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THE INDEPENDENT

Music is politics to fans' ears in Ukraine

A GROUP of young men wearing yellow-and-blue headbands tore off their shirts and danced wildly when their favourite band, Tabular Rasa, came on stage in the south Ukrainian city of Zaporozhye. This display, though, was more than a simple celebration of sex, drugs, rock 'n roll and the joys of creeping Western decadence — much more. This was hard-core nationalist politics.

At the nine-day Chervona Ruta music festival the political message was the medium. Prize-winning rock groups, like Mertvi Piven, wove traditional music motifs from Ukraine's Carpathian mountains into songs played on a modern-day *kobza*, an instrument

resembling a guitar, to the delight of the thousands of fans packed into Zaporozhye's central sports hall. Many wore yellow and blue — the republic's national colours.

"Coming here was a mission. This is the musical rebirth of Ukraine," said Andrei Sereda, the balding, bare-foot vocalist Andrei of Komy Vniz. The group, from Kiev, won the festival two years ago and with it, millions of followers across the republic.

This year's event was so political that a prominent opposition leader, Vyacheslav Chornovil, arrived to close the festival this weekend with a speech. With less than 24 hours before the expected signing of a new Union Treaty be-

From Susan Viets
in Zaporozhye, Ukraine

tween the Kremlin and five republics — a move many Ukrainians oppose — his arrival was no surprise. The treaty was on many minds, not least those of the musicians.

"No one can understand the inner workings of politics here but one can only hope that through education or intuition people will realise the Union will harm the nation," said Mr Sereda.

Mr Chornovil, a member of the pro-independence movement Rukh and governor of the Ukrainian province of Lvov, told the

festival: "The very style and formation of the Union Treaty contradicts Ukrainian sovereignty . . . this style, this way of thinking, will allow the centre to later take away the powers they want." He went on to tell the cheering fans: "With your music you are on the barricades of Ukrainian culture and independence."

The message was important because Ukrainian leaders now say they will fight for a bilateral "confederative agreement" between the Ukraine and the new Soviet Federation instead of the Union Treaty.

In June, Ukraine's Communist-dominated parliament surprised Moscow by delaying its vote on

the Union Treaty until mid-September, demanding control of taxation and foreign policy-making at the republic level. Since then President Mikhail Gorbachev, and Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President, have struck a deal for tomorrow's signing and issued an ultimatum to equivocating republics that they must join by 10 October.

"We are not asking Gorbachev to give us time . . . We're planning a surprise for him. We can't break economic ties but we will propose signing a treaty instead between Ukraine and the federation," said Mr Chornovil. This too was music to the fans and they loved it almost as much as they did Tabular Rasa.