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## **Anastasia Lester: 'Publishers prefer to prolong rights than invest in new translations.'**

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*Agent for Russia for several French publishers, as well as contributor to the trade weekly, Knijnoe Obozrenie analyses the evolution of French-Russian translations on the occasion of the Non/Fiction Salon, from Nov. 28 –Dec. 2 in Moscow.*

### **Livres Hebdo – How is the rights market in Russia faring?**

The economic situation in Russia is causing concern; which incites publishers to show caution when buying rights. Even if there is a tradition of reading 'quality' literature, their main concern is to ensure commercial success (minimum: 5000 copies a year). Translating quality literature is longer and more challenging: only smaller publishers who can survive with a less ambitious print run even attempt it. Unfortunately their number has gone down in the last few years; either they haven't survived the crisis or they've been eaten up by big groups.

### **How do French books hold up in the global rights market?**

They're behind English but ahead of the northern European countries, even though Russia has very strong historical links with them. The volume of rights sales varies very little from one year to the next. What does change is the type of contract. Rather than undertake new translations, publishers prefer to prolong rights.

### **Have you noticed any trends in the acquisition of French rights in Russia?**

French books have become increasingly present in Russia over the last ten years. The more popular fiction is prevalent with writers like Bernard Werber, Amélie Nothomb, Marc Lévy and Guillaume Musso. However we have noticed real progress in all categories; several French authors have penetrated the market and are selling very well, such as Frédéric Beigbeder and Michel Houellebecq. There is also increasing interest for genre literature like quality detective novels of the type written by J.M. Erre (Buchet-Chastel). On the other hand, in non-fiction, only history has found a niche: it is almost impossible to translate current affairs or politics because, in Russia, these subjects are not treated in books but in the press.

### **What about children's books?**

Illustrated children's books are going from strength to strength. For many years, it was very difficult to persuade publishers, who were convinced that French graphics would not appeal to the Russian public. For example four

years ago, the graphics of an author like Rebecca Dautremer just didn't get the message over. Then a new generation of parents came along, more open-minded, more curious. They are looking for more adventurous aesthetics in children's books. Today, these publishers are in demand.

**What does the Non/Fiction salon, which takes place from Nov. 28 to Dec. 2 in Moscow, contribute to the rights trade?**

Coming after Frankfurt, this rendezvous is appreciated by professionals. It's smaller, more intellectual, more intimate and more convivial for trade. Publishers have had the time to read the manuscripts submitted before hand. They take stock of their year and sign new contracts?not publishing 'coups' of course?and they refine their selection. The only snag is the cost: this fair remains expensive for the exhibitors.

**Anastasia Lester is interviewed by Mylène Moulin**