

Warsaw Unhappy With Crash Investigation

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The  Moscow Times

A Poland official has expressed dissatisfaction with Russia's investigation of the April plane crash that killed Polish President Lech Kaczynski, the first public sign of new tension between Warsaw and Moscow.

Poland's concerns were expressed in a letter handed to Russian investigators by Edmund Klich, Poland's representative in the probe led by the Russian-based Interstate Aviation Committee.

"There is a feeling of a certain deficiency because we haven't received many things that we have wanted to have," said Klich, who was to return to Poland on Thursday as Russian investigators prepare to write a report on their findings.

His remarks to reporters Wednesday suggested that disputes over the investigation could jeopardize a thaw in relations between the countries.

The plane crashed while trying to land in foggy weather near the airport in Smolensk.

Kaczynski, his wife and 94 others were killed. They were on their way to a ceremony in the Katyn forest commemorating the killing of thousands of Poles by the Soviet NKVD secret police in 1940.

Klich said a major concern was that Poland had not received detailed information about Smolensk airport and the procedures followed by its personnel, which he said could be useful in determining why the crash occurred.

"I don't look at those [documents] from the point of view of blame, I look at them from the point of view of a decision's influence on the occurrence of the accident or the circumstances that could have affected the accident," Klich said.

Information about the airport is central to the question of whether the flight should be classified as civilian or military — a potentially crucial point in assigning responsibility for the decision to land in poor weather.

"The Russian side is of the opinion that the flight was considered to be of a civil nature," Klich said. "We have a different opinion."

Interstate Aviation Committee deputy head Oleg Yermolov declined to comment, saying the investigation is not over yet.

A source close to the investigation said recently that should the flight be classified as an international civil one, final responsibility for the landing would lie with the plane's crew, or possibly someone else on board.

Poland insists that the flight should be considered military, meaning more responsibility would lie with the airport's ground crew, the source said.

Another source said that the Smolensk airport, served by Russian military, does not meet the International Civil Aviation Organization's standards of a civilian airport.

"It is a military airport," the source said.

Yermolov said the Interstate Aviation Committee is preparing to draft its final report on the investigation.

Klich said he is anxious to see how the IAC addresses his questions. "I hope it will address those concerns," he said, adding that he was told it should be ready within weeks.

At that point, Poland will have 60 days to review and address it. Then it will be Russia's turn to consider Polish comments and together with Warsaw write a conclusive version.

Poland's top military prosecutor, Krzysztof Parulski, said Thursday that, with Russia's permission, archeologists and geologists would start searching for human remains and debris at the crash site Sept. 30, The Associated Press reported.

He said the site might hold human remains and debris that could be significant to the investigation.

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