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Harvard Medical School Scientist Faces U.S. Smuggling Charges, Possible Deportation to Russia

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Ksenia Petrova. **Polina Pugacheva**

U.S. authorities have charged Russian scientist and Harvard Medical School researcher Ksenia Petrova with smuggling biological materials and say they intend to deport her to Russia, where her legal team warns she could face persecution for her anti-war views.

Petrova, 31, was formally charged on Wednesday on suspicion of trying to smuggle frog embryos and embryonic samples into the U.S. She faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Boston.

The charges stem from a Feb. 16 incident when Petrova was stopped by customs officials at Boston Logan International Airport upon returning from Paris. Her U.S. research visa was revoked the same day, and she was later placed in immigration detention.

Petrova's lawyer, Gregory Romanovsky, called the charges "outrageous and legally

indefensible."

"The government confirmed in court yesterday its intent to deport Ksenia to Russia, where it knows she will face grave danger for opposing the Putin regime," he said in a statement sent to The Moscow Times.

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Romanovsky argued that Petrova did not need a permit to bring in the non-living frog embryos, which are reportedly not considered restricted biological materials under U.S. Customs law.

"Yesterday's hearing in federal district court in Vermont confirmed that Customs and Border Patrol officials had no legal basis for cancelling Ksenia's visa and detaining her," he said.

Petrova was initially held in Vermont but was transferred to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Louisiana. On May 14, a federal judge in Vermont scheduled a bail hearing in her wrongful detention case for May 28. Petrova attended that hearing remotely.

"Less than two hours after the Vermont judge set a hearing on Ksenia's release, she was suddenly transferred from ICE to criminal custody," Romanovsky said.

"This is not a coincidence. It is an attempt by the government to justify its outrageous and legally indefensible position that this scientist working for the U.S. on cures for cancer and aging research has somehow become a danger to the community," the lawyer added.

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