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COUNTRY: BELARUS
SUBJ: RED TAPE PREDICTED TO HAMPER BALLOON DOWNING INQUIRY
SOURCE: MOSCOW IZVESTIYA IN RUSSIAN 16 SEP 95 P 3

REPORT BY VLADIMIR MIKHAYEV: "BEFORE TAKING OFF, A U.S. BALLOONIST SAID THIS RACE WOULD BE HIS LAST")

(FBIS TRANSLATED EXCERPT) FOUR DAYS ON, IT IS POSSIBLE TO FORECAST QUITE CONFIDENTLY THAT THE INVESTIGATION WHICH HAS BEGUN INTO THE DEATHS OF TWO U.S. PILOTS OF THE BALLOON DOWED BY A BELARUSIAN AIR DEFENSE HELICOPTER TUESDAY IN THE REGION OF OSOVTSY MILITARY AIRFIELD WILL INEVITABLY COME UP AGAINST A MIDDLE OF PAPERS AND A BUREAUCRATIC LACK OF COORDINATION ON THE PART OF VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS.

AN INVESTIGATION WILL HAVE TO BE CONDUCTED INTO WHETHER OR NOT IT WAS KNOWN IN BELARUS THAT FOREIGN BALLOONISTS MIGHT BE FLYING OVER BELARUS. IF IT WAS, WERE THOSE OFFICIALS WHO, BY VIRTUE OF THEIR JOBS, ARE MEANT TO BE INFORMED ACTUALLY NOTIFIED OF THE PROBABLE "APPEARANCE OF "UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS" IN THEIR SOVEREIGN AIRSPACE?

INCIDENTALLY, THE LAST POINT COULD ALSO BE THE SUBJECT OF INVESTIGATION: IS IT DIFFICULT TO MAKE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A GAILY COLORED BALLOON, WITH A HEAVY SACKET, AND ANOTHER AIRCRAFT? THIS QUESTION IS APPROPRIATE, BECAUSE COLONEL LAZER, DEPUTY COMMANDER OF AIR DEFENSE IN CHARGE OF FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, ORIGINALLY MAINTAINED THAT A METEOROLOGICAL OR OTHER KIND OF SONDE HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY FIRE FOR EFFECT.

THERE IS ALSO CONFUSION IN THE CHRONOLOGY OF CONTACTS BETWEEN THE BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL AERONAUTICAL FEDERATION, WHICH IS OBLISHED TO WARN OF TRANSNATIONAL FLIGHTS BY ITS BALLOONISTS. THE FEDERATION INFORMED MINSK BACK IN MARCH OF THE LONG-DISTANCE FLIGHT COMPETITION THAT WAS BEING PREPARED, VALERIY TSYPKALA, BELARUSIAN DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DECLARED. ANOTHER DEPUTY HEAD OF THE FOREIGN POLICY DEPARTMENT -- PETR BELYAYEV -- MAINTAINED THAT THE NAVIGATION SERVICES HAD RECEIVED NOTIFICATION IN MAY.

REUTERS REPORTED THAT AN EXECUTIVE ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL -- YURIY SIVAKOV -- IN TURN RELATED THAT BACK IN JULY MINSK HAD LINKED ITS CONSENT TO THE PROVISION OF "NOTIFICATION" OF THE ESTABLISHED INTERNATIONAL KIND. ACCORDING TO SIVAKOV, HOWEVER, "WE DID NOT RECEIVE SUCH NOTIFICATION AND DID NOT GIVE THE ORGANIZERS (OF THE COMPETITION) FORMAL PERMISSION."

THAT CLAIM IS INSOLUBLY AT VARIANCE WITH THE POSITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL AERONAUTICAL FEDERATION. A SPECIAL STATEMENT PUBLISHED IN ITS NAME BY THE ORGANIZER OF THE GORDON BENNETT-95 RACE -- THE SWISS AEROCLUB -- STATES THAT IT HAD "RECEIVED ALL THE NECESSARY PERMITS TO ENTER THE AIRSPACE OF BELARUS," TO WHICH THEY HAD PASSED A PRECISE INDICATION OF THE ROUTE.

STRICTLY SPEAKING, IT IS NOT EASY TO PREDICT WHERE THE PREVAILING WINDS WILL BLOW BALLOONS. THE GERMANS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHO WON THE RACE, LANDED IN LATVIA BECAUSE THEY STAYED IN THE AIR FOR 92 HOURS. THE AUSTRIANS FLEW ON TO UKRAINE. ANOTHER THREE U.S. CREWS FOUND THEMSELVES INSIDE BELARUS, AND TWO OF THEM LANDED SAFELY ON TERRA FIRMA THEMSELVES.

LANCES ARE ALREADY BEING BROKEN OVER WHETHER THE CASUALTIES COULD HAVE HAD TIME TO TRANSMIT THEIR IDENTIFICATION SIGNALS. THEY HAD AT THEIR DISPOSAL INSTRUMENTS ENABLING THEM TO FIX THEIR LOCATION AND TO MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION WITH AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS. IN PARTICULAR, THEY HAD MULTICHAelnAL RADIO TRANSMITTERS AND A SYSTEM OF SOLAR BATTERIES FOR THEM. THIS WOULD SEEM TO SWEEP ASIDE THE VERSION PUT FORWARD BY RUTH LUDWIG OF THE BALLOON FEDERATION OF AMERICA, WHO ASSUMED, SO AP REPORTED, THAT THE AMERICANS' DEATHS...
SUPPLY HAD COME TO AN END -- THE BATTERIES WERE FLAT. ((PASSAGE OMITTED))

THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT HAS VOICED SEVERE DISSATISFACTION WITH THE FACT THAT MINSK KEPT QUIET ABOUT THE INCIDENT FOR 24 HOURS AND THEN CONFINED ITSELF TO AN EXPRESSION OF REGRET, WITHOUT EXPRESSING REPENTANCE OR MAKING A FORMAL APOLOGY. AS STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN MIKE MCCURRY FORMULATED WASHINGTON'S POSITION, "WE POSSESS INDIRECT EVIDENCE WHICH MIGHT ENABLE US TO MAKE THE ASSUMPTION THAT THIS TRAGIC MISTAKE NEED NOT HAVE HAPPENED." WHETHER OR NOT THIS IS SO HAS TO BE ASCERTAINED IN THE COURSE OF THE INVESTIGATION.

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(ENDALL) 16 SEP 18/15572 SEP 546
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