

Traffic Cop Suspended as Mikhalkov Car Scandal Escalates

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Moscow's police chief suspended on Tuesday a traffic officer who botched an investigation into allegations that Oscar-winning director Nikita Mikhalkov drove his car in the wrong lane on the Garden Ring.

The traffic violation was caught on video and [published](#) in late May on the LiveJournal community of Blue Buckets, a group of motorists that campaigns against government officials who misuse their right to drive with priority-giving flashing blue lights on their cars.

Although Mikhalkov is not a government official, he was a longtime user of a flashing blue light, issued to him by the Defense Ministry. But he lost the device in May amid a public outcry.

The person who filmed the video showing Mikhalkov's black Range Rover, which was identified by its license plates, reported the incident to the police and insisted that the car was driven by Mikhalkov. The resulting investigation lasted 2 1/2 months — well over the 30 days required by law — and was closed in mid-August after police said they had failed to identify

who had sat behind the wheel.

The police statement, a copy of which was also posted on Blue Buckets, sparked a fresh burst of outrage in media and the blogosphere.

A driver can lose his license for up to six months for driving in the wrong lane, but the violation has a three-month statute of limitations, which, in this case, has already expired.

Furthermore, under the law, the owners of cars that are spotted speeding by police cameras receive traffic tickets in the mail, regardless of who was behind the wheel.

Police chief Sergei Kolokoltsev ordered on Monday an internal check into the Mikhalkov investigation, and Sergei Chigrin, the commander of the traffic police unit who ordered the case closed, was suspended and faces dismissal, RIA-Novosti [said](#).

Mikhalkov denied on Tuesday that he was driving the Range Rover, Interfax reported.

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