member in its own right, nested inside a Union that Ukraine has also joined — rather than a clean secession from Ukraine.

Adjara (Georgia) and Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan) — the two autonomous republics that did not meaningfully engage with the Novo-Ogaryovo process even in reality — are not extended this

same treatment and remain simple subdivisions of their parent republics (Adjara within independent Georgia; Nakhchivan within Azerbaijan, which is itself a Union signatory).

4.6 Full Roster of the new USSR

The new Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics therefore comprises the nine signatory Union republics and the autonomous republics admitted as direct signatories alongside them:

The Nine Union Republics

Republic	Soviet-era name	1991 leader at signing
Russian Federation	Russian SFSR	Boris Yeltsin (President)
Ukraine	Ukrainian SSR	Leonid Kravchuk (Chairman, Supreme Soviet)
Belarus	Byelorussian SSR	Stanislav Shushkevich (Chairman, Supreme Soviet)
Kazakhstan	Kazakh SSR	Nursultan Nazarbayev (President)
Uzbekistan	Uzbek SSR	Islam Karimov (President)
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan SSR	Ayaz Mutalibov (President)
Kyrgyzstan	Kirghiz SSR	Askar Akayev (President)
Tajikistan	Tajik SSR	Rahmon Nabyev (President)
Turkmenistan	Turkmen SSR	Saparmurat Niyazov (President)

Autonomous Republics Admitted as Direct Signatories

The eight delegations already drafted for this committee, plus the remaining real-world autonomous republics that the dais may add as further delegations:

Autonomous republic	Nested within	Status
Tatarstan	Russian Federation	Drafted
Bashkortostan	Russian Federation	Drafted
Checheno-Ingushetia	Russian Federation	Drafted
Dagestan	Russian Federation	Drafted
North Ossetia	Russian Federation	Drafted
Crimea	Ukraine	Drafted
Karakalpakstan	Uzbekistan	Drafted
Abkhazia	Georgia (independent — see 4.5)	Drafted

4.7 The Political Landscape Facing the Union

The new Union inherits every real structural problem the August 1991 treaty left unresolved (Section 2.5), now made sharper by the fact that the autonomous republics' admission as full members (Section 4.5) was never actually tested in reality and has no settled precedent to draw on:

- Economic transition. Hyperinflationary pressure, collapsing interrepublican trade, and the unresolved mechanics of a common currency and Union-wide market are exactly as severe as they were in reality in August 1991 — the treaty's signing does not, by itself, fix any of this.
- Centre–republic power-sharing. Tax revenue, debt, and resource-control questions the treaty left open (Section 2.5) must now actually be negotiated in practice, for the first time, by a much larger and more heterogeneous set of signatories than the original nine.
- The Communist Party's future. With no coup to discredit and dissolve it, the CPSU remains a functioning, if newly constrained, institution, and conservative elements within it have not been politically destroyed the way they were in reality after August 1991.
- Friction between Union republics and their new ASSR peers. Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Georgia (in the sense of the rump state's claims on Abkhazia) all have direct, immediate grievances against the elevation of autonomous republics to equal status, since each lost formal authority over territory it had governed for decades.
- External recognition and the UN seat. As successor to the USSR, the new Union retains the Soviet seat at the UN Security Council and existing nuclear-power status, but the international community — especially the United States, which by August 1991 had already begun quietly preparing for Soviet fragmentation — is watching to see whether a treaty this novel can actually hold.

4.8 Committee Mandate and Key Debates

Delegates represent the signatory Union republics and the admitted autonomous republics, and the committee's task is to govern the new Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics through its first, most dangerous year. Indicative questions for debate include:

- How should the promised common currency and Union-wide market actually be implemented, and how should the gold and diamond reserves be divided or pooled?
- What is the real, working division of power between the centre and the republics on taxation, resource control, and border administration — beyond the treaty's broad principles?
- What legal and practical status do the newly admitted autonomous republics actually have relative to the Union republics that used to contain them, and how do disputes between them get resolved?
- What happens to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union now that it has survived intact, and what role (if any) does it play in the new constitutional order?
- How should the Union manage its negotiated separation from the six non-signatory republics — borders, minorities, military assets, and debt?
- How should the Union conduct itself toward the West, and what does it do with the Soviet nuclear arsenal it has inherited?

4.9 The Stakes

Nothing about this committee's premise guarantees success. Every force that pulled the real Soviet Union apart in the months after August 1991 — economic collapse, nationalist mobilisation, institutional distrust between centre and republic, and now an entirely untested layer of autonomous-republic politics — is still present and still operating. The treaty removed one trigger for disaster; it invented none of the solutions. Whether the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics becomes a durable confederation or simply a slower, more contested route to the same dissolution is the question the committee exists to answer.