



## Twelve Anniversary of Smolensk Tragedy

On April 10, 2010, 96 people died in a plane crash near Smolensk, including President Lech Kaczyński, his wife Maria, the highest commanders of the Polish Army, representatives of the Polish Episcopate and the last president of the Republic of Poland in exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski. The Polish delegation was heading to the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre.

Twelve years have passed since those tragic events...

This year's anniversary of the Smolensk catastrophe runs alongside another tragic event that has been unfolding for over a month, which is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It is hard not to get the impression that these events, although distant in time and not having much in common at first glance, are strangely intertwined. The common element of both is undoubtedly the imperialism of contemporary Russia ruled by Vladimir Putin.

With Putin's assumption of the presidency in 2000, a new epoch in the history of Russia began. Russia's strong asset in the form of energy resources has opened up many new opportunities for Putin in relations with neighboring countries as well as with the countries of the European Union. The enormous profits from the sale of gas and oil improved the internal situation in Russia, translating directly into public mood and increased support for Putin's rule. By consistently eliminating the internal opposition, Putin strengthened his power, gained a stable political arrangement, and was able to focus on imperial foreign policy perspectives that Russia never really abandoned.

Poland, remembering very bad experiences with its eastern neighbor in the past, noticed this, but its warnings were ignored and explained by a kind of Russophobia. On August 12, 2008, on the fifth day of the Russo-Georgian war, the then Polish president, Lech Kaczyński, flew to the country attacked by the Russians to show Georgians that they were not alone. That day, at a rally in Tbilisi, he uttered the famous words: *"today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic states, and then maybe next turn will be for my country, for Poland."* Today we can see how prophetic these words were... Less than 2 years later, President Lech Kaczynski dies in a plane crash in Russia, and 6 years later we witness Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

For years, special investigative commissions have been trying to collect evidence that could explain the causes of the Smolensk catastrophe, rejecting the official position of the Russian side about the pilot's error and the plane crash against a tree. Unfortunately, all the investigations to date (suspended and then renewed again) have not yet given an unequivocal answer, what really happened on April 10, 2010 at the airport of the former Smolensk-Sieviernyj military base.

To a large extent the fault belongs to the Russian side, which denied the Polish investigative committee free access to the wreckage of the plane (and to the black boxes), and the systematic, deliberate destruction of it. However, acting consistently for many years, the



investigative committees managed to find more and more evidence to form a final report. The last report of provided by Antoni Macierewicz, was completed in November 2021 (the report has not yet been presented to the public, only the families of the deceased can have an access to it).

Recently, Wołodymyr Zełenski, the president of Ukraine that currently fights Russian invasion, also commented on Smolensk catastrophe, warning against Russia and Putin with the words: *“We remember the terrible tragedy in Smolensk in 2010. We remember how the circumstances of this catastrophe were investigated. We know what it meant for you and what it meant for you the silence of those who knew everything exactly, but all the time still looked at our neighbor”*.

Over the past 12 years, the catastrophe has become a widely discussed topic in Polish public debate. To this day, the causes and course of the accident are discussed in many circles. From the outset, the hypothesis that the crash could have been a political murder, and the crash of the plane - the result of an attack or other terrorist act on the part of Russia, was seriously considered.

The Smolensk tragedy is strikingly symbolic. Such a shock - the death of the highest commanders, the president, representatives of all political options and churches - has not been experienced by the Polish nation in the past, even during the struggle for its sovereignty. The place where the catastrophe happened is also important - so close to horrible war crime we have suffered since (Soviet) Russia - the massacre of Polish soldiers in Katyn in April 1940.

It was the second largest disaster in the history of Polish aviation in terms of the number of casualties and the largest disaster in the history of the Polish Air Force in terms of the number of casualties. Over 150,000 people attended the funeral of Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria in Krakow and the ceremony was watched on TV by over 13 million viewers.

To all victims of the Smolensk catastrophe:

*Wieczne odpoczywanie racz Im dac Panie, a swiatłość wiekuista niechaj Im swieci...  
Niech odpoczywają w pokoju wiecznym Amen!*



We will not forget!