Beat: Miscellaneous

Police helicopter crashes into TV tower in Macedonia, killing 4

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USPA News - A large police helicopter crashed late on Thursday after colliding with a television transmitter tower during a routine training mission in southeastern Macedonia, killing all four crew members on board the aircraft, authorities said on Friday. The accident happened at around 10 p.m. local time on Thursday when the Mi-17 V5 helicopter was on a night training flight in southeastern Macedonia, near the city of Strumica, about 120 kilometers (74 miles) southeast of the capital Skopje.

It was carrying four pilots, all with more than 34 years of experience. Interior Minister Gordana Jankuloska said the aircraft had struck a 120-meter (394-foot) high television transmitter near Strumica, causing it to crash. She said the helicopter was flying from Skopje with five scheduled stops, one of them in Strumica, before its expected return to the capital city. "Last night we faced one of the darkest and most difficult moments in the history of the Interior Ministry," an emotional Jankuloska said at a press conference. "We lost four of our experienced colleagues who, with their knowledge, professionalism, and spirit, left a deep mark on us and on the work of the ministry." Jankuloska said police had cordoned off the crash site and investigators were working to determine what had caused Thursday`s deadly accident. The minister said both black boxes had been recovered at the crash site, which was strewn over an area covering more than 50 meters (55 yards). Defense Minister Zoran Jolevski said the ministry`s full resources were available to assist investigators, if necessary. "Allow me to express my deep condolences to the families of the killed police officers in yesterday`s tragic helicopter crash," he said in a message. "This is an extremely difficult period that we will survive only if we are all together, unified as one." Thursday`s helicopter crash was the worst aviation accident in Macedonia since November 1993, when Avioimpex Flight 110 crashed into Mount Trojani near the southwestern city of Ohrid, killing all 116 people on board. That accident came just months after another airliner crashed near Skopje while preparing to land at the capital`s airport, killing 83 of the 97 people on board.

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