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Russian Blogger Stuck at Georgian Border After Fleeing 'Political' Terrorism Charges

By Anastasia Tenisheva

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Insa Lander. **@rednalasni / twitter.com**

A Russian blogger and activist has been trapped in the border zone between Russia and Georgia for nearly a week after Tbilisi authorities denied her entry to the country.

Russian authorities accuse Insa Lander of recruiting others to a terrorist organization, a claim she rejects as politically motivated. She fled house arrest and attempted to cross into Georgia and seek political asylum on June 12 and again on June 13, but was turned away at the Georgian border both times.

Lander, who is now staying in a duty-free shop between the two countries' border checkpoints, told The Moscow Times that she does not have regular access to food and water and that human rights defenders are not allowed to visit her.

“One day [Georgian border guards] assure me they really want to help, but the very next day they say I am a ‘problem’ and I have to go back to Russia as nothing threatens me there,” Lander said in an interview.

“Some border guards brought me coffee or tea, others kicked me out of the duty-free shop while it was raining. Duty-free employees are forbidden from helping me — they cannot give me water or provide Wi-Fi,” she added.

“In any case, I am not afraid of local border guards and I do not expect anything bad from them; all the danger comes from the Russian border.”

Georgia’s Interior Ministry said Lander was denied entry because she allegedly gave “clearly false and contradictory information” about the purpose of her visit.

Georgian law also states that individuals prosecuted for terrorism in other countries may be denied entry.

“There are more than 1,000 Russian activists and journalists in Georgia. In this case, Georgia is probably afraid of the fabricated terrorism charges brought against Insa. We applied to the Foreign Ministry, the Interior Ministry and Georgian humanitarian organizations, but so far we have no results,” Yegor Kuroptev, director of the Free Russia Foundation in the South Caucasus, told The Moscow Times.

Kuroptev said he was unable to visit Lander in the neutral zone, but managed to pass some food along to her.

He also said the Free Russia Foundation — which supports the Russian diaspora in Georgia — is currently in talks with a number of European countries to provide Lander with political asylum.

Lithuania's Ambassador to Georgia, Andrius Kalindra, said Thursday that Vilnius was ready to provide Lander with a visa if she is allowed to enter Georgia.

Lander, a longtime Moscow resident, was arrested on terrorism charges in the North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in December 2021 and placed under house arrest.

She says the case is an attempt to stop her from investigating alleged corruption at a charity led by a top official in Kabardino-Balkaria.

Her lawyer Dmitry Zakhvatov said the case was based on her correspondence on the VKontakte social network dating from 2014.

Russia's oldest human rights watchdog Memorial has called Lander’s prosecution illegal and politically motivated.

A number of Russian opposition figures have previously been denied entry to Georgia, including journalists Mikhail Fishman and Ilya Azar and politicians Lyubov Sobol and Dmitry Gudkov.

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