

To Profs. Roger D. Kornberg kornberg@stanford.edu
Wolfgang Ketterle ketterle@mit.edu
Alan J. Heeger ajhe@physics.ucsb.edu
Mikhail D. Lukin lukin@physics.harvard.edu
Eugene A. Demler demler@physics.harvard.edu
John M. Doyle doyle@physics.harvard.edu
Tommaso Calarco tommaso.calarco@uni-ulm.de
Arden L. Bement bement@purdue.edu
Dieter Bimberg bimberg@physik.TU-Berlin.DE
Richard A. Lerner rlerner@scripps.edu

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Dear colleagues,

According to information available to us, each one of you is either engaged or considering engagement in the Skolkovo Project in Russia, which presumably is being developed by Russian Government to "internationalize" Russian science.

International collaboration in science is a great way of advancing science and technology, provided it is based on open exchange of ideas, information, data, and free movements of people engaged in the research -- and is void of secrecy, spy paranoia, and totalitarian control over the flow of ideas, information and people.

The reason we are writing to you is that, because of your engagement with the Skolkovo project, you may serve as great facilitators of improving the "climate" between the international and Russian research communities, by acting to encourage Russian Government to free Russian scientists currently imprisoned, or under active investigation by Russian security agencies, all of them being accused of "spying" activity and/or illegal transfer of allegedly secret technological information to other countries.

According to information available to us at the moment, there are seven of them: Drs. Valentin Danilov, Igor Reshetin, Mikhail Ivanov, Sergei Visir, Ivan Pet'kov, Evgenij Afanas'ev, and Svyatoslav Bobyshev; most of them imprisoned for very long terms, some exceeding 10 years.

The accusations against those scientists are not true and are dictated by the motives other than real justice or real state security. The cases against them have been made in a way very much reminiscent of an old Soviet style by using trumped-up charges and a massive pressure of internal security apparatus on the accused, the experts and the witnesses (if any).

Our main point is that with those scientists behind the bars, it would be difficult to imagine that a broad collaboration between Russian science and technology on one hand, and international scientific community, on the other hand, would be successful and effective. Because of fear that they might be arbitrary accused of spy activity, many Russian scientists may be reluctant to be open with their research counterparts and foreign funding companies; similarly, their foreign colleagues may feel that the collaboration is greatly hampered by those fears. They may also be reluctant to go into more open exchange of information and ideas with their Russian colleagues by another reason: in a situation, whereby the Russian state and its security apparatus exercises a harsh control over the exchange process, the assumption may persist that those scientific data may be used to directly benefit Russian military and security purposes. None of this will be instrumental in developing a successful, productive, and efficient collaboration within the Skolkovo project and similar programs underway in Russia. All this may bring back a Cold War-like atmosphere, and this is not in the best interest of all parties involved.

By its very nature, science strives on open exchange of ideas, information, data, and discussion. Of course, there were many instances in recent history, when that open exchange was severely curtailed by the factors external to the science. Behind each of those instances there were all kinds of hostility or war -- ideological, military, etc. None of them served the progress of humankind or science, if we leave alone a new weaponry development. To keep the science open is in the best interest of each one of us as scientists, responsible members of free societies, and citizens of the world.

The international scientific collaboration and Gulag for scientists do not blend together.

The release of those scientists has been strongly advocated by renown Russian human right activists, such as Lyudmila Alexeeva, Elena Bonner, Vladimir Bukovsky, Sergei Kovalev, and many others in their open letter of July 2010 (see their letter attached); that letter was also signed by Prof. Yuri Ryzhov, the Chairman of the Committee for Protection of Scientists, and Dr. Ernst Chernyj, the Secretary of that Committee.

The late Prof. Vitaly L. Ginzburg, a renown physicist and a Nobel Price winner (physics), was also a member of that Committee. In in 2008, not long before he passed away, he wrote a letter to Russian President D. A. Medvedev in support of two convicted then physicists (Sutyagin and Danilov), see copy of his letter attached.

Concluding our letter, we hope that you will act to encourage Russian Government to free those imprisoned scientists, and by doing that to greatly enhance the chances of Skolkovo project to succeed by improving the trust between Russian and international research communities. We would be happy to hear from you.

Most sincerely yours,

Prof. Alexander E. Kaplan
Dept. of Electr. & Comp. Eng.
Johns Hopkins University
3400 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218, USA
ph. (410) 366-3056
E-mail: alexander.kaplan@jhu.edu
web: <http://psi.ece.jhu.edu/~kaplan>

Prof. Vladimir B. Sandomirsky
Dept. of Physics
Bar-Ilan University
Ramat-Gan, 52900 Israel
ph. (972)3936-6524
E-mail: samgomv@biu.013.net.il
web: <http://www.biu.ac.il/PH/sandomirsky/>

PS. A similar letter has been emailed by us a while ago also to

Prof. Zhores I. Alferov, Zhores.Alferov@pop.ioffe.rssi.ru
Valentin P. Gapontsev, vgapontsev@ipgphotonics.com
Yuri V. Gulyaev, gulyaev@cplire.ru
Vladimir M. Shalaev, shalaev@purdue.edu

PPS. Both attached letters in support of the cause of those imprisoned scientists are in Russian, and at the moment we don't have their translation into English. At least two of you (Mikhail D. Lukin and Eugene A. Demler) speak Russian, and for the rest of you we'll have their English translation later on.