The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Norway Expels Migrant Celebrity

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January 24, 2011




She managed to get a university degree, land a job and become citizen of the year in Norway. But this did not save 25-year-old Maria Amelie — born as Madina Salamova — from being expelled to Russia as an illegal immigrant.

Salamova flew into Moscow on Monday, arriving in Russia for the first time in 11 years. Her plane was bound for Sheremetyevo Airport, not Domodedovo, which saw a bomb attack the same day.

Salamova's plight sparked a heated debate in Norway, with local authorities claiming they upheld the law and critics saying her human rights were violated. Diplomats said only her celebrity status differentiates her from hundreds of illegals quietly deported from Norway every year.

Salamova's family moved from North Ossetia to Finland in 2000. Her parents, Khetag Salamov and Yelena Gutiyeva, remain in hiding in Norway.

Norwegian media reported that Salamov was a businessman who had to flee debtors, Komsomolskaya Pravda said. North Ossetian blogger Madina Sageyeva speculated that his debts may reach millions of dollars.

Finnish authorities rejected an asylum claim from the family, prompting them to illegally move to Norway in 2002, Radio Liberty reported.

Despite not having a legal status in the country, Salamova mastered the Norwegian language, graduated from a local university and even published an autobiography called “Illegal Norwegian.”

The book, out in September under the pen name Maria Amelie, prompted the local weekly news magazine Ny Tid to proclaim her 2010 Citizen of the Year — and the authorities to initiate her deportation.

Salamova unsuccessfully campaigned against deportation in court, and rights groups, politicians and celebrities in Norway joined a campaign in her support.

Some 1,000 supporters rallied for her release in Oslo this week, and more than 91,000 people have joined her support group on Facebook. A group favoring her deportation numbered less than 6,000 people.

Sagalova spent some time at a detention center for illegal immigrants, and though she was eventually released, police detained her again on Monday and shipped her off to the Oslo airport. Her Norwegian boyfriend, Eivin Traedal — who could not marry her because she has no documents, according to Komsomolskaya Pravda — followed her to Moscow.

Salamova said she felt no attachment to Russia and considered herself a Norwegian citizen. "I live in constant fear" of deportation, she told the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation soon after her release from custody last week, Radio Liberty reported.

"My friends and the whole country supported me in this fight," she said. "Where am I supposed to go now? My home is here, in Norway."

Norwegian authorities said she was welcome to return with a work permit, which she is entitled to because of a job offer from the local Teknisk Ukeblad newspaper, Norwegian tabloid Verdens Gang reported Monday. But it remains unclear how long the procedure might take.

Russian authorities said after her arrival at Sheremetyevo that Salamova would be provided accommodation and “would not have to sleep in the streets,” Norwegian daily Dagbladet reported, without elaborating. Salamova also obtained the first official document confirming her existence in years from Russian immigration authorities.

Still, she should have been allowed to stay in Norway, rights activists said.

“She should have never been deported — she came to Norway as a child and has been living here for the last eight years,” Patricia Kaatee, a spokeswoman for Amnesty International in Norway, said by telephone.

Kaatee cited the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, “which obliges authorities to take the child's interests into consideration,” to support her position.

Besides, Salamova has a “strong attachment” to Norway, with a job and a Norwegian boyfriend — which is sufficient basis to grant her a residence permit, Kaatee said.

Norwegian authorities insisted that Salamova had no legal grounds to stay, with Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg saying no exceptions could be made because that would open the floodgates for other illegal immigrants seeking to stay.

"We must handle individuals equally and not give them special treatment just because somebody receives a lot of attention," he told Norwegian media. "If we bend the rules for one person, we will then get thousands of refugees lodging baseless applications for asylum. Nobody wants that."

A spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Oslo, Vladimir Isupov, told The Moscow Times that Salamova did not seek assistance from Russian diplomats. “She wanted to keep up her refugee status and avoided contact with the embassy,” Isupov said.

He said Norway deports many people, most of whom are ignored by the media.

“We have dozens of such cases like hers,” Isupov said, adding that more than 100 people were deported from Norway to Russia last year, most of them against their will.

Another high-profile case, similar from a legal standpoint but involving a vastly different lead character, saw Russian ultranationalist and mixed martial arts fighter Vyacheslav Datsik flee a psychiatric hospital near St. Petersburg to seek asylum in Norway last fall.

Datsik crossed the Norwegian border illegally, turning himself and a gun he had over to the police. His asylum request was rejected, and he was sentenced in December to eight months in a Norwegian prison for illegal firearms possession.

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