

Criminal Case Opened Over Sobchak Restaurant Tussle

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The  Moscow Times

Police have opened a criminal investigation into an alleged fight involving socialite and journalist Kseniya Sobchak, opposition leader Ilya Yashin, and journalists from pro-Kremlin tabloid Life News, Interfax reported Friday.

The Life News correspondents have accused Sobchak, Yashin, Parnas leader Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Prokhorov aide Anton Krasovsky of attacking them earlier this month at Sobchak's restaurant Tverbul in central Moscow, after the journalists turned a video camera on the group. Police have opened an investigation into the alleged destruction of the journalists' \$4,000 video camera in the attack.

Life News said in an article Friday that the incident took place after its journalists entered Tverbul on March 12 to report on an award ceremony for Soviet film director Pavel Lungin. The journalists noticed the group of opposition figures "in a most impartial manner speaking about those who attend demonstrations, and about government leaders" and began videotaping their conversation, Life News said.

Within a few minutes, members of the group saw the journalists videotaping them

and attacked, swinging punches and yelling threats, the tabloid report said.

Yashin said he suspected the case of being political.

"We're used to this sort of thing, and all of this is political in nature," Yashin told Interfax. "If the [judicial] process starts, we'll use our rich experience of defending [ourselves] within the walls of court."

Opposition leaders have been the targets of embarrassing reports on Life News before. The tabloid released private phone conversations of Boris Nemtsov last year in which Nemtsov spoke disparagingly about certain members of the opposition.

Earlier this month, Yashin said the Life News journalists at Tverbul had been asked to stop videotaping because it was "meddling in [their] private life, which is illegal."

Kseniya Sobchak made a splash in the media last year after shooting a video of Federal Youth Agency head Vasily Yakemenko dining at an extravagant Moscow restaurant. She asked Yakemenko how he could afford such a meal, a question the official evaded.

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