

Journalist Booted After Visa Violation

By [Nikolaus von Twickel](#)

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A prominent French writer and journalist has been kicked out of the country on the grounds that she did not have the right to research a book while on a business visa.

Federal Migration Service officials detained Anne Nivat in her hotel in Vladimir on Friday and took her to a police station, Nivat said in a telephone interview Monday from Paris.

During four hours of questioning, the officers argued that she had violated visa rules because the purpose of her visit did not correspond with her real activity. They said she was speaking with the opposition instead of doing business.

"[They] made it clear that they were not happy with my activities," she said.

Nivat had her visa canceled and replaced with a transit visa, which expired Sunday. Luckily, she had already booked her return flight for that day.

She was told that if her documents are in order she can return to Russia tomorrow, but that if

she infringes migration rules again she will be banned from entering the country for three years.

Nivat had arrived in Vladimir, a city just east of Moscow, after a visit to Karelia. She said migration officials made it clear to her that they had been following her already during her stay in the northwestern region bordering Finland.

Nivat pointed out that in Karelia she had not just met with radical opposition members but with representatives of the pro-Kremlin A Just Russia and United Russia parties.

She suggested that authorities were nervous in the run-up to the March 4 presidential election and that migration officials were acting "just in case."

"They want to preserve the status quo," she said.

Federal Migration Service spokespeople asked for written questions Monday and did not respond before press time.

Russian migration law limits foreigners' activities in the country, and business visa holders should only conduct business talks or attend business conferences, said Alexei Filippenkov, of the Visa Delight agency.

"To legally work as a journalist, you either need to be accredited for a foreign media outlet or employed by national media," he explained.

Fellow writer Andrei Dmitriyev, who first [broke the news](#) on his Facebook page, expressed dismay at the rules.

"Isn't talking to people the business of a writer who is working on a book on Russia?" he asked.

As of Monday night, the authorities seemed poised to reverse their decision. The BBC reported that Federal Migration Service chief Konstantin Romodanovsky had reviewed the case and decided that the revocation of Nivat's visa would not stand.

Nivat, 42, achieved considerable publicity during the late 1990s when she covered the war in Chechnya for French daily newspaper Liberation.

In her book "Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter Behind the Lines of the War in Chechnya," published in 2000, she described how she reported from the North Caucasus disguised as a Chechen peasant after being refused accreditation.

She even made it onto national television Monday. Gazprom-owned channel NTV led its 7 p.m. newscast with her case.

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