

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ESPERANTO DURING THE COLD WAR

This research examines the role of Esperanto during the Cold War, highlighting how its neutrality allowed it to bridge ideological divides and gain acceptance under authoritarian regimes. By exploring the case of Bulgaria, this research illustrates how Esperanto served as a tool for civil resistance and internationalism, emphasizing its enduring significance as a language of activism and cultural exchange during a highly polarized era.

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### INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, language became a powerful tool in the ideological battle between the United States and the Soviet Union, with Russian gaining prominence as a symbol of Soviet influence. Amid this linguistic rivalry, Esperanto emerged as a neutral, planned language that transcended national and political boundaries, gaining momentum in Eastern Europe as a means of fostering global engagement and ideological resistance without aligning with the dominant powers of the era.



Esperanto Promotional Material. Translation: "You fly with our banner, Esperanto, Across the world! Transcend state boundaries. You flutter over all the furrows of the earth, non-stop sowing Brotherhood among people of good will! Bring Hope to every freedom lover!" Image Credit: <https://www.eldiario.es>

### WHAT IS ESPERANTO?

**Ideological Foundation:** Esperanto was created by L.L. Zamenhof in 1887 as an international language rooted in principles of language neutrality and communication equality, drawing parallels with early 20th-century social movements like Socialism and Positivism.

**Neutrality and Accessibility:** Unlike national languages tied to specific countries and their geopolitical agendas, Esperanto eliminated linguistic disadvantages for non-native speakers, making it an ideal tool for those seeking a neutral international language during the Cold War.

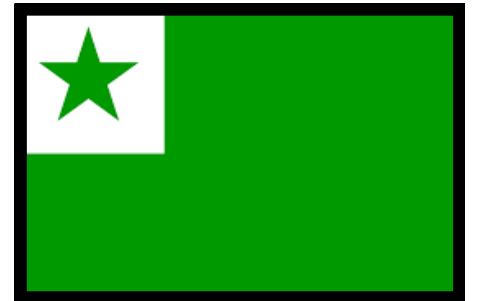
### LANGUAGE USE DURING THE COLD WAR

As a neutral language, Esperanto emerged as an ideal tool for those seeking an international language free from the political associations of the era, thriving especially in Eastern Europe.

Although initially supported by socialists as an international language for workers, Esperanto maintained a complex relationship with state socialism, often operating outside the confines of the nation-state and challenging institutional boundaries.

To the right: Esperanto Flag

Below: USSR postage stamp  
6th International Congress of Esperanto  
speakers in Leningrad. Image Credit:  
Electronic catalog "Stamps of the Country  
of Soviets"



Esperanto Congress postal stamp. Yugoslavia, 1953.

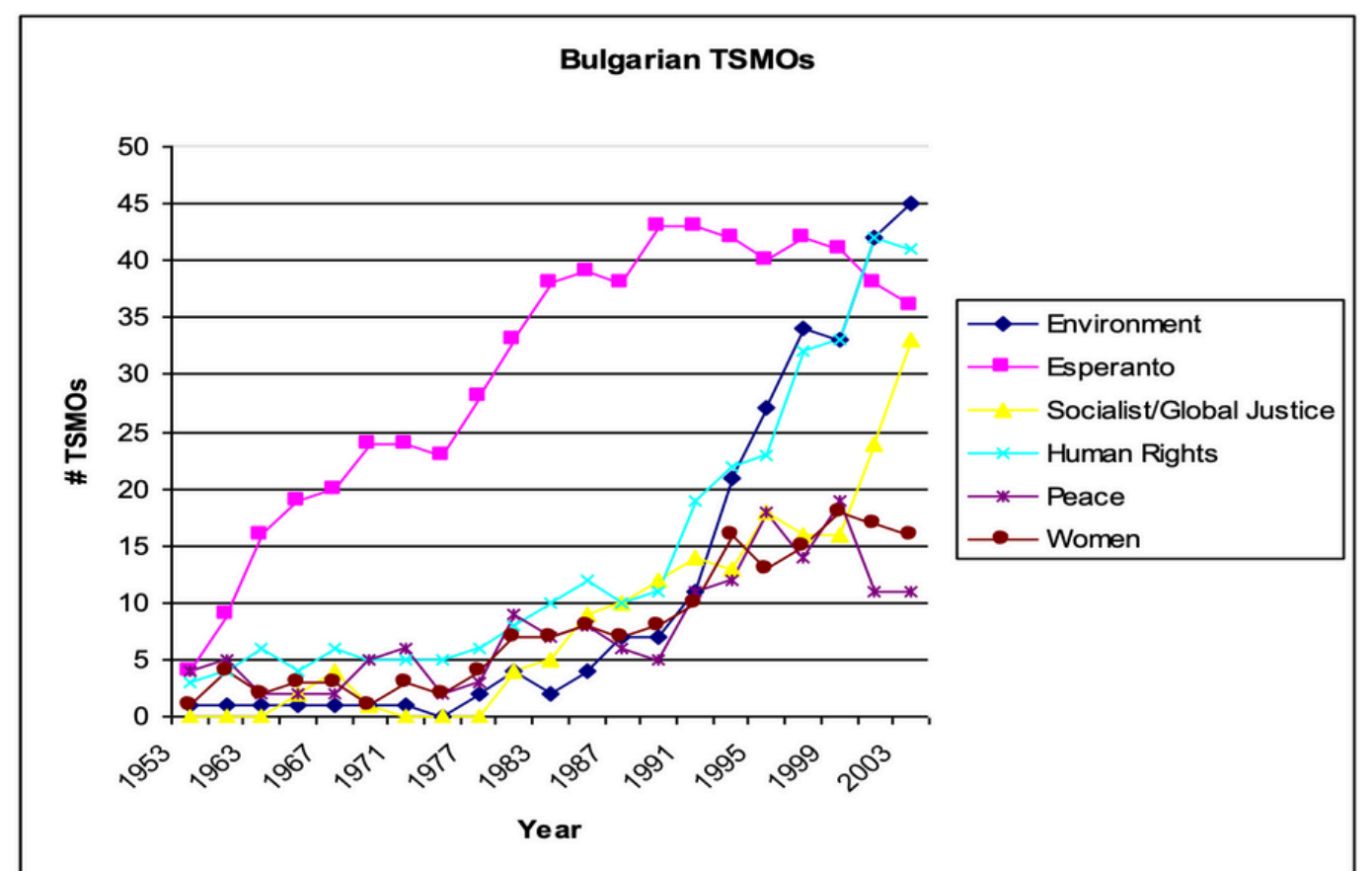


Image Credit: [hipstamp.com](http://hipstamp.com)

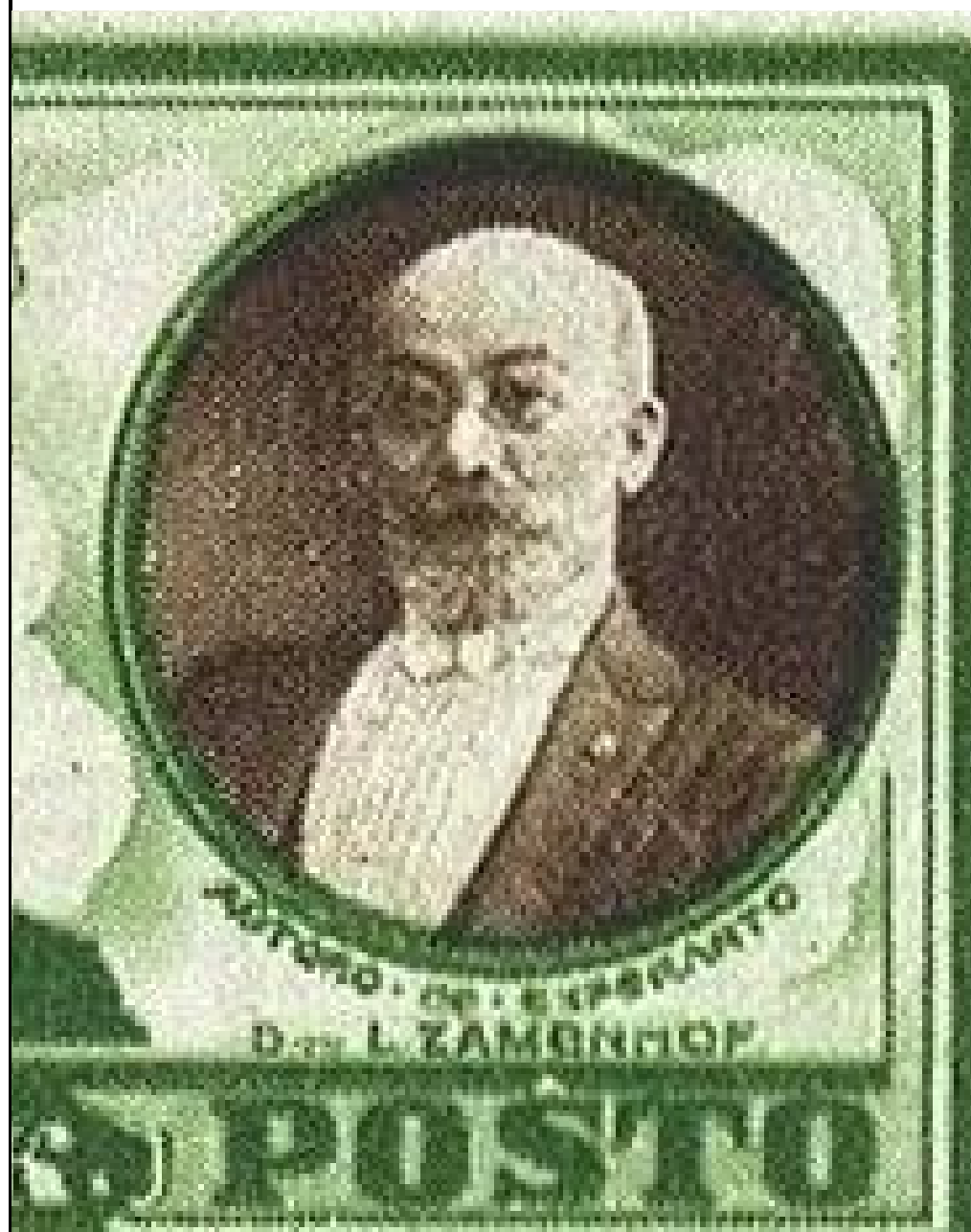


### THE BULGARIAN CASE

- The Bulgarian Esperanto movement serves as a key example of how Esperanto thrived in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. From the mid-1950s onwards, Bulgaria became a major center for the movement, which managed to grow by aligning itself with state socialism while maintaining a non-partisan stance.
- By promoting state achievements and avoiding direct opposition, the movement cultivated a unique activist culture that allowed it to survive and even flourish under an authoritarian regime. Esperanto's impact in Bulgaria underscores its ability to bridge East-West divides and offer a platform for internationalism and community building.
- Despite limited freedom of movement, Bulgarian Esperantists hosted two World Congresses in 1963 and 1978.



Bulgarian transnational social movement organization field by issue. (Smith and Wiest 2012)



USSR Esperanto Postal Stamp. Image Credit:  
<https://oldbid.com/2145666>

### ESPERANTO AND IRAN

Shortly after the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini briefly promoted Esperanto as a means of international communication among Muslims, favoring it over Western languages like English. However, this support waned when authorities discovered the language's association with the Bahá'í faith, leading Iranian politicians to distance themselves from Esperanto. Khomeini's initial interest in Esperanto underscores its appeal as a neutral language unaligned with Western ideals, particularly during a time of intense East-West division.

### CONCLUSION

Although Esperanto didn't wield significant political power during the Cold War, it thrived under the Soviet regime by offering a neutral platform for global communication. The movement grew by balancing political neutrality with socialist ideals, attracting a diverse membership and enduring by engaging those seeking connection and learning, while standing apart from the traditional East-West conflict.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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