

Polish Crash Widow Slams Moscow

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WARSAW — The widow of the Polish air force chief who died in last year's crash in Smolensk that killed Poland's president accused Moscow of slandering her husband by saying he had been drinking and contributed to the disaster.

In emotional public comments a day after a Russian report on the April 10 airliner accident in which 96 Poles died, Ewa Blasik also attacked the Polish government for what she called its "passive" failure to defend the honor of its officers.

Opposition leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski, twin brother of the late President Lech Kaczynski, branded the report by Russia's Interstate Aviation Committee, or IAC, a "joke against Poland."

"The IAC report is a shameful attempt to slander the memory of my husband," Ewa Blasik told a news conference on Thursday.

"There is not a single shred of evidence confirming that my husband mounted pressure or influenced the pilots. ... It is not possible that he had been drinking," she said.

The Interstate Aviation Committee laid blame squarely on the Polish pilots and said they had

come under psychological pressure to land from officials on board the airliner, including air force commander Andrzej Blasik, despite poor weather conditions.

Blasik, who was in the cockpit at the time of the crash, had a blood alcohol level of about 0.06 percent, the report said. That is around typical international limits for driving cars.

The Polish delegation died near Smolensk while flying to a ceremony held in honor of Poles massacred by Soviet secret police at Katyn in 1940.

The air force chief's widow said: "My husband, Andrzej Blasik, was Poland's first pilot and he dedicated all of his life to serving his homeland.

"He was also a man of honor and somebody today is trying to deprive him of that honor in the face of the whole world. The Polish government should defend the dignity of Polish officers, including my husband."

She called the attitude of Prime Minister Donald Tusk's government "passive."

Warsaw, which is conducting its own probe into the crash, has said the Polish side bears a large share of responsibility for the crash but that Russian air controllers and the poor technical facilities at Smolensk airport are also to be blamed.

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