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Who was Polish President Lech Kaczynski?

The late Polish president Lech Kaczynski, who was killed in a plane crash this weekend, shared a prominent career with his twin brother Jaroslaw – ever since the two starred together in a movie as boys.



In this March 15 photo, Polish President Lech Kaczynski and wife, Maria, stand in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. Both were among 96 people killed in a plane crash this weekend.

(Alik Keplicz/AP/File)

By Christa Case Bryant, Staff writer

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Boston —

The late Polish President Lech Kaczynski, who was killed in a plane crash this weekend, made up one half of a dynamic duo that sought to raise Poland from the ashes of communism.

The other half? His twin brother, Jaroslaw.

From childhood, when the two starred together in the film “The Two Who Stole the Moon,” the Kaczynskis have worked closely together.

As young adults, they played a key role in the Solidarity movement that helped bring down communism. When Poland held its first free presidential elections in 1990, they paved the way for Solidarity leader Lech Walesa to rise to power – and Lech Kaczynski became justice minister.

Jaroslaw was always considered the strategist of the two, a kind of Karl Rove of Polish politics that helped swing the country to the right. He helped found the Law and Justice Party in 2001, on whose ticket Lech was elected president in 2005 with the support of two-thirds of Poland’s rural population.

As Polish head of state, Lech was said to consult with his twin daily about the country’s affairs. Then, in July 2006, he made Jaroslaw’s role official by appointing him prime minister.

Together, they sought to uncover misdeeds by former communist officials – a widely criticized campaign.

Perhaps more detrimental to Poland, they raised the hackles of many in the European Union by challenging the EU's pervasive secularism. Many of their older countrymen feared that such ideals would erode Poland's unique identity and its long association with the Roman Catholic Church.

A devout Catholic himself who publicly thanked Rome for its support of the Solidarity movement, Lech and his brother strongly opposed abortion. In a break from Catholic teaching, they also campaigned for a return of the death penalty, and made clear that their political and moral stances wouldn't be swayed by the carrot of EU funding. While socially conservative, they espoused socialist economic policies.,

But their strategy backfired, and in 2007 Jaroslaw lost his seat to the more liberal-minded but fiscally conservative Donald Tusk – a victory largely chalked up to the frustration of young people with the twins' approach.

Lech kept his seat, however, and had pledged to seek reelection in the presidential vote scheduled for this fall.

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