**Glasnost**

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[**Glasnost**](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a3/Ru-glasnost.ogg) ([Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_language): Гласность, was the policy of maximal publicity, openness, and transparency in the activities of all government institutions in the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union), together with [freedom of information](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_information), introduced by [Mikhail Gorbachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev) in the second half of 1980s.

The word is a [transliteration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteration) of the Russian word **Гласность** and was frequently used by [Gorbachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorbachev) to specify the policies he believed might help reduce the corruption at the top of the Communist Party and the Soviet government, and moderate the abuse of administrative power in the [Central Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Committee). Russian [human rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights) activist and dissident [Lyudmila Alexeyeva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyudmila_Alexeyeva) explained glasnost as a word that "had been in the Russian language for centuries. It was in the dictionaries and lawbooks as long as there had been dictionaries and lawbooks. It was an ordinary, hardworking, nondescript word that was used to refer to a process, any process of justice of governance, being conducted in the open."

Glasnost can also refer to the specific period in the history of the USSR during the 1980s when there was less [censorship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship) and greater freedom of information.

**Areas of concern**

While "glasnost" is associated with [freedom of speech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_speech), the main goal of this policy was to make the country's management transparent and open to debate, thus circumventing the narrow circle of [apparatchiks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apparatchik) who previously exercised complete control of the economy. Through reviewing the past or current mistakes being made, it was hoped that the Soviet people would back reforms such as [perestroika](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika).

A 1988 Soviet postage stamp: (1) *Perestroika continues the cause of the* [*October Revolution*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution);
(2) [*Acceleration*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uskoreniye)*,* [*Democratization*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demokratizatsiya)*, Glasnost*

Glasnost gave new freedoms to the people, such as a greater freedom of information by opening the secret parts for unallowed literature in the libraries and a greater freedom of speech — a radical change, as control of speech and suppression of government criticism had previously been a central part of the Soviet system. There was also a greater degree of freedom within the media. In the late 1980s, the Soviet government came under increased criticism, as did [Leninist ideology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leninism) (which Gorbachev had attempted to preserve as the foundation for reform), and members of the Soviet population were more outspoken in their view that the Soviet government had become a failure. Glasnost did indeed provide freedom of expression, far beyond what Gorbachev had intended, and changed citizens' views towards the government, which played a key role in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Mikhail Gorbachev instituted the idea of glasnost in the 1980's, giving the Soviets a new idea of freedom of speech. Giving the Soviets this freedom of speech led to the reduction of censorship in publishing, radio, television, and other media. Soviet officials didn't agree with glasnost because it threatened their statuses as authority figures and the officials who spoke out were then dismissed and replaced. Gorbachev replaced over half of the party's leadership, because they didn't agree with his ideals of free speech.

Gorbachev expressed that glasnost was greatly needed across Western Europe because of the Chernobyl incident of 1986. A nuclear reactor exploded in a nuclear plant, and the plant leaked radioactive material out into the atmosphere. The information was delayed, and the people living near the plant suffered because they were never informed of this catastrophic event.

**Effects**

Relaxation of [censorship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship) resulted in the Communist Party losing its grip on the [media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_media). Before long, much to the embarrassment of the authorities, the media began to expose severe social and economic problems which the Soviet government had long denied and covered up. Long-denied problems such as poor housing, food shortages, [alcoholism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholism), widespread pollution, creeping mortality rates and the second-rate position of women were now receiving increased attention. Moreover, under glasnost, the people were able to learn significantly more about the horrors committed by the government when [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin) was in power. Although [Nikita Khrushchev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev) denounced Stalin's [personality cult](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personality_cult), information about the true proportions of his atrocities was still suppressed. In all, the very positive view of Soviet life which had long been presented to the public by the official media was being rapidly dismantled, and the negative aspects of life in the Soviet Union were brought into the spotlight. This began to undermine the faith of the public in the Soviet system.

Political openness continued to produce [unintended consequences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_consequence). In [elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election) to the regional assemblies of the Soviet Union's [constituent republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republics_of_the_Soviet_Union), [nationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism) swept the board. As Gorbachev had weakened the system of internal political repression, the ability of the USSR's central Moscow government to impose its will on the USSR's constituent republics had been largely undermined. During the 1980s, calls for greater independence from Moscow's rule grew louder. This was especially marked in the [Baltic Republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Republics) of [Estonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonia), [Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuania) and [Latvia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvia), which had been annexed into the Soviet Union by [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin) in 1940. Nationalist feeling also took hold in other Soviet republics such as [Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_SSR), [Georgia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian_SSR) and [Azerbaijan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azerbaijan_SSR).

Starting in the mid-1980s, the Baltic states used the reforms provided by glasnost to assert their rights to protect their environment (for example during the [Phosphorite War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phosphorite_War)) and their historic monuments and, later, their claims to sovereignty and independence. When the Balts withstood outside threats, they exposed an irresolute [Kremlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Kremlin). Bolstering separatism in other Soviet republics, the Balts triggered multiple challenges to the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union). Supported by Russian leader [Boris Yeltsin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Yeltsin), the Baltic republics asserted their sovereignty.

The rise of nationalism under glasnost also reawakened simmering ethnic tensions throughout the union. For example, in February 1988, [Nagorno-Karabakh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh), a predominantly ethnic Armenian region in the Azerbaijan SSR, passed a resolution calling for unification with the [Armenian SSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_SSR), which sparked the [Nagorno-Karabakh War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh_War).

The freedoms generated under glasnost enabled increased contact between Soviet citizens and the western world, particularly with the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). Restrictions on travel were loosened, allowing increased business and cultural contact. For example, one key meeting location was in the U.S. at the [Dakin Building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakin_Building), then owned by American [philanthropist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philanthropist) Henry Dakin, who had extensive Russian contacts:

During the late 1980s, as glasnost and [perestroika](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika) led to the liquidation of the Soviet empire, the Dakin building was the location for a series of groups facilitating United States-Russian contacts. They included the Center for U.S.-U.S.S.R. Initiatives, which helped more than 1000 Americans visit the Soviet Union and more than 100 then-Soviet citizens visit the U.S.

While thousands of [political prisoners](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_prisoner) and many [dissidents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissident) were released in the spirit of glasnost, Gorbachev's original goal of using glasnost and perestroika to reform the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) was not achieved. In 1991, [the Soviet Union was dissolved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Soviet_Union) following a [failed coup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_coup_attempt_of_1991) by conservative elements who were opposed to Gorbachev's reforms.

**See also**

* [Demokratizatsiya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demokratizatsiya)
* [Glasnost Bowl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasnost_Bowl)
* [Perestroika](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika)