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Father Who Killed Air Traffic Controller Detained in Germany

By The Moscow Times

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Vitaly Kaloyev was detained in the Munich airport on the way to a memorial service for a plane crash in which his entire family was killed.

The North Ossetian architect who killed a Danish air traffic controller he blamed for the deaths of his wife and children in a 2002 midair plane collision was detained by police when he arrived in Germany to attend a 10th anniversary memorial service.

Vitaly Kaloyev was taken into custody Saturday at the Munich airport as he arrived for the ceremony at the invitation of the city of Überlingen, where much of the debris from the two planes fell.

"It seems the German authorities don't want to let me attend the memorial service," Kaloyev told Interfax. "For some reason they think my presence there is not necessary, although my entire family died in the accident."

Kaloyev, who was issued a Schengen visa, appealed to North Ossetian leader Taimuraz Mamsurov for help. The Russian consulate reacted quickly and negotiated with German authorities to allow Kaloyev to attend the service, on the condition that he would be accompanied by Russian diplomats.

“They gave me two days to stay in Germany. Then I have to return to Russia,” said Kaloyev, who arrived in the country with two of his brother’s children.

Authorities told Kaloyev that his visa was issued by mistake and that a Swiss delegation had asked that he be denied entry to the country.

In July 2002, a Bashkirian Airlines Tu-154 passenger jet collided with a DHL Boeing 757 cargo plane above southern Germany after air traffic controller Peter Nielsen incorrectly told the Tu-154 to descend. Seventy-one people were killed, including 52 children and Kaloyev’s wife and two children, a 10-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. Kaloyev was one of the first relatives to reach the scene of the crash, and he found his daughter’s body 3 kilometers away.

Kaloyev traveled to Switzerland in 2004 and fatally stabbed Nielsen, 36, who had worked for the Swiss air traffic control company monitoring the flight, outside his home. Kaloyev was sentenced to eight years in prison but was released after two.

Upon his return to Russia, authorities in North Ossetia, where he was viewed as a hero, appointed him deputy minister of architecture and construction.

The Swiss government has demanded that Kaloyev pay 150,000 Swiss francs ($158,000) for prison costs, but Kaloyev has refused, saying that even if he had the money, it would be better to give it to an orphanage or “anywhere but Switzerland.”

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