

Victims' Families Call on Russia to Reopen Investigation Into 2001 Black Sea Crash

November 19, 2015



Relatives of victims of Sibir airlines Tupolev TU-154 plane crash read a passenger list published in a newspaper, in the Black Sea port of Sochi, Oct. 7, 2001.

Victims' families have called on President Vladimir Putin and the Russian prosecutor general to resume investigations into the 2001 crash of a Russian commercial airliner over the Black Sea — which killed all 78 people on board — and reopen a criminal case against the perpetrators, the Kommersant newspaper reported Thursday.

The plane is considered to have been accidentally shot down by Ukrainian forces.

"We think that transferring the case to law enforcement in the country involved in the catastrophe was a mistake," signatories of a letter sent Wednesday to Putin said, referring to Ukraine, Kommersant reported.

The letter stated that a criminal suit was brought to the Russian Prosecutor General's Office

following the crash, and transferred to its Ukrainian counterpart in December the same year.

Ukraine's security council admitted in October 2001 that the plane, a Soviet-made Tu-154 operated by the Russian carrier S7 Airlines, may have been brought down by an errant Ukrainian missile fired during defense exercises, Russian media reported. The plane had been en route from Tel Aviv to the Siberian city of Novosibirsk.

Boris Kalinovsky, the former head of a fund supporting victims' families that was active between 2000 and 2011, argued that the case should be heard by Russian courts, as the airliner could be considered to be part of Russia's jurisdiction.

"We believe that a de facto murder of 78 innocent citizens took place ... on Russian territory, of which the plane was part," he was quoted by Kommersant as saying.

The newspaper reported in December 2013 that S7 had decided against lodging a complaint against Ukrainian courts with the European Court of Human Rights.

Following the crash, Ukraine eventually paid \$15.6 to victims' families.

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