

ROMANIA

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EXTERNAL

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Alleged Torture of Costel Covalciuc

AI CONCERN: Amnesty International is concerned that Costel Covalciuc was allegedly tortured by police and that he died in suspicious circumstances while in police custody.

BACKGROUND; On 29 June 1993 at around 7.30pm Costel Covalciuc, a 35-year-old labourer from Dorohoi, was arrested by two police officers at his home in Dobrogeanu-Gherea number 84 for allegedly threatening his wife and mother-in-law with a knife during a quarrel. On 30 June, after a summary court hearing under Law number 61/91, Costel Covalciuc was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. The next day, his appeal for re-examination of the case was rejected in the same court, this time in the presence of the local prosecutor and a defence lawyer, appointed by the court.

On 4 July 1993 word reached his family that Costel Covalciuc had died that morning and that his body was in the hospital morgue. Several members of the family who went to the morgue before the autopsy told representatives of the Romanian Helsinki Committee that the body of the deceased "was barefoot in sandals, his shirt open, with blood-smearred hands, unbuttoned trousers, and many bruises on the body, throat and temples". The description of these injuries is consistent with the statements made by a nurse who saw the body when it was brought to the hospital and a patient who observed the body before it was taken to the morgue.

Several days later, Calina H_{ngale}, who was detained in the same police station from 2 to 4 July, told Viorica Covalciuc, Costel's wife, and Maria Dascalachi that while in detention she heard a man crying: "Don't kill me! I've got six growing children!" (Costel Covalciuc was father of six children.)

According to the report made by the Dorohoi police, during the night between 3 and 4 July, Costel Covalciuc complained of abdominal pains. After he started to vomit blood, on the morning of 4 July, a doctor was called to examine Costel in his detention cell. Dr Eugen Gavriliu came to the police station between 9am and 9.15am to find Costel Covalciuc in a state of shock. He could not determine the cause of haemorrhage and recommended that the prisoner should immediately be taken to the hospital.

Costel Covalciuc was taken in a police car to the Dorohoi hospital at 11am. Two nurses who came to the car with a stretcher found the body already cold and a doctor subsequently came to determine that the patient had deceased.

After the autopsy, performed on 5 July 1993, Constantin Covalciuc, Costel's father, was given a form completed by coroner Busca which stated that Costel Covalciuc's death was of a "non-violent" type and that it was caused by "an acute cardio-vascular insufficiency" (a heart attack). The autopsy reportedly also noted that the death resulted from "miocard ebilica, a degenerative cardiac disease due to chronic alcohol abuse and vascular dystrophy." Dr Bucsa reportedly suspected that arterial (heart) spasms could have been produced due to abstinence syndromes.

Costel Covalciuc's medical records at the local hospital (where he registered for the first time in 1985) show that in the period 1990 to 1993 he had a clean bill of health at the annual check-ups.

The Military Prosecutor of Ia_i, who investigated the death of Costel Covalciuc concluded that the victim was not subjected to ill-treatment in detention and that external lesions on the body of the deceased could have resulted from "compression".