

Canada-Russia Bilateral Relations

Canada and Russia are geographically the world's largest countries. They share three oceans, the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic. Canada established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union 50 years ago this month, on June 12, 1942, but relations were cool until the recent dramatic changes that led to the emergence of the Russian Federation as an independent state. Now, contacts between Canadians and Russians are developing with unparalleled speed.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's visit to the Soviet Union in November 1989 was marked by open and frank discussion and by the signature of 14 bilateral agreements.

President Gorbachev's visit to Canada in May 1990 reaffirmed this new tone, and Canada followed up with three visits to Russia by the secretary of state for external affairs.

President Yeltsin visited Canada in February 1992, when he and Prime Minister Mulroney signed a joint political declaration. They also signed a memorandum on regular consultations and a long-term grain agreement.

Canada has accepted Russia as the continuation of the U.S.S.R. in respect of all Soviet international rights and obligations. Existing Canada-U.S.S.R. treaties and agreements remain in force.

Canada supported Russia's assumption of the former Soviet Union's membership in the United Nations and in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Canada also backs Russia's co-sponsorship of the Middle East peace process and has benefited from Russia's support for peace initiatives in Yugoslavia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The two countries also work closely together in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which met at the ministerial level on June 5, 1992.

Size and geography have dictated that Canada and Russia face many common challenges and have similar potential in energy, agriculture, forestry, environment, industrial restructuring, transport and communication.

In recent years, Russia and Canada have cooperated closely in the Arctic. Both supported the creation of the International Arctic Science Council and took part in the 1991 Conference on the Arctic Environment, held in Rovaniemi, Finland.

The 1992 joint political declaration affirmed Russia's support for the creation of an international Arctic council, an idea launched by Prime Minister Mulroney in St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) in 1989.

Cooperation also extends to the military sphere, where joint exercises and staff talks are now annual events. A delegation from a Canadian military college visited Moscow and St. Petersburg early in 1992 and a group of Russian paratroopers will take part in a Canadian jump exercise later in the year.

From 1988 to 1991, Canadian visas issued to tourists from the former U.S.S.R. doubled to 27,426. Academic exchanges sent 22 scholars to Russia and 21 Russian scholars to Canada in 1990-91.

The recent Crossroads of the Continents exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization explored early links between North America and Russia across the Bering Strait.