

Poland Complains of Delay in Plane Crash Data

August 03, 2010



A Kaczynski supporter holding a rosary during a protest Tuesday at a cross near the presidential palace in Warsaw. **Bartosz Bobkowski**

Poland has complained that Russian officials were being slow in handing over documents needed for a Polish investigation into a plane crash that killed Polish President Lech Kaczynski and other top officials in Smolensk in April.

Polish Interior Minister Jerzy Miller said holes in documentation provided by Russia were preventing the Poles from reaching conclusions on whether anyone in Poland was to blame.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he would ask Moscow for an explanation of delays in making the documents available.

Oleg Yermolov, deputy chairman of the international committee seeking the causes of the crash, declined to comment on the complaints, saying the group is carrying out a “comprehensive” investigation.

Kaczynski's Tu-154 jet crashed as it tried to land in thick fog at the Smolensk airport on April 10, killing all 95 people on board. Crash investigators have blamed the pilot, saying he ignored advice from Russian air traffic controllers to divert the flight elsewhere. Cockpit transcripts have suggested that the pilot might have been under pressure from someone on the plane to land.

Kaczynski was flying to a memorial for 22,000 Polish officers murdered by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's secret police in the 1940 Katyn massacres.

Poland's investigation into the crash is being conducted alongside the main Russian investigation, in which a Polish official is an observer. Both sides are supposed to share their information.

Meanwhile, protesters shouting "Defend the cross!" scuffled with police in Warsaw on Tuesday but managed to prevent Polish officials from moving a cross erected outside the presidential palace in memory of Kaczynski.

About 20 demonstrators stood in front of the wooden cross, pleading with priests who were supposed to move it to the nearby St. Anne's Church. They were supported by a cheering crowd of hundreds gathered behind a police barrier across the street.

Security officials dragged away a few of the chanting, praying protesters — including a woman who tried to tie herself to the cross. But officials decided not to immediately press ahead with the plan, which is opposed by some Kaczynski supporters.

Kaczynski's supporters have turned the cross into a shrine where they focus their grief over the late leader's tragic death. It has also become a source of friction with their political rivals, who argue that the cross should be moved away from state to church ground, with President-elect Bronislaw Komorowski saying the makeshift symbol should not remain in front of a top state building.

(AP, MT, Bloomberg)

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