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03.05.2024, 05:54

28.04.2011

Presidents of Poland and Russia in Smoleńsk and Katyń

KatyńMonday saw the Presidents of Poland and Russia take part in the commemoration ceremonies held in connection with the anniversary of the massacre of Polish officers by the NKVD in Katyń. The two Presidents laid wreaths in the Polish and in the Russian sections of the cemetery.

Bronisław Komorowski and Dmitry Medvedev also laid wreaths at the Smoleńsk airport at the birch tree into which a piece of the Tu-154M plane crashed on 10th April 2010. Before that, the two Presidents met at the Smoleńsk library and discussed matters such as the monument commemorating the victims of the crash, which is to be erected in Smoleńsk.

The visit to the cemetery in Katyń began in the Russian part of the Memorial Complex. There, at the Orthodox cross, the two politicians laid wreaths. The anthem of the Russian Federation was played and an Orthodox prayer was said.

"We shall pray to our Lord that the souls of all victims of the (Smoleńsk) crash may rest in peace and we shall beg Him that such a tragedy should never take place again anywhere in the world," said Panteleimon, the Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop of Smoleńsk and Vyazemsk.

Panteleimon and Bishop Józef Guzek, the Field Bishop of the Polish Army, then exchanged gifts – a painting of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa and an icon representing the Smoleńsk Madonna from the Dormition Cathedral (Uspienskiy sobor).

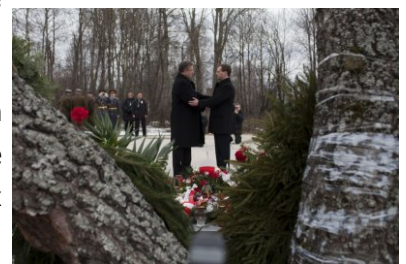
Subsequently, the two leaders moved to the Katyń War Cemetery where they took part in the commemoration ceremony of the 71st anniversary of the Katyń massacre. A group of 220 relatives of the victims also took part in the ceremony.

"Today we honour the Polish officers and soldiers who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom and independence. We recall their martyrdom. The Katyń massacre of Polish prisoners of war is a symbol of this," read the roll of honour, given by an officer of the Polish Army.

President Komorowski delivered a speech after the holy mass closing the ceremony. He quoted Lech Kaczyński, who died in the plane crash before reaching Katyń last year: "The Katyń tragedy and the struggle against the lies about Katyń is an important experience for future generations of Poles, as it is a part of our history, our memory, and our identity, and it is also a part of the



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history of Europe and the world at large."

Address by the President of the Republic of Poland on the 71st Anniversary of the Katyn Massacre

He also emphasized that this was the first time for a President of Russia to visit the Polish cemetery in Katyń and bow his head before the slain Polish heroes. The Polish President thinks this was another important step "in the right direction on the road which we have been traversing for so many years now."

"We bow our heads in prayer and contemplation here, where the massacre took place," he added. Apart from honouring Polish prisoners of war who were "slaughtered malevolently, without a trial and the regular civic right to defend themselves," the President also honoured Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians who were murdered brutally at this spot.

President Komorowski and President Medvedev laid wreaths and lit vigil lights at the altar in the Polish section of the cemetery. They both lowered their heads and were silent for some time. The melody of "Śpij kolego" ["Sleep, my friend"] was played and the Polish President walked the President of Russia out of the Polish section and briefly talked with him.

(PAP)

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