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# Police Deny Magnitsky Died From Beating

By Rina Soloveitchik

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The senior investigator in the case, Oleg Silchenko.

The Interior Ministry declared Thursday that lawyer Sergei Magnitsky died from heart failure in jail and not as the result of beating by prison officials, refuting the findings of a recent report put out by his employer Hermitage Capital.

"In the findings of the prison doctors, it said explicitly that the prisoner died from heart failure," said Anzhelika Kastuyeva, spokeswoman for the Interior Ministry's investigative department.

In a briefing with reporters, Interior Ministry officials categorically denied the conclusions reached in the report published last week by Hermitage that suggested the 37-year-old lawyer was left to die on the floor of his cell after suffering brain trauma in a beating ordered by prison officials.

“Each page is either based on false facts or the misrepresentation of facts,” Kastuyeva said.

Hermitage’s report, which ran at 75 pages in English and 100 pages in Russian, offered morgue photos showing ugly, dark bruises on Magnitsky’s wrists and legs. But investigators said those injuries were inconsequential.

“The finding of the prison doctors notes that Magnitsky had bruises from the handcuffs,” said the senior investigator in the case, Oleg Silchenko. “The report, however, also said he did not die from the implications of the bruises.”

In a statement e-mailed the day before the Interior Ministry briefing, Hermitage dismissed the investigators’ findings as bogus.

Magnitsky was arrested on Nov. 28, 2008, on tax evasion charges after he had accused officials of stealing $230 million from the state budget. Magnitsky died in pretrial detention on Nov. 16, 2009.

Magnitsky’s family has held Silchenko responsible for his death, saying Magnitsky was denied treatment for medical problems he suffered during his detention.

Silchenko dismissed the accusation.

“Ninety-nine percent of the prisoners in solitary confinement claim that they need medical treatment,” Silchenko said, explaining why officers could not take his complaints seriously.

Silchenko is thought to be on the so-called “Magnitsky list” of Russian officials barred from entering the United States for their alleged role in Magnitsky’s death.

Investigators also scoffed at parts of the report that cast doubt on Magnitsky’s guilt and the legitimacy of the criminal investigation that landed him in jail.

Pavel Lapshow, head of the ministry’s investigative department, presented a complicated graphic to explain how Hermitage Capital used an elaborate offshore scheme to avoid paying $230 million in Russian taxes.

But Lapshow then raised doubts on his own claims.

“At that time these kinds of schemes were not illegal,” he said in a slip of the tongue that left reporters puzzled.

When pressed as to why Magnitsky was jailed if the actions were legal, Lapshow was unable to give a clear answer.

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