

Poland to Move Smolensk Cross in Bid to End Feud

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A wooden cross raised outside Poland's presidential palace after a Smolensk plane crash killed President Lech Kaczynski and 95 others will be moved to a nearby church in an attempt to end a dispute over who is responsible for the crash.

President-elect Bronislaw Komorowski, who won early elections in June forced by Kaczynski's death, wanted to move the cross earlier, but his bid sparked anger among supporters of the main opposition party, Law and Justice, led by Kaczynski's twin brother, Jaroslaw.

Groups of elderly Kaczynski supporters kept guard around the clock for several days to prevent the removal of the cross, accusing Komorowski and Prime Minister Donald Tusk's Civic Platform, which backs Komorowski, of betraying Poland and the Catholic faith.

Jaroslaw Kaczynski told a recent news conference that removing the cross would be "moral abuse" until a proper memorial was erected on the site, which is on one of Warsaw's most popular streets in the historic Old Town.

Soon afterward, a stand was set up by the cross to collect the signatures of those who wanted the cross removed.

Jaroslav Kaczynski accuses Tusk's government of misconducting an investigation into the crash and has suggested that it is at least partly responsible for organizing the ill-fated trip.

Lech Kaczynski's plane crashed on April 10 while trying to land in thick fog in Smolensk, where the Polish president planned to attend a commemoration ceremony for thousands of Poles killed by Soviet forces in the nearby Katyn forest in 1940.

Jaroslav Kaczynski also has questioned the role of the Smolensk airport's ground control in the accident and criticized Russian authorities' handling of the case after the crash.

Tusk's Civic Platform accuses Jaroslav Kaczynski of using the catastrophe to win political points and has urged confidence in investigations by Polish and Russian officials, who have blamed the crash on pilot error.

Since taking power in 2007, Tusk has sought to improve relations with Russia, which are traditionally strained over historic as well as security issues, after hitting a rocky patch during Jaroslav Kaczynski's rule as prime minister in 2006 and 2007.

A scout organization posted the cross outside Kaczynski's offices following the crash, and tens of thousands of people prayed by it, lit candles or laid flowers.

Details of a ceremony for moving the cross to the nearby Church of St. Anna will be agreed on soon, said a joint statement by the scout organization, the president's chancellery, the Warsaw diocese and the Church of St. Anna.

"This temple is the site of permanent prayers for the tragically perished President Lech Kaczynski, his wife and all victims of the Smolensk catastrophe," the statement said.

(Reuters, MT)

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