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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Socialite Becomes National Enemy After Mocking Pro-Kremlin Film Crew Killed in Sunday's Plane Crash

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Bozhena Rynska / Facebook

With the year's biggest holiday less than a week away, Russia finds itself reeling from a national tragedy this weekend, when a military plane crashed into the Black Sea, killing nearly a hundred passengers. The victims weren't soldiers but journalists, entertainers, and humanitarian workers, including one famous charity activist whose death makes Sunday's calamity even more horrifying.

For more on the plane crash, see: The Time She Didn't Come Back Alive

The deadly plane crash wasn't the only thing to disgust Russians on Dec. 25, however. Writer and socialite Bozhena Rynska made herself something of a national enemy with a single Facebook post that day, where she thanked God for the deaths of a film crew from the pro-Kremlin television network NTV. "Of course thanks, Lordy, for the bonus of the NTV film

crew, but why did you have to take the others?" she wrote in a post that Facebook later hid behind friends-only privacy settings.

In less facetious remarks, Rynska then accused Russia's Defense Ministry of failing to keep the plane in working order. "Soldiers, in the opinion of the chekist mafia, were created in order to die," she said.

Rynska has a long history with the NTV network. Most recently, in September 2014, she was convicted of assaulting an NTV film crew outside her home in Moscow. Rynska insists that the reporters were to blame for the altercation.

Rynska's comments have provoked fiercely negative responses, and Russia's General Prosecutor has announced that it is investigating the legality of what she wrote. "Certainly, in the event that we uncover any violations of the law, we will take all the necessary measures to respond to the situation," the agency's spokesman told the Interfax news agency on Tuesday.

Maria Katasonova, a right-wing youth activist and an aide in the State Duma, has also formally complained to Russia's Federal Investigative Committee, arguing that Rynska's Facebook post might qualify as illegal hate speech.

Other prominent figures in Russian society, including Russian Esquire's chief editor, Sergey Minaev, and the Kremlin's special advisor on the Internet, German Klimenko, have campaigned to ostracize Rynska and deny her future employment in Russian journalism. Pro-Kremlin television and radio pundit Vladimir Soloviev has even launched a campaign to take away Rynska's Russian citizenship.

Asked at a press conference about Rynska's comments, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called them "complete madness," and warned that "the very harshest reaction in public opinion is absolutely understandable and justified."

For more about Russia's civilian casualties in Moscow's war in Syria, see: Non-Combat Losses in Russia's Ill-Defined War

The backlash against Rynska has already inspired at least one conspiracy theory about an organized campaign to stigmatize the anti-Kremlin opposition. Ilya Klishin, the former Web editor for the independent television network Dozhd, who recently became digital director for RTVi, wrote on Facebook that the chronology of reactions (beginning with pro-Kremlin bloggers and growing to reports in state-run media outlets) suggests some nefarious orchestration, not unlike the allegedly coordinated campaign against Dozhd in 2014, after the TV channel aired a controversial survey asking viewers if they would have abandoned Leningrad to the Nazis.

"It all looks as if someone in some old or not so old square has this enormous remote to control all the attacks," Klishin said.

So far, the very harshest reaction has been an attempt by unknown persons to break into Rynska's home in Moscow. On Tuesday, she claimed on Facebook that someone climbed onto her balcony and tried to enter through a window. When that failed, the intruder taped photographs of the killed NTV reporters to a glass door.

Rynska, for her part, remains unapologetic. Describing the break-in and the photos pasted to her window, she wrote: "I sit here, looking at these faces, and I think: was your ultimate fate worth the kopecks you got for all the lies and dirt you spread against freethinkers?"

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