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In Poland, 2 Russian Flight Controllers Suspects in 2010 Crash

By The Moscow Times

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An improvised memorial near the site of a plane crash that killed Polish then-President Lech Kaczynski in 2010.

Poland's military prosecutors said Friday they have identified two Russian flight controllers as suspects for allegedly contributing to the 2010 plane crash in Russia that killed Poland's President Lech Kaczynski and 95 others.

Warsaw Regional Prosecutor Col. Ireneusz Szelag said the investigators want to question the two Russians, and are seeking Moscow's permission. A number of Polish flight officials have already been questioned.

Presenting a report from experts, Szelag said that the chief responsibility rested with the flight crew, who took wrong decisions, were not licensed to fly in conditions of poor visibility and pushed ahead with the landing in adverse conditions.

Two Russian controllers were communicating with the Polish presidential plane as it attempted to land in dense fog at a rudimentary airport in Smolensk on April 10, 2010.

The Tu-154M plane clipped trees and crashed some 500 meters from the runway, killing all aboard.

Concerning the Russian controllers, Szelag cited penal code articles that refer to unintentional contribution to a traffic catastrophe, which carries a maximum sentence of eight years in prison.

An earlier report by aviation experts said the controllers allowed the crew to attempt landing at the poorly equipped airport and provided imprecise guidance.

Russian law and bilateral agreements should be taken into account, as Poland awaits Moscow's reply, Szelag said.

Two Poles are under criminal investigation for allegedly contributing to the crash. According to the prosecutors, they appointed a crew that was not licensed to fly in poor visibility. The criminal investigation into the crash continues and Friday's announcements were not final.

Poland has been asking Moscow in vain to return the wreckage.

The announcement comes at a time when Poland's ties with Russia are tense over the deadly conflict in neighboring Ukraine between the government forces and Russia-backed rebels.

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