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Top Court Reopens LUKoil Car Crash Probe

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The Constitutional Court on Thursday ordered that a criminal case be reopened into last year's road accident involving LUKoil vice president Anatoly Barkov that resulted in two deaths.

The ruling promises to have a far-reaching impact because it will make it harder for the police to close inquiries into incidents by blaming them on those who died, Igor Trunov, one of the lawyers for the two prominent gynecologists who died in the accident, told Interfax.

The gynecologists, Vera Sidelnikova, 72, and her daugher-in-law Olga Alexandrina, 35, were killed when their car collided head-on with Barkov's Mercedes on the traffic-clogged Leninsky Prospekt in southern Moscow.

City police blamed the accident on the women and closed the case in August. An independent probe by a motorist rights group, the Russian Federation of Car Owners, claimed that Barkov's

car actually caused the crash by swerving into the wrong lane, but the findings were ignored by officials.

The car crash became one of the biggest public scandals of 2010, with the media, bloggers and numerous celebrities accusing investigators of participating in a cover-up for a prominent businessman. Police denied the allegations, and the investigator in the case, Stanislav Lagoiko, told The Moscow Times by telephone earlier this month that the only pressure he had faced was from the victims' relatives.

Alexandrina's husband, Sergei Sidelnikov, died from a cerebral hemorrhage last August that friends said might have been caused by stress from the car crash. Alexandrina's father, Sergei Alexandrin, who has become the guardian of her 2-year-old daughter, has pushed for the case to be reopened.

Moscow's Tverskoi District Court and the Moscow City Court rejected appeals to reopen the case last fall, but the Constitutional Court ruled Thursday that a criminal case cannot be closed over the death of a suspect if relatives insist that it should proceed.

Lawyers for Alexandrina and Sidelnikova said they were pleased with the ruling and would recall lawsuits appealing the case's closure from the European Court of Human Rights.

City police said they will comply with the ruling.

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