

# Poland Begins Exhumations of Smolensk Victims to Prove Russia Trail

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The Polish government has exhumed the bodies of late President Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria in Kraków as part of its re-opened investigation into the 2010 Smolensk plane crash.

The couple's bodies were removed from their tombs in the Wawel castle at 1 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 15. Jarosław Kaczyński, the late president's twin brother and leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, alongside the couple's daughter. Members of the Defense Ministry's commission re-investigating the crash and two Catholic clerics were also present.

In an interview with Polish television, one of the priests leading the religious ceremony at the exhumation said that "it went without any problems." "The opening of the sarcophagus took longer than expected," he added.

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The bodies were then transported to a lab in the medical center of Kraków's Jagiellonian University, where experts will conduct a number of tests. Poland's prosecutors say the medics will have four months to "form an opinion."

The presidential couple is the first of 83 victims to be exhumed on the orders of the National Prosecution. Over 200 relatives of the victims have signed letters opposing the forced exhumations, with one widow claiming that families were "forced to go through hell."

President Andrzej Duda has maintained that, although he "understands the pain of the families," it is the "lawful responsibility of the prosecutors" to carry out the investigation. Only 10% of Poles support the exhumations.

Prosecutors say medical tests should be conducted to investigate claims that the remains of victims were swapped, or find any irregularities in the description of injuries prepared by Russian medical staff. The last of the exhumations is expected to take place by the winter of 2017.

Ninety-six people, including the many members of Poland's former government, were killed in the air crash close to Russia's Smolensk airport in 2010. Poland's ruling Law and Justice party has long maintained that the disaster was the result of foul play, placing the blame on Moscow and the previous Polish government led by Donald Tusk, the current President of the European Council.

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