

WORLD REPORT

Los Angeles Times

TUESDAY
MARCH 31, 1992

H/6 TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 1992

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Profile

Even Russians Concede Kravchuk Is 'Crafty Fox'

■ Ukraine's leader wheels, deals and bluffs with one goal: to create a completely independent state.

By ELIZABETH SHOGREN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

KIEV, Ukraine—At home, Ukrainian President Leonid M. Kravchuk is admired as the old-style Communist apparatchik who had a change of faith and led his people's drive for independence from the Kremlin. In Russia, he is known as the first Ukrainian with the audacity to say "no," repeatedly, to Moscow.

And to both Ukrainians and Russians, Kravchuk is the "crafty fox" who knows how to play the game of politics—better, arguably, than any other leader in the former Soviet republics.

"His style reminds me of a world-class chess player," Oleg G. Belorus, Kravchuk's campaign manager and adviser, said. "He focuses all of his power and strategies on his main goal—making Ukraine a completely independent state."

In the name of Ukraine's independence, Kravchuk has snarled the divorce hearings between the republics of the former Soviet Union and stalled the planned concentration in Russia of all Soviet tactical nuclear weapons.

Ukrainians see these maneuvers as evidence of Kravchuk's political skill and boldness. But his flip-flops on issues as important to the world as nuclear arms control and the orderly breakup of the Soviet Union are raising questions both in Moscow and abroad.

Certainly, Kravchuk's public profile has increased along with his influence on issues of global importance. President Bush and other world leaders are finding it necessary to maintain close telephone contact with the Ukrainian president.

making Ukraine an independent state that has brought Kravchuk to impasses with Moscow and its vision for the Commonwealth.

At a press conference earlier this month, Kravchuk said that Ukraine was suspending the previously agreed transfer of tactical nuclear weapons to Russia. Russian officials, who had not been informed in advance, were shocked.

Mikola G. Khomenko, the secretary of Kravchuk's administration, defended his boss's motives, saying Kravchuk wanted to create a sensation to show the world that Russia is collecting the weapons, but not dismantling them. But Khomenko conceded that the unconventional approach to dealing with issues as important as nuclear weapons may reflect Kravchuk's inexperience in international politics.

In Moscow, officials say they have learned fast that Kravchuk will agree to nothing that he feels could compromise Kiev's sovereignty.

"His policies are tough," said Alexander G. Granberg, Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin's state adviser specializing in relations between the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States. "He moves very boldly to assert Ukraine's independence. When this path infringes on the interests of other republics, he does not avoid conflicts."

"Of course, a president must think about the interests of his own state and his own people," Granberg continued. "But it is a well-known rule of international relations that if his actions cause harm to his neighbors, then, in the final analysis, he will be the loser."

Biography

Name: Leonid M. Kravchuk

Title: President of Ukraine.

Age: 58

Career: Reared in rural Ukraine. Son of peasants. Spent most of career as Communist Party apparatchik. Advanced to chief of Ukrainian Communist Party Central Committee's propaganda committee. Chosen as chairman of Ukraine's Parliament in July, 1990. Elected Ukraine president in November, 1991. Helped launch Commonwealth of Independent States in December, 1991.

Quote: "It was Ukraine that changed the course of history in the late 20th Century. It has destroyed the [Soviet] empire."



MARISSA ROTH / For The Times

Kravchuk, left, having tete-a-tete at scientific gathering. "His style reminds me of a world-class chess player," says an adviser.

While playing hardball with other republics, Kravchuk is the conciliator in domestic politics. His success is credited to his ability to dodge political confrontations and attract former adversaries to his side.

Kravchuk has made concessions to residents of predominantly Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine, who were upset by a new law making Ukrainian the only

healthy."

The most frequent complaint about Kravchuk is that he has failed to enact the economic reform his country needs.

"He had no economic plan and no clear ideas of how to reform the economy," complained Svetlana Shlinchenko, 29, a homemaker, as she walked down a Kiev street with her 6-year-old son. "He only

state and its policy and the Communist Party changed overnight."

In July, 1990, Kravchuk was selected out of a pool of 27 candidates as the chairman of Ukraine's Parliament and started maneuvering to make his office—instead of the traditionally all-powerful post of Communist Party chief—the most influential in the republic. Kravchuk declared his victo-