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Russia Rejects Rights Court's Recommendations for Combatting Police Torture

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Ivan Sekretarev / AP

Russia has declined to fulfill recommendations of the European Court on Human Rights (ECHR) to combat torture during police detention. The authorities stated their position in response to an ECHR complaint from a resident of St. Petersburg, the RBC news site reported.

The complaint, filed by Tatiana Shmeleva, alleges that Shmeleva's son, Denis Vyrzhikovsky, was beaten to death in police detention in 2010. In September 2016, the Strasbourg-based ECHR proposed that the Russian government should settle the case with Shemeleva by implementing systemic measures to combat police brutality.

Ilnur Sharapov, a lawyer from the "Legal Zone" rights organization representing Shmeleva in court, suggested several possible measures: installing security cameras in all police stations, medical exams for detainees, stricter rules for police communication with detainees, and increasing the number of investigators handling cases of police misconduct.

Sharapov also asked the ECHR to force Russia to reopen the investigation into Vyrzhikovsky's death. Despite being heard in court multiple times, it was repeatedly sent for further investigation. Currently, the investigation has been suspended.

However, in an official letter signed by Deputy Justice Minister Georgy Matyushkin, the Russian authorities declined the ECHR's offer — although the government did acknowledge that the police violated Vyrzhikovsky's right to life and humane treatment.

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Police came to the apartment Vyrzhikovsky shared with his partner, Olga Zverkova, in St. Petersburg in October 2010 to investigate Zverkova for fraud. The officers detained the couple and took them to a district police station, where they were placed in separate cells. There, police beat both Vyrzhikovsky and Zverkova.

To hide their crime, the officers took the couple to another police station and informed the staff that they had found Vyrzhikovsky and Zverkova intoxicated and injured on the street. The two detainees were placed in separate cells.

The next morning, police officers called an ambulance for Vyrzhikovsky, and he was placed in hospital, where he died eight days later from a pulmonary embolism. Doctors found he was also suffering from severe bruising and cerebral endema.

The five officers allegedly involved in the torture were tried in court twice. During the second trial, all five were sentenced to multi-year prison sentences. However, an appellate court subsequently overturned the ruling in 2015.

According to Shmeleva and Sharapov's complaint to the ECHR, there have been two other cases in which Russia acknowledged torture in police custody and paid compensation to the complainants, but declined to take systemic measures against torture.

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