The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Pensioner Who Died in Police Custody Possibly Wrongly Accused

February 05, 2015



A pensioner was taken to a police station after employees at a local store claimed she had tried to steal three packs of butter.

Prosecutors in St. Petersburg said Thursday that they are "checking the legality" of police officers and supermarket employees regarding the detention of an 81-year-old woman who was accused of stealing butter and died in police custody.

The butter that the woman was accused of stealing was found in her shopping basket, and she even offered to pay for it after the accusation was made, prosecutors said in a statement.

Federal Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said in a statement Thursday that a criminal case has been opened into the death, and that an investigation is under way.

The woman died of a suspected heart attack at a local police station. Initial news reports said she had been accused of stealing three packs of butter.

But her nephew Valery Sokolov said a police officer told him the case revolved around not

three, but just one pack, for which the woman appeared to have "simply forgotten to pay," the Fontanka news site reported Wednesday.

Local prosecutors later cleared the pensioner of committing any crime, saying the woman might not have seen the products lying under her bag when she was standing at the cash register, Russian News Service reported.

The report cited prosecutors as saying that video footage showed the woman tried to pay for the products "with trembling hands," but that shop employees refused to listen to her and instead decided to call the police.

Yelena Topoleva-Soldunova, a member of Russia's Civic Chamber consultative body, denounced the handling of the case by police and store security guards and called for a thorough investigation, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"Did nobody see that this was an elderly person and that even if a theft had occurred, maybe that issue could have been resolved on the spot, without taking the old woman to a police station?" Topoleva-Soldunova was quoted as saying.

"It remains questionable whether an elderly person had to be escorted to a police station over three packs of butter," she added.

The Fontanka news site later reported that the pensioner was a survivor of the Siege of Leningrad during World War II, when Nazi forces cut off supplies to the city now known as St. Petersburg. More than 600,000 starved to death during the siege, which lasted from 1941 to 1944.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/02/05/russian-pensioner-who-died-in-police-custody-possibly-wrongly-accused-a43594