

The case of Svetlana Mesyats, a scholar of ancient philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, raises serious concerns about academic freedom and the personal safety of researchers in Russia. Dr Mesyats was arrested in May 2026 and placed under house arrest over alleged irregularities in the reporting of results from a research and translation project, and now faces a prison sentence of up to ten years. Given her international scholarly reputation, the nature of the low-cost humanities project, and the broader context of long-standing pressure on the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, there is concern that the property-related charges may be serving as a pretext for political and ideological control over the academic institution and its direction. The Czech historical experience of the persecution of academics between 1948 and 1989 reinforces the fear that this case may likewise be an instance of suppressing free scholarship under an ostensibly legal pretext.

JOINT STATEMENT BY CZECH ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHER SVETLANA MESYATS

Prague, 25 June 2026

We are following the events at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow with great concern. Our colleague Svetlana Mesyats, Ph.D., was arrested on May 19, 2026, and subsequently placed under house arrest. This occurred in connection with alleged irregularities in the reporting of results from a seven-year research and translation project in the field of ancient philosophy. Several of her colleagues were also detained and interrogated. Dr. Mesyats has been charged with a property-related offense, for which she faces up to ten years in prison.

Dr. Mesyats is an internationally renowned and respected expert in her field. She has published studies on ancient Neoplatonism and the Aristotelian tradition, as well as a monograph on Goethe. She has served as a visiting scholar at several German universities and is a member of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies. Czech and foreign colleagues who know Dr. Mesyats as a conscientious, modest, and honest person consider the charges brought against her to be highly improbable. Moreover, property-related charges of this severity in connection with low-cost projects such as the translation of philosophical texts from Classical Greek are extremely unusual.

In our view, Dr. Mesyats's case must be viewed in the context of long-standing and well-documented efforts to subject the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences to stricter ideological and state control. The Institute has repeatedly been accused of being "pro-Western" and "liberal." There have also been public calls for its employees to undergo ideological vetting. The study of Aristotle's writings, to which Dr. Mesyats's project was dedicated, was labeled in some of these attacks as "pro-Western," "pro-democratic," and therefore "unpatriotic" or hostile to Russian culture. In this context, the question arises as to whether the alleged doubts about the proper reporting of the project's results do not in fact conceal an effort to exert political and ideological control over the Institute of Philosophy and over the type of scientific activity conducted there.

The experience of our country from 1948 to 1989 reminds us that in a totalitarian state that systematically violates human rights, academic freedom is often restricted as well. We know that many academics, particularly in the humanities, were persecuted for their political views or simply for

refusing to conform to the party line in their work. This injustice was often given the appearance of legitimacy through spurious charges. Against the backdrop of this experience, we consider it our duty

to express serious concerns not only about academic freedom in the Russian Federation, but also about the personal safety of Dr. Mesyats and her colleagues.

ENDORSED BY:

Filosofický ústav Akademie věd České republiky
Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy
Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci
Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity
Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Pardubice
Filozofická fakulta Západočeské univerzity v Plzni
Cyrilometodějská teologická fakulta Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci
Rada Učené společnosti České Republiky
Katedra filosofie a dějin přírodních věd Přírodovědecké fakulty Univerzity Karlovy
Katedra filosofie a religionistiky Teologické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity v Českých Budějovicích

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SOURCES

1. Svetlana Mesyats: scholarly profile and publications
 - Institute of Philosophy profile:
<https://iphras.ru/mesyats.htm>
 - Academia.edu profile:
<https://svetla.academia.edu/SvetlanaMesyats>
2. Raid on the Institute, detention, house arrest, and criminal charges
 - <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2026/05/22/russia-s-institute-of-philosophy-raided-over-fraud-case-tied-to-aristotle-translation-project-the-institute-had-previously-been-accused-of-disloyalty-to-the-kremlin>
 - <https://theins.press/en/news/292891>
3. Earlier attacks on the Institute of Philosophy and the Aristotle translation project
 - <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2026/05/25/antisovetskie-filosofskie-kontratseptsii>
 - <https://t-invariant.org/2026/05/targeting-aristotle-the-philosophers-case-started-over-economics-but-will-end-in-politics/>
 - <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/05/28/russian-philosopher-reportedly-charged-with-embezzling-public-funds-intended-for-aristotle-translations-a92873>
4. Broader context: pressure on academics and the use of administrative or financial charges
 - <https://t-invariant.org/2026/06/molchanie-ne-spasaet-filosofy-zapustili-otkrytoe-pismo-v-zashhitu-svetlany-mesyats/>

Contacts:

Mgr. Matyáš Havrda, Ph.D., DSc., havrda@flu.cas.cz
doc. Robert Roreitner, Dr. Phil., robert.roreitner@ff.cuni.cz