

51st IAA SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) –
The Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

Author: Dr. Rebecca Charbonneau
National Radio Astronomy Observatory, United States, rebeccaannecharbonneau@gmail.com

CETI ACROSS THE IRON CURTAIN

Abstract

The search for and communication with extraterrestrial intelligence (CETI) developed simultaneously in the United States and the Soviet Union in the mid-twentieth century and is one of the few examples of a scientific field which established highly successful points of international cooperation and communication during the Cold War period. CETI's unique collaborative success resulted in part due to the general internationalist philosophy of the community. For example, in considering the potential cultural impact of discovering extraterrestrial intelligence, prominent CETI scientists such as Carl Sagan and Iosif Shklovskii argued that the discovery of life on other worlds could possibly bring about global unity and ergo strove to cooperate with their global peers as 'earthlings', rather than national citizens. Because of this cosmopolitan perspective, CETI assisted in the formation of networks of contact and communication between Soviet and American astrophysicists, which led to further collaboration in other areas of radio astronomy, including Very Long Baseline Interferometry, despite the political challenges. Fundamentally, CETI concerns the question of communication with civilizations which are alien to us, and Soviet and American CETI scientists worked to communicate both with extraterrestrials and each other. This paper will highlight the parallels between the challenges of communication across the Iron Curtain and across the depths of outer space and show how CETI's unique internationalist philosophies fostered successful communication between otherwise hostile worlds.