

## Contribution to the Barents Encyclopedia

“Short” article on the “The Murmansk Speech of 1987” by Lassi Heininen

**Murmansk Speech of 1987.** The 1980s were characterized by changing conditions for the circumpolar North and particularly the European North. On the one hand, northerners, mainly northern indigenous peoples, began to rediscover the region’s potential as a means of reestablishing horizontal connections and functional co-operation across the cold war political divide. On the other hand international non-governmental organizations, especially those dealing with environment and science (such as Greenpeace International, World Wildlife Fund, Arctic research project of Tampere Peace Research Institute and Kuhmo Summer Academy) initiated activities for environmental protection in northern regions. This new situation of wild growing northern collaboration across national borders pressed the arctic states to react and to take on a more active role in northern co-operation. The concern for environmental protection offered politicians a common denominator.

A prominent sign of the changing times appeared in Murmansk on October 1, 1987. On this day, Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet president at the time, held a speech which gave the initial impetus for a subsequent intergovernmental co-operation in the entire Arctic region. In his speech Gorbachev outlined six concrete proposals: The first two dealt with the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in northern Europe, reducing military activities, and the stimulation of confidence-building measures in the northern seas. The other proposals concerned civilian (economic) co-operation in developing natural resources, co-ordination of scientific research, co-operation in environmental protection, and the opening of the Northern Sea Route to foreign ships.

The impact of Gorbachev’s Murmansk speech should not be underestimated. First of all it started a process that led to the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991, when ministers of the eight arctic states for the first time signed a common document in Rovaniemi (the process was initiated by Finland, but the proposal originally came from the Murmansk Speech). Secondly, the initiation of AEPS subsequently led to the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, and to a new era of arctic international co-operation between the eight arctic states (concerning environmental protection and research in particular). The International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) had been established already in 1990.

The Murmansk speech thus laid a foundation for new connections and can be seen as an early indicator of a change in the closed nature of the Soviet north; the collapse of the Soviet Union further accelerated this change. The speech represented an important turning point for the Arctic states since it started a new rapid process “from confrontation to co-operation”. This has meant a significant geopolitical change, high stability and peace in the Arctic, as well as a rebirth of close connections between northern peoples and societies. However, as previous mentioned many of these changes within the Arctic as well as the European North had already started in the 1980s by non-states actors. The frozen, divided, and militarized North, meaning much of northern Europe and the Barents Sea region, had actually started to defrost even before the end of the cold war period. In this warming up process the Murmansk speech played an important and even indispensable role.

*Lassi Heininen  
Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi*

## **References and Suggestions for Further Reading**

- Gorbachev, M. (1987). The Speech in Murmansk at the ceremonial meeting on the occasion of the presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the city of Murmansk, October 1, 1987. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, pp. 23–31. (The full text is available from the following URL: [www.barentsinfo.fi/docs/Gorbachev\\_speech.pdf](http://www.barentsinfo.fi/docs/Gorbachev_speech.pdf).)
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