The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Spain Has 'No Doubt' Kremlin Behind Russian Helicopter Deserter's Death – El Pais

February 22, 2024



Maxim Kuzminov. **Social media**

Spanish intelligence has "no doubt" that its Russian counterparts are behind the mysterious shooting death of a Russian pilot who defected to Ukraine with a military helicopter, the national daily El Pais reported Thursday, citing anonymous sources.

Maxim Kuzminov flew his Mi-8 helicopter into Ukraine in August, saying he opposed Russia's military offensive. Two fellow servicemen unaware of his plans to defect were killed while trying to flee after landing in Ukraine.

Spanish police confirmed this week that the body of a gunshot victim found on Feb. 13 in the town of Villajoyosa near Alicante in southern Spain belonged to Kuzminov. Ukraine's GUR military intelligence also confirmed Kuzminov's death without specifying its cause.

"The only doubt experts have is whether the operation was the work of the Foreign

Intelligence Service (SVR),... the Federal Security Service (FSB) ... or of the Military Intelligence Service (GRU)," El Pais reported, referring to three Russian intelligence agencies.

Citing its sources, the publication said Kuzminov was likely killed by professional hitmen from outside Spain who have since fled abroad.

Related article: Mystery Surrounds Death of Russian Helicopter Deserter

The sources added that they "do not believe" Russian SVR and GRU agents stationed in Madrid — some of whom were expelled after Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago — had direct involvement in the crime.

Anonymous diplomatic sources told El Pais that Spain would give a "forceful response" if an investigation confirmed the involvement of the Russian authorities.

Russia has publicized Kuzminov's assassination as an example to other potential defectors and to avenge his two companions' deaths, according to the sources consulted by El Pais.

Russian media circulated source-based reports revealing Kuzminov's identity this week after initial news of his death under a false Ukrainian name failed to gain traction.

The news outlet El Periodico on Thursday shared a photograph of Kuzminov's Ukrainian passport under the name of 33-year-old Ihor Shevchenko.

Moscow has celebrated Kuzminov's death.

"This traitor and criminal became a moral corpse at the very moment when he planned his dirty and terrible crime," SVR head Sergei Naryshkin said Tuesday without confirming or denying Russian involvement.

In October, Russian state television reported that the GRU had "been given the order" to eliminate Kuzminov.

"It's just a matter of time," a journalist for Russia's Channel One said in a TV report after talking to Russian special forces, who claimed to be on the hunt for the "traitor."

The Kremlin said Tuesday it did not have any information on Kuzminov's death.

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/02/22/spain-has-no-doubt-kremlin-behind-russian-helicopter-deserters-death-el-pais-a84204