

Crimea to stay part of Ukraine territory

BORIS YELTSIN may be disappointed to learn that leaders of the Crimean peninsula say they will not break away from Ukraine to join Russia following their declaration of sovereignty this week.

The mayor of Crimea's capital, Simferopol, Gennady Yarovoy, quoted a member of the Crimean parliament, as saying: "I think Crimea will vote for Ukrainian independence in the December referendum . . . People here will vote for whatever promises a good life, and the economy is better in Ukraine than in Russia."

Mr Yarovoy, who recently left the Communist Party, produced surveys from November 1990 and January 1991 showing that while most Crimeans would prefer to be part of a Union, if forced to make the choice more (23 per cent in January) would choose to remain in Ukraine than to join Russia (17 per cent).

The declaration of sovereignty adopted on Thursday stipulates that borders cannot be changed without consent from Crimea.

Ukrainian leaders in Kiev will undoubtedly be relieved at the news. The head of the republic, Leonid Kravchuk, said that he was only temporarily reassured by a communiqué issued by Russia and Ukraine following Mr Yeltsin's recent statement that seceding republics should revise borders with their neighbours. The communiqué pledges only mutual respect of borders while the Union exists.

Mr Kravchuk sharply criticised "Russian adventurers" who he accused of travelling out to Crimea to whip up secessionist sentiments. Crimea was the gift from the former general-secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, on behalf of Russia to Ukraine in 1954 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the union of the two republics under

From Susan Viets
in Simferopol

the treaty of Khmelnytsky. The 2.5 million population of Crimea is predominantly Russian. More than 700,000 Ukrainians and 120,000 Tatars, brutally deported after the Second World War and now flooding back, form the two largest minority groups.

Crimea's leadership before the failed coup was Communist. Even Yuri Komov, the head of the pro-reform parliamentary faction Democratic Crimea, and his deputy, Aleksandr Deimus, both only left the Party on 19 August. They publicly condemned the coup on 20 August.

Mr Komov said: "Crimea today is a banana republic." He added: "The Party was motivated to pass sovereignty because it's afraid of the Ukrainian decision to take away Party property and is worried by the commission Ukraine set up to investigate those implicated in the putsch."

"This is the land of neo-Bolshevism . . . Communism isn't dead here, it's seriously wounded but a wounded beast is the most dangerous," said Mr Deimus.

Crimea's recently proclaimed sovereignty will be a strong bargaining counter in relations with Kiev. Crimean laws now take precedence on its territory. Crimea has also taken control of all its natural resources, as well as hard currency from tourism, which brings 7.5 million visitors to Crimea annually. It, in turn, depends on Ukraine for more than 80 per cent of its water and electricity. "There will be a blockade if Crimea says it wants independence . . . if we move too far we face the danger of creating a Yugoslavia here," said Mr Komov.

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