

Lithuanians Sue Gorbachev Over Deadly Soviet Crackdown

By [AFP](#)

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In front of the TV center in Vilnius, Lithuania, 1991. **Andrey Babushkin / TASS**

Six Lithuanians who lost relatives during Moscow's crackdown on the Baltic state's independence drive filed a lawsuit against former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on Thursday.

The group initiated legal action 31 years to the day since the January 1991 assault, which killed 14 civilians and wounded over 700.

In 2019, a Lithuanian court convicted dozens of Soviet-era officials of war crimes but the country's prosecutors have refused to investigate Gorbachev, who was in power at the time.

The refusal has angered those seeking justice for the crackdown.

The civil lawsuit states that Gorbachev had control of the Soviet military, but failed to stop the "international crime" against Lithuanians seeking freedom after 50 years of Soviet

occupation.

"It is clear that the actions of the military forces... would not have been possible without coordination with Gorbachev," said Robertas Povilaitis, who lost his father.

He said the war crimes trial was "very important but without considering the responsibility of the top commander, justice is not complete."

The Jan. 13, 1991, assault on key buildings shielded by tens of thousands of peaceful independence supporters was part of failed Kremlin efforts to bring Lithuania to heel after its March 1990 secession from the Soviet Union.

Lithuania won recognition from Moscow as an independent state in September 1991.

Most of the 67 people convicted of war crimes in Lithuania for the assault were tried in absentia, including former Soviet defense minister Dmitry Iazov, who died in 2020.

While several Lithuanian Soviet-era officials were jailed for their actions, other suspects have remained out of reach in Russia and Belarus.

Ties between Russia and Lithuania, a nation of 2.8 million, have been rocky since independence, and notably since the Baltic state joined the European Union and NATO in 2004.

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