

Masha Gessen's Book on Totalitarianism in Russia Seized at Border Over 'Extremism' Concerns

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Masha Gessen / Flickr (CC BY-ND 2.0)

Russian customs officials have reportedly seized an award-winning book about totalitarianism at the border, citing concerns that it contains “propaganda of certain views or ideologies.”

Human rights lawyer Sergei Golubok reported encountering difficulties with having his Amazon order of Gessen’s “The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia” delivered this month. Customs authorities in St. Petersburg’s Pulkovo Airport reportedly demanded that Golubok write a letter [explaining](#) that the book does not contain extremist materials.

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On Thursday, the lawyer [wrote](#) on Facebook that his copy of Gessen's portrayal of post-Soviet life had been seized based on a 2015 Russian-led customs union ruling.

"That's what books are written for, to express and convey 'certain views' to people," Golubok [quipped](#) in a letter he wrote to customs officials on Monday. "Besides, I haven't read the book so I can't say with certainty what's written in it," he added.

"The ideas discussed in the book are confirmed by this whole story," Gessen was quoted as [saying](#) by St. Petersburg's Fontanka.ru news website Tuesday.

A former contributor to The Moscow Times and current staff writer at The New Yorker, Gessen won the 2017 National Book Award for Nonfiction in 2017 for "The Future is History."

"The incident is indeed reminiscent of Soviet-era policies – ironically, the very subject of Gessen's book," Human Rights Watch [said](#) Wednesday.

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