



# The Fall of the Soviet System

# Soviet Union Administrative Divisions, 1989

DEPOSITORY

The United States Government has not recognized the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. Other boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.



### ASSRs and AOs in the Caucasus

1. Kabardino-Balkarskaya ASSR
2. Severo-Osetinskaya ASSR
3. Checheno-Ingushskaya ASSR
4. Adzharskaya ASSR
5. Nakhichevskaya ASSR (Azerbaijan SSR)
6. Adygeyskaya AO
7. Karachayevo-Cherkesskaya AO
8. Yugo-Osetinskaya AO
9. Nagorno-Karabakhskaya AO

**KAZAKH** Union republic (SSR)

- Union republic (SSR) center
- Autonomous republic (ASSR), oblast, or kray boundary
- - - Autonomous oblast (AO) or autonomous okrug (AOK) boundary

*Note: The union republic administrative centers are shown. The only other administrative centers shown are for oblasts having the same name as their administrative centers.*

0 400 800 Kilometers  
0 400 800 Miles

\*Areas with no oblast-level administrative divisions, where rayons are under direct republic jurisdiction



Figure 16. Independent States of the Former Soviet Union





ӨХЛИ ЮРТЛАРЫҢ ПРО-  
ЛЕТАРЛАРЫ, БИРЛЕШИН!

ПРОЛЕТАРХОИ ХАМАИ  
МАМЛАКАТХО, ЯК ШАВЕДИ

VISU ZEMJU PROLETA-  
RIEŠI, SAVIENOJĪETIES!

VISU ŠALIŲ PROLE-  
TARAI, VIENYKĪTĒS!

ბოლომუნათა უვალა  
შეკენბისა, შეკენბრათა!

БУТУН ДУНЁ ПРОЛЕ-  
ТАРЛАРИ, БИРЛАШИՆԳԻՅ!

ПРОЛЕТАРІ ВСІХ  
КРАЇН, ЄДНАЙТЕСЯ!

PROLETARIIS UNIVERSAE  
TERRARUM, UNITE!

ПРОЛЕТАРЫ УСІХ  
КРАЇН, ЯДНАЙЦЕСЯ!

БУТУН ӨЛКӨЛӨРИН ПРО-  
ЛЕТАРЛАРЫ, БИРЛӨШИՆ!

БАРЛЫК ЕЛДЕРДИՆ ПРОЛЕ-  
ТАРЛАРЫ, БІРІГІՆДЕР!

ПРОЛЕТАРЬ ДИН ТОАТЕ  
ЦӘРИЛЕ, УНИЦИ-ВЭ!

БАРДЫК ӨЛКӨЛӨРДУН ПРО-  
ЛЕТАРЛАРЫ, БИРИКДИТЕ!

KÕIGI MAALDE PROLE-  
TAARLASED, ÜHINEGE!





◆ 1989:

■ First democratic election in the USSR

■ Economic recession starts

■ Emergence of democratic opposition

■ Fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe

◆ 1990:

■ Democratic elections in the 15 Soviet republics

■ Republics push for sovereignty

■ Gorbachev's desperate attempts to maintain control

■ The Soviet Constitution is amended to strip the Communist Party of its core role in the state

■ Gorbachev is elected President of the USSR

◆ 1991:

■ Escalation of conflict between conservatives and democratic reformers

■ The August coup resulting in the paralysis of the Soviet state

■ Dissolution of the Soviet Union

- 1989-1991
- Two historic changes
  - ◆ The Soviet Communist Party lost power after 74 years; transition to capitalism began
  - ◆ The Soviet Union was replaced by 15 new independent states
- Democratization – launched by Communist Party leadership to revitalize the Soviet Union - destroyed the USSR
  - ◆ Failure of economic reforms
  - ◆ The Stalinist legacy of the Communists was not forgotten – and it undermined the authority of the Communist Party
  - ◆ Extreme centralization of power in a multiethnic state generated pressures for greater autonomy by its constituent units – Union Republics, and smaller units within the Republics

- Gorbachev undertook a radical attempt to revive the Soviet system through **democratic and market reforms**
- His goal was **not capitalism**, but **democratic market socialism**
- He **did not intend to dismantle** the Soviet Union – he wanted to revitalize it by means of democracy and economic reforms




- The Soviet system was **subjected to a test**
- And it **failed** it
- Why?
- Why did **the economy go into a crisis** as a result of market reforms – **instead of booming**?
  - ◆ Monopoly power in every sector of the economy
  - ◆ Dominance of the military-industrial complex
  - ◆ New market operators: exchange vs. production
  - ◆ Bureaucracy's determination to control the market forces – either by suppressing them or by using them in their own interests
- The logic of emerging **bureau-capitalism**

- **How to counteract it?**
- The Chinese model:
  - ◆ The CP keeps a tight reign over the state, practices **market authoritarianism**
- This option requires:
  - ◆ A strong **authoritarian political culture**
  - ◆ A **disciplined** and **obedient** bureaucracy
- In the Soviet Union:
  - ◆ Authoritarian political culture was **decayed**, desire for democratization was rising
  - ◆ The bureaucracy was **corrupt, self-serving, and falling out of control**
- The only remaining option:
  - ◆ Open up the political system for **popular participation** and **mobilize the people** in support of reform

- Democratizing the state
- Restore the original democratic **power of the Soviets**
- **Enable the citizens** to take control of the state through democratic procedures
  - ◆ Are the bureaucrats willing to give up power?
  - ◆ Are the people ready to take power?
- NO and NO
- Emergence of **a political spectrum** (conservatives, liberals, democrats, fascists)
- Policy deadlocks



- **The territorial axis**
- The 1990 elections empower **regional bureaucracies**
- **Nationalism** becomes their natural vehicle
- **The unexpected surge of nationalism**
- A natural component of democratization
- Demand for devolution of power:
  - ◆ to Union Republics,
  - ◆ to regions within Republics,
  - ◆ to cities,
  - ◆ to boroughs and villages,
  - ◆ etc.
- The rise of **identity politics**
- Clashes over territory, distribution of resources
- The Union Government is seen by everyone as a target



Boris Yeltsin was born in 1931 in the village of Butka, Southern Urals, grandson of a dispossessed and deported rich peasant

КУРОРТНЫЙ МАГАЗИН

KURORTMAG.F







As a teenager, had a reputation of a rowdy



A  
construction  
engineering  
student



University  
graduate





1970s: local Party official supervising construction sites



1987: Moscow Party boss, riding a bus

- Jack Matlock, US Ambassador to Moscow, 1987-1991:
- “I think he could have kept Yeltsin on the team a lot longer. Undoubtedly at some point Yeltsin, given the chance, would have tried to challenge him, but the best way to head that off would be to use him at least as long as you could and keep him on the team. Instead he opted, fairly early on in the game, to force him out. This left Yeltsin with no option, if he was to get political power, than taking Gorbachev on.
- <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Matlock/matlock-con6.html>



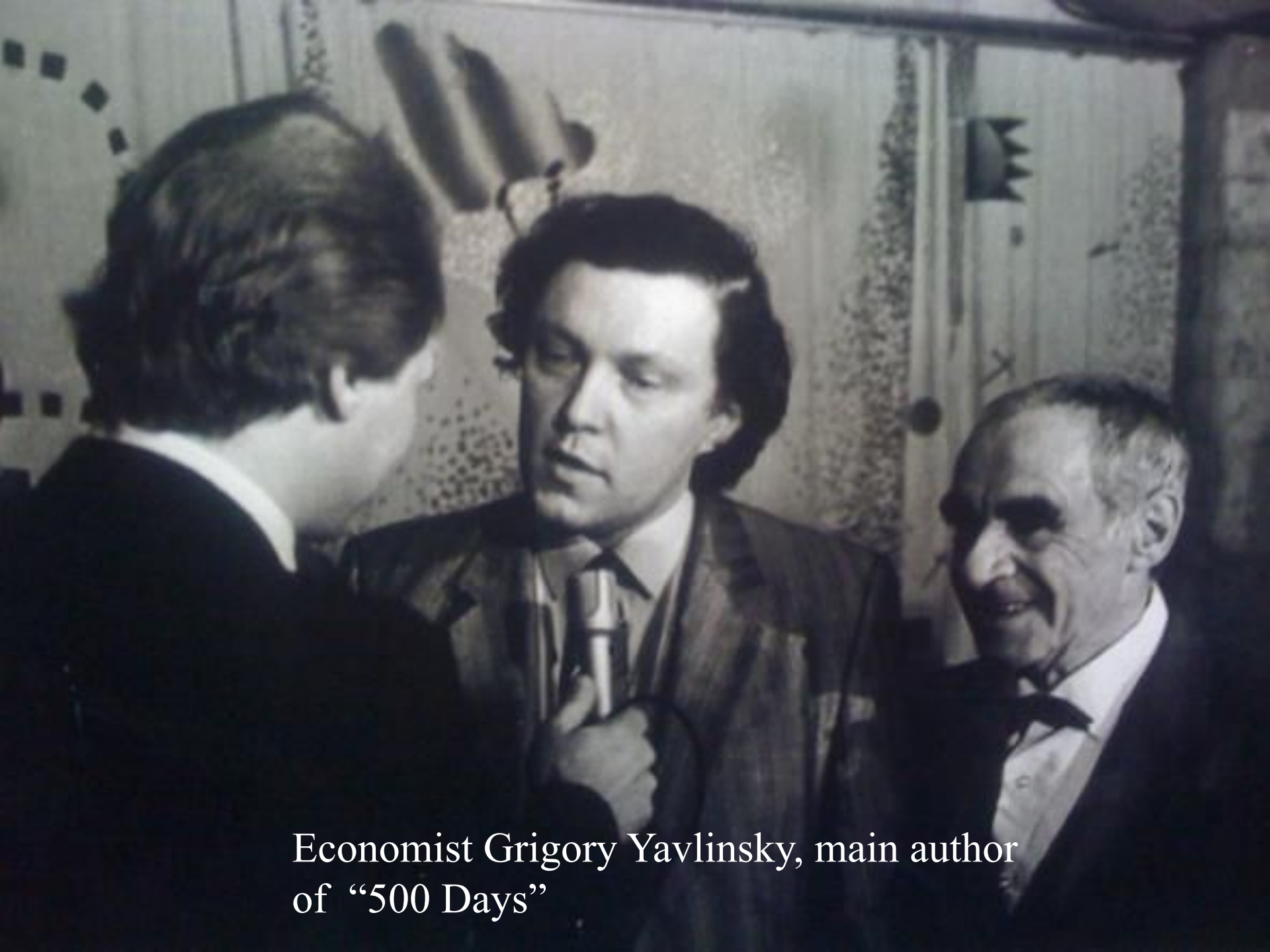
1989: Newly elected MP Alexei Kazannik yielded his parliament seat to Yeltsin





- Decisive turn:
- March 1990 parliamentary elections in Russia and the other Union Republics
- Yeltsin and his supporters run on a populist-democratic platform and **win control of the Russian parliament** (Supreme Soviet of Russia)
- The Russian Supreme Soviet becomes a vehicle for Yeltsin's struggle to reduce the power of the Federal Government and launch radical reforms
- Yeltsin makes alliances with like-minded forces in other Union Republics
- Republics move to adopt **Declarations of Sovereignty**

- **Gorbachev's manoeuvres**
- He is stuck between conservatives, on one side, and radical reformers, on the other
- September 1990: **"500 Days"**
- A coherent program of rapid planned transition to a market economy
- Wide autonomy for Union Republics
- A chance **to save the Union through radical reforms**
- Yeltsin's parliament endorses it and proposes it to the Union parliament
- **Gorbachev is inclined to support it**
- Fierce opposition from conservatives forces him to adopt a compromise plan

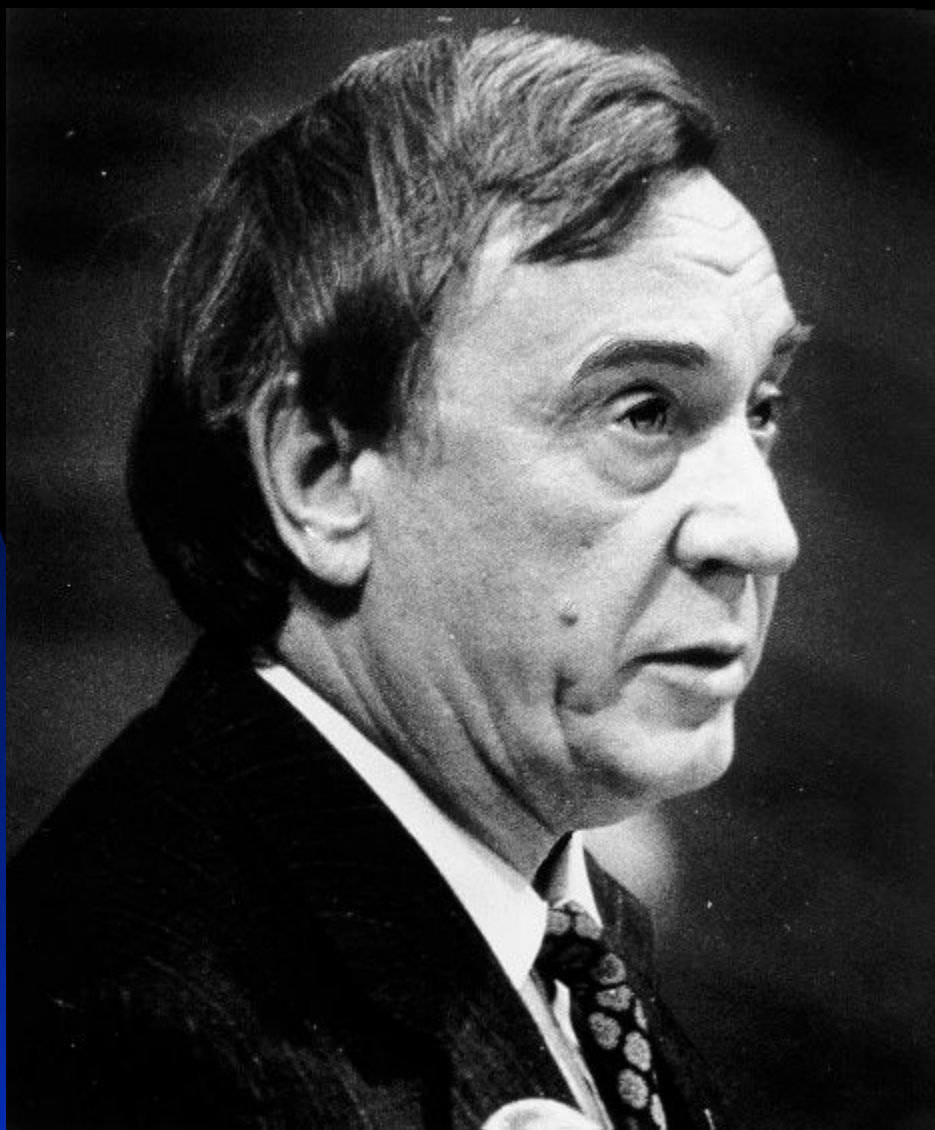


Economist Grigory Yavlinsky, main author  
of “500 Days”





Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov



Vice President Gennady Yanaev



KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov



January 1991: Vilnius, Lithuania







Moscow democrats rally in support of Lithuania

- **Spring 1991**
- Shocked at the bloodshed in Vilnius, and seeing a wave of protests against the attempted crackdown, Gorbachev moves to make an alliance with Yeltsin
- **Yeltsin runs for President of Russia**





1991: Yeltsin campaigning





June 1991: Russia's  
President-Elect



“Two bears in the same lair”: USSR President Gorbachev and Russia’s President Yeltsin

- **A new Union Treaty**
- Worked out by Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's teams in summer of 1991
- To be signed at the end of August 1991



Top hardliners plotting: Defence Minister Yazov and KGB Chairman Kryuchkov



- The August 1991 coup:
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--XPj3dKYRA>





Leaders of the August 1991 coup present themselves at a Moscow press conference



August, 1991: Barricades in front of the Russian Parliament building





The military  
desert the  
coup and join  
protesters



Russians celebrating the defeat of the August coup













Freed from house arrest in Crimea, Gorbachev returns to Moscow



After the coup, Gorbachev was rapidly losing power to Boris Yeltsin





December 8, 1991: the three men who dissolved the Soviet Union, left to right: Presidents Kravchuk of Ukraine, Shushkevich of Belarus, Yeltsin of Russia



A photograph of Mikhail Gorbachev, the first and last President of the Soviet Union, sitting at a dark wooden desk. He is wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a dark patterned tie. He has short, thinning grey hair and is wearing glasses. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. In front of him on the desk are several papers, including one with a red circular seal. A black pen is visible on the desk to the left. The background features a red curtain on the left and a light blue wall with a gold-colored decorative border on the right.

Resignation of the  
Soviet Union's first and  
last President

## 1917 and 1991 compared

Collapse of the Romanov Empire and dissolution of the Soviet Union

- The Romanov Empire collapsed as a result of a **revolution**, the elites were overthrown and replaced by new elites as a result of **the civil war**
- The Soviet elites moved to **divide the empire** to recast themselves as leaders of **independent nation-states** – or of **units of the Russian Federation**

A key reason why the Soviet empire made **a relatively quiet exit** was because **key Soviet elites** saw **a future for themselves** after communism