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Forced Feeding and Artificial Feeding of Convicts: Terminological Dispute or Substantive Difference

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Abstract

Introduction: the article discusses the possibility of replacing the term “forced feeding”, used in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation, with the term “artificial feeding”, enshrined in a number of international documents. *Results:* the term “artificial feeding” is by its nature medical (non-legal) and includes several possible ways of feeding a person in an unnatural way: both prohibited by international acts and permitted by them. At the same time, in the declarations of the World Medical Association (WMA), which specifically regulate the actions of doctors in situations where convicts refuse to take food, “forced feeding” refers to any artificial feeding of a convict carried out against his/her will. In this regard, the inclusion of the term “artificial feeding” in the Penal Code of the Russian Federation without changing the essence of domestic regulation of the problem under consideration is pointless, since such a change will still not ensure compliance of domestic legislation with the WMA recommendations, and the term “artificial feeding” does not fully convey the meaning of the institution established in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation. At the same time, although forced feeding can cause physical and moral suffering to convicts, as well as encroach on the autonomy of their personality, it seems inappropriate to exclude the possibility of forced feeding of convicts from legislation, since the institution of forced feeding in the domestic legal system lets the state fulfil its duty to protect the life and health of persons in penitentiary institutions and achieve the goal of correcting convicts.

Keywords: forced feeding, artificial feeding, nutrition of convicts, international standards, penitentiary medicine, deprivation of liberty, goals of penal legislation.

5.1.4. Criminal law sciences.

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Introduction

The institution of forced feeding of convicts for medical reasons, established in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation and largely inconsistent with foreign approaches to the legal regulation of situations when convicts refuse to take food, is still debatable among domestic penitentiary scientists. The content and the term used to name this legal institution are discussed. According to I.A. Davydova, I.N. Korobova and A.N. Siryakov, the term “forced feeding” is vague, does not fully comply with the requirements of international legal acts and should be replaced with “artificial feeding”, which is more correct and reflects requirements of international documents [1, p. 142].

In this article, we will identify how the terms “forced feeding” and “artificial feeding” are presented in domestic and foreign literature and international legal acts to answer the question whether the issue of possible replacement of one concept by another is solely a dispute about terms or there really is an essential difference between these concepts? Taking into account differences in domestic and foreign approaches to the legal regulation of the actions of penitentiary officers in case of refusal of convicts to take food, we will assess the feasibility of including the term “artificial feeding” in domestic legislation.

Methodology

The main provisions of this article are based on works of Russian and foreign scientists, WMA recommendations, provisions of international standards of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, as well as decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. At the same time, it takes into account the fact that the Russian Federation withdrew from the Council of Europe on March 16, 2022 and ceased its participation in a number of European conventions. According to V.I. Seliverstov, this led to the weakened influence of the international legal factor on penal legislation and the practice of execution of deprivation of liberty [2, pp. 21–22]. It weakened the influence, but it did not exclude it. Therefore, though Russia withdrew from the Council of Europe, legislative and law enforcement problems based on European human rights solutions. It should be based on the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

of the Russian Federation of March 15, 2022 “On the launch of the procedure for withdrawal from the Council of Europe”, according to which “over the years, through joint efforts, much has been done to develop Russian legislation and law enforcement practice, strengthen the system of ensuring human rights in our country, including through the implementation of the norms of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Russian legislation”. In this regard, “the already adopted rulings of the European Court of Human Rights will be further in force, if they do not contradict the Constitution of the Russian Federation”. [3]

Research

In Russian literature, the term “artificial feeding” is usually considered as purely medical, and therefore does not require reflection in legal regulation. So, A.P. Skiba and A.A. Pavlenko point out that in medicine, when natural nutrition is impossible (through the mouth), the term “artificial feeding” is used, which includes several ways (ways) of introducing nutrients into the body: 1) enterally (through a gastric or nosogastric probe); 2) parenterally (intravenously or intramuscularly, bypassing the gastrointestinal tract); 3) with the help of a nutritious (drip) enema (this method is used as an auxiliary (additional to other methods) and is designed to inject a large amount of fluid into the body) [4, p. 145].

According to most domestic scientists, forced feeding of convicts from a medical point of view is always artificial feeding, and this fact, due to its obviousness, does not require special reflection in legislation. However, as mentioned above, foreign researchers describe the existence of essential differences between “forced feeding” and “artificial feeding” and indicate the need to consolidate the latter term in national legal regulation.

Thus, in 1975, the WMA Declaration of Tokyo was adopted by the 29th World Medical Assembly, which contains recommendations on the position of doctors regarding torture, punishment and other torments, as well as inhumane or humiliating treatment in connection with arrest or detention. For the first time, this international document consolidated the position on the inadmissibility of the use of artificial feeding in relation to persons who refused to

eat and were capable of forming an unimpaired and rational judgment about consequences of their decision [5]

This approach was developed in the WMA Declaration of Malta on Hunger Strikers, adopted by the 43rd World Medical Assembly in 1991 and for the first time drew the line between “forced feeding” and “artificial feeding” [6].

At the same time, the wording of the WMA Declaration of Malta in the 2006 edition gives member states of the association some interpretation freedom: on the one hand, the declaration explicitly allows the possibility of artificial feeding of a hunger striker only in situations where such medical manipulation does not conflict with the explicit will of such a person. On the other hand, the declaration prohibits forced feeding, but does not define this concept, and establishes a direct ban on feeding convicts only when it is accompanied by the use of methods of physical or mental violence against a convict or is intended to influence other convicts.

Accordingly, the WMA Declaration of Malta may be interpreted as follows: the declaration allows for the possibility of artificial feeding of convicts even in cases where it contradicts the explicit will of the convict, but is carried out without applying methods of physical or mental influence to him/her (for example, in a situation when a convict who has declared a hunger strike is unconscious or he/she is so weak physically that he/she is unable to resist the staff feeding him/her artificially).

Apparently, the authors of the proposal to include the term “artificial feeding” in Russian legislation were guided by this interpretation of the text of the cited international document. So, I.A. Davydova, I.N. Korobova and A.N. Siryakov indicate that “the proposed term will mean such feeding, which is carried out in order to maintain the lives of convicts, can be used against their will (emphasis added), but without the use of torture methods, humiliation and violence”. [1, p. 148]

Meanwhile, amendments to the WMA Dec-

laration of Malta made by the 68th WMA General Assembly in 2017 show the dubiousness of the above approach to the interpretation of the text of this document. So, in 2017, the text of the declaration was supplemented with the following provision: “all kinds of interventions for enteral or parenteral feeding against the will of the mentally competent hunger striker are to be considered as “forced feeding”. Forced feeding is never ethically acceptable” [7].

In addition, the WMA Declaration of Malta indicated for the first time that rectal hydration, i.e. ensuring the flow of fluid into the body through the rectum using a nutritional enema, is not and must never be used as a form of therapy for rehydration or nutritional support in fasting patients (regardless of the patient’s will) [7].

The 2017 amendments to the WMA Declaration of Malta allow us to conclude that the position of the World Medical Association regarding artificial and forced feeding correlation does not in fact contradict the approach adopted in domestic legal science: the term “artificial feeding” is medical and covers all possible ways of implementing this medical manipulation, while the term “forced feeding” by its nature is not medical, but legal and covers artificial feeding, carried out against the will of the person against whom it is applied.

At the same time, by adopting amendments in 2017 that clarified the content of the terms “artificial feeding” and “forced feeding”, the WMA clearly outlined its position regarding artificial feeding, carried out, although against the will of a starving person, but without using any violence against him/her. From the point of view of the association, any artificial feeding carried out against the explicit will of a starving convict constitutes forced feeding and should be prohibited.

Visually, the stance of the World Medical Association on the relationship between concepts of “artificial feeding” and “forced feeding” and the ethical acceptability of the use of various types of artificial feeding can be presented as follows:

Table 1. Methods of artificial feeding of convicts (according to the WMA)

Artificial feeding		
Method 1 (enteral)	Method 2 (parenterally)	Method 3 (nutritional enema)

It is ethically acceptable if a hunger strike agrees; a hunger striker is unable to express his/her will, there is no pre-expressed prohibition on the use of artificial feeding	It is ethically unacceptable regardless of the will of a hunger striker
It is ethically unacceptable if it contradicts the explicit will of a hunger striker – forced feeding	

The above together makes it clear that the replacement of the term “forced feeding” used in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation with the term “artificial feeding” understood as feeding applied against the will of the convicted person, but without the use of torture methods, humiliation and violence as proposed by I.A. Davydova, I.N. Korobova and A.N. Siryakov, will not solve the task set by the authors – to ensure compliance of domestic regulation of the actions of penitentiary officers in a situation where convicts refuse to eat with requirements of international legal acts.

In such circumstances, the proposal for the need for such a replacement (exclusion of the term “forced feeding” from the norms of current legislation, without excluding the very possibility of feeding a convict carried out against his/her will) is nothing more than the development of a dispute about terms and cannot be considered appropriate. Here are two additional arguments to support this conclusion:

First, the term chosen to name a phenomenon should most accurately reflect the meaning (essence) of this phenomenon. The explanatory dictionary of the Russian language defines the meaning of the adjective “forced” as “committed, carried out not voluntarily, forcibly, under duress”, and the adjective “artificial” as “similar to natural, replacing something natural” [8]. At the same time, it seems obvious that in the absolute majority of cases, artificial feeding of a convict who has declared a hunger strike and has not stopped it until he/she has a life-threatening condition is carried out against the will of such a convict and using certain methods of coercion (i.e., it is inherently forced). It is this circumstance, and not the fact that such medical manipulation replaces the natural way of eating, that is the key feature of the phenomenon under consideration, characterizing it from a legal, not a medical point of view. In this regard, it is the term “forced feeding” that best reflects the content of the legal institution established

in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation.

Second, contrary to the position of I.A. Davydova, I.N. Korobova and A.N. Siryakov, the use of the term “forced feeding” in national legislation does not exclude the possibility of bringing the legal institution in question into line with the requirements of international legal acts, including the requirement of inadmissibility of degrading treatment of convicts. Thus, in the foreign literature it is noted that the content of the term “forced feeding” used in the decisions of the ECHR does not differ significantly from the content of the term “artificial feeding” used in the documents of the World Medical Association. Thus, pointing out in the texts of its decisions the inadmissibility of the use of certain forced feeding methods and the need to limit the scope of artificial feeding of convicts exclusively to cases of threat to their lives, the European Court uses the term “force-feeding” in relation to those cases of feeding convicts carried out against their will, which the court considered to meet the requirements of the European Convention on human rights. [9, c. 29]

Thus, the inclusion of the term “artificial feeding” in domestic penitentiary legislation can be considered appropriate only in the case of a fundamental change in the domestic approach to regulating the problem under consideration and a complete rejection of forced feeding of convicts carried out against their will, i.e. in the case of bringing national legislation into line with the requirements of the World Medical Association (the Russian Federation is not its member). Are such fundamental changes necessary for Russia?

So, it is reasonable to consider motives that prompted the World Medical Association to recommend a complete ban on forced feeding of convicts carried out against their will. The analysis of texts of WMA declarations of Malta and Tokyo reveals the following:

First, the prohibition of forced feeding (as well as any other treatment) of convicts carried out against their will is considered by the

as a guarantee of the realization of the right of convicts to personal dignity. Thus, the WMA Declaration of Tokyo explicitly states that “the fundamental function of a doctor is to alleviate person’s suffering, and no personal, social or political motives can prevail over this most important task” [5].

The same logic (emphasis on the need to respect the dignity of the individual) can be traced in the WMA Declaration of Malta, which directly indicates that “from an ethical point of view, it is better to allow a person to die peacefully (the emphasis added) than to subject him/her to repeated interventions against his/her will” [7].

The second motive is the need to respect the autonomy of the convicted person. The Malta Declaration of the BMA stipulates that “doctors should respect the autonomy (the emphasis added) of persons capable of making independent decisions, even if this is expected to lead to harm” [7].

It should be noted that the above approach, based on the priority protection of the dignity and autonomy of the will of the convicted person, is very common in foreign literature. At the same time, it is no coincidence that the position described above on the need for a complete ban on forced feeding of convicts, carried out against their will, arose precisely in the World Medical Association, i.e. within the framework of the professional association of doctors (an international non-governmental organization). Thus, the researchers rightly point out that these principles stem mainly from research in the field of bioethics, not jurisprudence, and are by no means fully reflected in national legislation and practice of interstate bodies [10, p. 15].

Thus, the study of the ECHR practice, the list of participating countries of which largely echoes the list of states whose representatives participate in the activities of the WMA, allows us to conclude that it is impossible to resolve the problem under consideration solely based on the existence of human rights to personal dignity, personal integrity and autonomy of the will, in isolation from the protection of other rights and freedoms provided for by the 1950 European Convention, in particular the right to life guaranteed by Article 2 of the European Convention.

Thus, the issue of the admissibility of forced

feeding of convicts from the point of view of compliance with the requirements of the ECHR was considered by the European Commission on Human Rights (the predecessor of the European Court) back in 1984 as part of the case “H. against Germany”. In its decision, the European Commission did not deny the fact that forced feeding of convicts contains elements degrading to the dignity of the individual. At the same time, the Commission pointed out the inevitability of a contradiction in such situations between a person’s right to personal dignity and physical integrity and the obligation of a state party to the Convention (Article 2), to take positive actions aimed at saving the life of a person placed in a penitentiary institution. Based on the results of the case examination, the commission concluded that, by carrying out forced feeding of the convicted person, the German authorities “acted solely in the interests of the applicant”, and recognized this practice as not contrary to the requirements of the European Convention [11].

The ECHR was more categorical in its position on the priority of the state’s obligation to preserve the life of a convict (Article 2 of the European Convention) over the observance of the convict’s right to personal dignity (Article 3 of the European Convention) in 2005 when considering the case *Nevmerzhitiskii v. Ukraine*. “A measure that is therapeutically necessary from the point of view of generally recognized principles of medicine cannot be considered as inhuman and degrading to human dignity. The same can be said about forced feeding aimed at saving the life of a particular prisoner who refuses to take food” [12].

It is worth noting that the ECHR has taken such a firm position on the possibility of violating the autonomy of the will and personal inviolability of convicts, including using methods containing degrading elements, including due to the fact that the court consistently defends the position regarding the imposition of increased responsibility on the state for the life and health of persons in penitentiary institutions. For example, references to the “special responsibility” of the state for the well-being of such persons and “stricter obligations” of the state to protect their lives can be found in the text of the Ruling of the European Court of Justice in the case “*Pretty v. United Kingdom*” [13].

It should be noted that the above position on the increased responsibility of the state for the preservation of the life and health of persons placed in penitentiary institutions, as one of the grounds for the existence in the legislation of the institution of forced feeding of convicts, used against their will, is reflected in the domestic literature. "As a general rule, it is the right of every person to make a decision on their own, whether they want to live or not, whether they want to eat or not. However, by isolating criminals from society and placing them in a special institution, the state assumes the obligation not only to execute the punishment, but also to preserve their health at the same time" [4, p. 41].

Similarly, in domestic legislation (including in international acts to which the Russian Federation is a party), the position is reflected that the very fact of causing physical or moral suffering to a convicted person is not enough to conclude that the right to dignity of such a person has been violated or a person has been tortured.

Thus, Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984 defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person". At the same time, the same article of the Convention stipulates that "the definition of torture does not include pain or suffering that arises only as a result of legitimate sanctions, is inseparable from these sanctions or is caused by them accidentally".

Similarly, Article 7 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which reveals the content of the principle of humanity, indicates that "punishment and other measures of criminal law applied to a person who has committed a crime cannot have a purpose (emphasis added) of causing physical suffering or humiliation of human dignity".

The interpretation of the above provisions makes it possible to understand that both physical suffering and actions that humiliate human dignity to one degree or another are an immanent component of such a type of criminal punishment as deprivation of liberty. Following a significant part of the norms that constitute regime requirements for prisoners (for example, restriction of freedom of movement outside one cell (for convicts held in cell-type premises),

wearing standard-issue clothing, the need to be regularly subjected to personal inspection) causes both physical and moral suffering to convicts. However, these legal requirements are not considered as measures that infringe on personal dignity of convicts, since the purpose of the existence of these norms in the criminal law is not to cause such suffering to convicts, but to achieve punishment goals established by law.

The above together indicates that the fact of causing physical or moral suffering to a person sentenced to imprisonment who refused to eat during forced feeding, with the aim of preserving the life of the convicted person, cannot be considered as a violation of the convicted person's right to personal dignity, and therefore should not become a reason for excluding the institution of forced nutrition, carried out against the will of the convicted person, from domestic legislation.

A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding the argument that forced nutrition violates the autonomy of the convict's will.

Thus, V.I. Seliverstov rightly points out that domestic penal legislation proceeds from the paternalistic (paternal) approach of the state to its citizens (in relation to penal law – to convicts), which is clearly manifested in the proclamation of correction of convicts (that is, the formation of a respectful attitude among them to a person, society, work, norms, rules and traditions of human community and stimulation of their law-abiding behavior) as one of the main goals of penal legislation [14, p. 407].

At the same time, it should be noted that fixing the correction of convicts as the main purpose of penal legislation in Part 2 of Article 1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation fully complies with the requirements of international legal acts to which the Russian Federation is a party. Thus, Part 3 of Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 establishes that "the penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation". Therefore, the preservation of correctional orientation of penal legislation excludes the possibility of abandoning the institution of forced feeding of convicts used against their will.

Thus, proclaiming correction of convicts as

one of the main goals of penal enforcement legislation and the established procedure for completing and serving sentences (regime) as one of the main means of correcting convicts, the state significantly restricts the operation of personal autonomy in the penitentiary sphere. Regime requirements regulate in an almost comprehensive way the vital activity of those sentenced to imprisonment, without assuming the need to take into account the will of the convicted person in relation to compliance with these requirements. In this sense, the fact that forced feeding of convicts to imprisonment is carried out regardless of the will of convicts themselves fully fits into the general model of legal relations that have developed between convicts and employees of penitentiary institutions.

At the same time, a number of penitentiary researchers point out that prisoner's conscious refusal from eating constitutes a violation of the regime of serving punishment on the part of the convicted person [15, p. 81; 16, p. 221; 17, p. 119]. Regardless of whether refusal to eat constitutes a violation of any specific provision of the regime requirements, it seems obvious that failure to take measures aimed at preventing the death of a convicted person who refuses to eat excludes the possibility of further achieving the goal of his/her correction.

Thus, the fact of violation of the autonomy of the will of a convict who is subjected to forced feeding does not contradict fundamental provisions of domestic penal law, based on a paternalistic approach and maintaining a correctional orientation towards convicts.

The above together makes it clear that neither the possibility of causing physical or moral suffering to convicts subjected to forced nutrition, nor the violation of their personal autonomy can serve as sufficient arguments to exclude the provision on forced nutrition of

convicts who refuse to eat, regardless of the direction of their will from domestic legislation. In this regard, replacement of the term "forced feeding" used in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation by the term "artificial feeding" proposed by the World Medical Association is also inappropriate.

Conclusion

The term "artificial feeding" is by its nature medical (non-legal) and includes several possible ways to feed a person in an unnatural way: both prohibited by international acts and permitted by them. At the same time, in the WMA Declaration of Malta, which specifically regulates actions of doctors in situations where convicts refuse to eat, "forced feeding" means any artificial feeding of a convict carried out against his/her will. In this regard, the inclusion of the term "artificial feeding" in the Penal Code of the Russian Federation without changing the essence of domestic regulation of the problem under consideration is impractical, since such a change will still not ensure compliance of domestic legislation with the WMA recommendations, and the term "artificial feeding" is not able to fully convey the meaning of the institution established in Part 4 of Article 101 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation. At the same time, although forced feeding can cause physical and moral suffering to convicts, as well as encroach on the autonomy of their personality, a fundamental change in existing regulation and the exclusion from legislation of the possibility of forced feeding of convicts carried out against their will should also be recognized as inappropriate, since the existence of the institution of forced feeding in the domestic legal system is aimed at ensuring enforcement the state is responsible for protecting the life and health of persons in penitentiary institutions, and achieving the goal of correcting convicts.

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