

My Priceless Loss in Kazan Plane Crash

By [James Stanton](#)

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A month ago today, my girlfriend, Yana Baranova, and her British colleague, Donna Bull, boarded Tartarstan Airlines flight No. 363 from Moscow's Domodedovo Airport to Kazan. The airplane crashed when it attempted to land at Kazan Airport, killing all 50 on board.

Yana and Donna were representing Bellerbys College, a subsidiary of Study Group, an international educational supplier focused on providing children aged 15 and older the opportunity to improve their language skills and gain new life experiences by studying abroad.

Yana herself was 26. She was an incredibly focused and mature businesswoman. Her colleagues describe her as a "rising star" of their industry, and her drive would have doubtless carried her beyond her own expectations.

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I met Yana while working for a competitor in Astana, Kazakhstan, and can testify to the intense travel that is necessary in the industry.

Yana loved seeing new places and having new experiences, so this part of the job was definitely one of the things that attracted her to it.

It is scant consolation, but when I think about why she was on that plane, at least I know that she died doing something she enjoyed.

She had worked with Donna in different parts of the Commonwealth of Independent States on a number of occasions and considered her more than just a work colleague. Indeed they were so engaged in conversation that we were unable to speak for a last time before they boarded the plane. They never disembarked.

I saw firsthand the close relationships Yana built with her colleagues at a memorial event organized by the Moscow office of Study Group. The warmth and support they and Yana's friends have shown me throughout this difficult time has really touched me, and I would like to express my sincere thanks for everything they have done.

In seven weeks, Russia will be thrust into the spotlight. The Sochi Olympics are as much a showcase for international business as they are for sport. The stadiums and huge infrastructure projects that have been built are a testament to the achievements of a Group of Eight nation that has incredible potential for economic and social progression.

Why, then, was the deaths of 50 civilians greeted with indifference and a lack of surprise boarding on apathy?

This seems to be a particularly Russian phenomenon, and I will always remember the words that the Emergency Situations Ministry psychologist said to me when discussing the tragedy: "This is Russia."

It has now emerged that the pilot of flight No. 363 may not have been sufficiently trained to land the 30-year-old plane. He had acquired his type rating and license at an aviation school that was later shut down. But such was the demand for pilots that he found work without any difficulty.

The plane itself had been leased by companies in Brazil, Bulgaria, Uganda and other countries during its life. While they no longer had a use for it, a Russian airline was happy to fly it intensively — whatever the cost. And tragically, that cost became the lives of 50 people.

This was neither a one-off incident nor an unpreventable tragedy. It is an example of the continual systemic failure in the regulation of all commerce and industry that sadly continues to persist in Russia.

How can this country declare itself open for business yet not adhere to International Civil Aviation Organization standards that are accepted elsewhere throughout the G20 nations?

How can a country with pretensions to be a world power allow such a failure to occur?

I would suggest that the absence of safeguards and the death of these 50 civilians indicate how a murky regulatory system can lead to horrific consequences. Words will not bring back Yana or Donna. But preventative action could avert further loss of life.

The Russian government is paying lip service to the idea that they will investigate this event and rectify the failures that led to this disaster. But such promises have been made before, and nothing has changed.

I hope with all my heart that no one will have to endure what I and 49 other families have been through. But unless there are dramatic reforms, I fear that it is only a matter of time.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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