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Russian Finance Ministry ordered to pay acquitted art expert Basner \$36,000



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ST. PETERSBURG, April 26 (RAPSI, Mikhail Telekhov) – The St. Petersburg City Court has collected 2.25 million rubles (about \$36,000) from the Russian Finance Ministry in favor of prominent art expert Yelena Basner acquitted of fraud, RAPSI has learnt in the court.

A lower court's ruling denying compensation for expectation damages to Basner, who demanded 1.5 million rubles (\$24,000) from the state, was therefore overturned.

From April 2014 to January 2015, during investigation into the art expert, Basner placed under house arrest could not provide consulting services to Bukowskis auction house abroad under a signed contract, her lawyer said earlier.

In February, the Dzerzhinsky District Court of St. Petersburg denied the motion and explained that Basner could receive compensation for the loss of salary, but not for the loss of expectation.

The St. Petersburg City Court disagreed with the lower court's arguments and ordered the state to pay Basner an indexing 2.25-million-ruble compensation.

Basner, a former employee of the Bukowskis Auction House as well as the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, was investigated over the painting "In restaurant" attributed to Boris Grigoryev, a well-known Russian artist of the first half of the 20th century. The painting, which was allegedly examined by Basner in 2009 and sold for \$250,000, was proven to be a fake in 2011.

The art expert was arrested on January 31, 2014. She was charged with large-scale fraud and placed under house arrest. In January 2015, a court in St. Petersburg released Basner from the house arrest.

According to investigators, in the summer of 2009, Mikhail Aranson, who is now wanted by police, in collaboration with unknown co-conspirators invited Basner to the criminal conspiracy of selling the fake painting. Investigators alleged that Basner made up a sham story about the painting's history and found the buyer, a publisher Leonid Shumakov. Being convinced of the painting's authenticity he proposed his close friend, St. Petersburg art collector Andrey Vasilyev, to buy the painting.

Eventually, Vasilyev bought the fake painting for €180,000, whereas its real price was 12,000 rubles (€160).

Prosecutors have asked the court to sentence Basner to 4 years in prison, impose a fine of 500,000 rubles (about \$6,500 at the current exchange rate) on her and order to pay the collector 16.5 million rubles (\$215,500) in compensation.

However, Basner was found not guilty on May 17, 2016. The St. Petersburg City Court upheld her acquittal on August 11, 2016.