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THE INDIRECT VICTIMS OF KATYN

(Summary)

On 10 April 2010, in the tragic crash of the Polish government's TU-154 near Smolensk in Western Russia, Poland lost part of its élite. The passengers on board the plane had been on their way to Katyn to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre in which thousands of members of the Polish élite of a previous era had been obliterated. "Katyn" is in fact the collective, generalized term broadly resorted to when speaking about the massacres of the Polish prisoners-of-war from the special camps of Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobelsk that took place at Katyn, Kharkov (Kharkiv), and Mednoye in the months of April and May of 1940. By no means were the shootings of the Polish POWs the epilogue of the Katyn tragedy. Next came the manipulations and the propaganda on the part of the communist authorities, together with the persecutions against anyone who fought to preserve the memory of the Katyn victims. For several decades, keeping alive the truth about Katyn in Poland was an uphill struggle. Throughout most of the communist régime, the authorities, spurred by the mighty neighbour to the East, were doing their best to keep the Polish citizens in the dark about who had committed the executions of the Polish POWs in Katyn. Thus, during the postwar years in Poland, the subject of Katyn was presented strictly in accordance with the official view according to which it had been the Germans who massacred the Polish POWs at Katyn. Then, during the period of Khrushchev's Thaw, a hush fell over the question of Katyn. In later years as well, the policy of silence about everything related to Katyn continued to be in full force.