

Deputy Mayor's Driver Held in Slaying

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Investigators said the deputy mayor of the Moscow region town of Podolsk was shot dead late last month in a plot by her indebted personal driver — who brazenly withdrew \$10,000 from her bank account within an hour of reporting her murder and then paid part of a loan.

Deputy Mayor Vera Sviridova, 53, was killed with a single gunshot to the forehead in her house in the village of Svitino, near Podolsk just south of Moscow, on Sept. 26, investigators said. Her driver, Vladimir Koshkin, 48, called police at 8 a.m. that morning to report finding her body.

But investigators said Friday that Alexei Korotkikh, a 25-year-old unemployed Oryol resident and a friend of Koshkin's son, visited Sviridova's house earlier that morning and shot the deputy mayor in the forehead as she opened the door, Vesti state television [reported](#), citing court documents.

He then stole money, jewelry, a cell phone, bankcards and a bag with documents from the house, news reports said.

Korotkikh used the dead woman's bankcards to withdraw 300,000 rubles (\$10,000) from bank machines at 9 a.m. that morning, the reports said. He made no effort to hide his identity while making the withdrawals, and his face caught on surveillance cameras has become a key piece of evidence in the case.

Police detained Korotkikh several hours later — but not before he apparently managed to pass money over to Koshkin, the driver.

"Immediately after the murder, Sviridova's driver paid off part of his bank loan — and this aroused the suspicions of investigators, which were later confirmed," said Irina Gumyonnaya, a senior investigator for the Moscow region branch of the Investigative Committee, Vesti reported.

A court on Friday sanctioned the arrest of Koshkin, his 31-year-old son Andrei and Korotkikh in connection with the killing.

Andrei Koshkin, who also worked as a driver for Podolsk City Hall, has denied wrongdoing, saying he only obeyed his father's orders. Korotkikh, who was serving two years' probation for robbery at the time of the killing, has refused to talk with investigators.

Vladimir Koshkin, who faces up to life in prison, has admitted to robbing his boss, but said the killing was an accident and he had only wanted to frighten her.

Sviridova, who as deputy mayor oversaw Podolsk's finances, was a "honest woman" and single mother who lived rather modestly, said Sergei Korolyov, a local anti-corruption activist. He said Sviridova took out a mortgage when she decided to buy a home.

Police, meanwhile, might now want to reopen investigations into two unsolved robberies of Podolsk Mayor Alexander Nikulin's house, Vesti said. His personal driver used to be Vladimir Koshkin.

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