

No trial for death of Chovanec in Charleroi police cell, states Prosecutor's Office

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Credit: Police footage

The police are not responsible for the death of Jozef Chovanec (38), the Slovakian man who died after an incident in a cell at Charleroi Airport almost five years ago, meaning no one will have to stand trial for his death, announced the Charleroi Public Prosecutor's Office on Monday evening.

On 23 February 2018, Chovanec was taken to a police cell at Charleroi Airport because he did

not have the necessary documents to board a plane to Slovakia and reportedly also pushed a flight attendant. That night in the cell, he behaved strangely and banged his head against the wall until it was covered in blood, after which six police officers entered his cell to restrain him.

His face was covered with a blanket, a man sat on him for minutes and a female colleague **gave a Hitler salute.**

After 40 minutes, an ambulance operator gave Chovanec an injection with a sedative, but he went into cardiac arrest and ended up in a coma. He was taken to hospital but died there several days later.

All of this was visible from cell camera footage that leaked in 2020, leading to **public outrage in both Belgium and Slovakia.** Last Thursday, the case came before the council chamber and it turned out that the Public Prosecutor's Office did not want to prosecute any of the five officers or the doctor, **De Standaard** reports.

'Self-inflicted injuries'

According to the court experts' report, it was Chovanec who fatally injured himself by hanging his head

injured himself by banging his head against the cell walls. The suffocation by the officers afterwards would not be the cause of death. However, Chovanec's relatives and the experts appointed by them – including the well-known Flemish forensic pathologist Professor Wim Van De Voorde – dispute this.

They believe that suffocation is the most plausible cause of death and have requested an additional investigation. "You can imagine that [Chovanec's] widow was shocked when she heard that the Public Prosecutor's Office is not taking anything to court," lawyer Ann Van de Steen told **the Belgian press**. "But we are not going to give in."

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"We find the position of the Public Prosecutor's Office incomprehensible" she added. "It is

incomprehensible, she added. It is not like you can say that there is no evidence of guilt, can you? There are so many contradictions. At the very least there should be a discussion in court.”

Now, the investigating judge must decide whether an extra investigation will be carried out. If it will not, the lawyer can still appeal. Only when the entire procedure has been completed will the case be returned to the court in order to make a final decision on whether someone should be on trial.