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Author: Ms. Gabriela Radulescu
TU Berlin, Germany

REGULATING OUTER SPACE: CONTACT WITH EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE
INTERNATIONAL ASTRONAUTICAL COMMUNITY IN THE LATE 1950S

Abstract

This presentation draws on my doctoral thesis in the history of science in which I look at the across-the-Iron-Curtain aspects of extraterrestrial intelligence - during the Space Age. In this talk, I focus on the prehistory of Communication with Extraterrestrial Intelligence (CETI) in the astronautical community in the late 1950s. The first time the International Astronautical Congress dealt with extraterrestrial beings was at the 1956 International Astronautical Congress. Then, American lawyer Andrew Haley (of the American Rocket Society) argued for the need to regulate relations between all beings in the Universe, thereby presenting the notion of ‘Metalaw’. I draw on the work of Dumas Walton in documenting the history of the IAA SETI Permanent Committee (2015) by framing this as the first pre-CETI moment internationally. I further contextualize the 1956 talk by Haley at the IAC 1956 entitled “Space Law and Metalaw: A Synoptic View” in relation to outer space concerns on brink of the launch of the Space Age. I argue that by raising the question of contact with extraterrestrial intelligence, Haley addressed bones of contention between the Soviet Union and the West which had been traditionally dividing the two sides over the use of airspace. With the precipitation of the launching of artificial satellites announced by both sides in 1955, Haley was prompted to intensify the lobbying for particular stances on outer space regulations. I review the political intertwinings of terrestrials launching objects into outer space that underlay Metalaw and claim that these continued to be part of later CETI, not least with the IAA Study Group and later Committee. All in all, I draw attention to the relational character of contact with extraterrestrial intelligence during the Space Age.