

# The Azat Miftakhov Day

Wednesday June 16, 2021



**Cédric Villani**

*Opening speech*

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is an honour – although a sad honour – for me to introduce this day of lectures, dedicated to our Russian colleague Azat Miftakhov. I thank the Azat Miftakhov Committee for their trust in inviting me to introduce this conference.

Just a few days ago, I was among the group of mathematicians and officials who welcomed our Turkish colleague Tuna Altinel. For 2 years he had to endure persecution by the Turkish institutions, forbidding him to come back to his University in Lyon. A whole international community was mobilised in France and in Turkey, from the University to the city of Villeurbanne to the Parliament, to raise voice and accompany Tuna throughout each step of the kafka-style maze which he had to endure.

This was not the first time that I was involved in a team work to help the light shine again in the darkness. For years I have been one of those calling for a memory work in favour of the mathematician Maurice Audin, arbitrarily captured, tortured and killed in the Algeria war. It took more than sixty years between the moment when Audin was arrested, 11 June 1957 and the historical declaration of President Macron on 13 September 2018 on Audin, the horrors of the war and the torture in Algeria. Some of our mathematician colleagues such as Laurent Schwartz, Michel Broué, Gérard Tronel and many others have been quite active, starting with the public PhD defence of Audin, organised by Laurent Schwartz in the absence of Audin himself.

Today we are gathered for another one of these cases in which a fellow human being is prosecuted by an administration. It may look like an endless pit to go through all these individual cases! After all, it is estimated that there are more than 100 000 prisoners of opinion around the world. So why focus so much energy on individual cases? First, because each of them, as a fellow human, deserves our wholehearted support. As they say, « He who saves a single life, saves the world entire. » But also, some individual cases become emblematic of a larger cause, and have repercussions for many other cases. And, in the case today, this is one of our colleagues, member of our community, with whom we have shared work and mathematical dreams.

And so this is the fate of Azat Miftakhov today. 28-year old, originally from Tatarstan, pursuing studies of mathematics at Moscow State University, and now persecuted for more than 2 years. First arrested for « explosive manufacturing », with no proof, case dismissed, then re-arrested for « breaking a window », one year before, at an office of the United Russia Party, under the testimony of two secret witnesses, one of whom was already dead during the trial. Does it not sound like a joke?! No joke, Miftakhov was beaten by the police, Miftakhov was sentenced to 6 years of prison. It is heartbreaking to see Russia, with its glorious scientific tradition, still fighting with the demons of political persecution which broke the careers and lives of so many people already.

It is my conviction that mathematicians and scientists always have to stand up against absurdity and unfairness and re-expose their faith in the power of daring thought, free speech and the combination of logics and imagination which is so important for us. In this very special day, we shall not only hear words from our very respected colleagues Anatoli Vershik and Tuna Atlinel, but also hear great mathematics by world-renowned experts. Maryna Viazovska from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne; Alexander Bufetov from CNRS, Institut de Mathématiques de Marseille and Steklov Institute; and last but not least our young colleague from Bonn, Peter Scholze, who as you know received the Fields Medal in Rio 3 years ago. It is a pleasure to thank the French Mathematical Society for their support of this outstanding event.

Thank you.

**Cédric Villani**

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