

Suspect in Plane Crash Death of Total CEO Seeks Plea Bargain

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Vladimir Martynenko, the plow's driver.

The driver of a snowplow that crashed into the private jet of French oil giant Total's CEO at a Moscow airport last year, killing all on board, is ready to accept a plea bargain, the Izvestia newspaper reported Tuesday, citing the suspect's lawyer.

Vladimir Martynenko was behind the wheel of the snowplow that collided with the plane of Christophe de Margerie as it was preparing to take off from Moscow's Vnukovo Airport on the night of Oct. 20. The aircraft caught fire upon impact, killing de Margerie and three French crew members.

Martynenko's lawyer, Alexander Karabanov, told Izvestia that his client, who has been in pretrial detention since the accident, was ready to admit partial guilt of having violated transportation safety regulations in exchange for leniency.

"Vladimir Martynenko is ready to admit partial guilt although, to be honest, we still do not understand what exactly he is accused of," Izvestia quoted Karabanov as saying.

Martynenko was charged in October with violating transportation safety rules leading to the deaths of two or more people, media reported at the time. Under Russian law, he faces up to seven years behind bars if convicted.

The Investigative Committee said soon after the crash that a blood test had revealed alcohol in Martynenko's system, an allegation the driver has denied. Karabanov said Tuesday he had still not been given a copy of the blood test results. Responsibility for the incident, Karabanov said, lay with the airport personnel whose instructions his client followed on the night Margerie was killed.

Other suspects charged in the case include traffic controller Alexander Kruglov, senior engineer Vladimir Ledenev, aircraft controller Roman Dunayev and Svetlana Krivsun, a traffic control trainee.

Last month, Russian investigators handed the results of their preliminary probe into the incident to their French counterparts.

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