

**Poland would defend Lithuania  
“I cannot imagine any other way”  
interview with President Duda**



*Andrzej Duda / J. Stacevičius / LRT nuotr.*

In an interview with LRT, Polish President Andrzej Duda discusses the situation in Ukraine, how to protect the interests of Polish farmers, and whether or not the Polish military would come to Lithuania’s defence if it were attacked.

***The war in Ukraine has been going on for more than two years. Poland, too, has been forced to scramble its fighter jets when a Russian missile flew into its territory. How do you see the situation in Ukraine today? What can we expect this year?***

Poland does indeed scramble warplanes frequently to patrol the airspace. This was also the case today before dawn, around 04:00. Missiles were dropped on Ukrainian towns right next to the Polish border, such as the town of Stryi. F-16s and warplanes of our allies patrolling the airspace on the eastern flank of NATO took to the air.

The situation in Ukraine is very difficult. I have always said in the international arena that Ukraine needs our help – constant and never-ending help. What Ukraine needs most now is ammunition. [...]

***Recently, there have been more suggestions that Ukraine should start peace talks and offer concessions. Does withholding arms equate to a kind of tacit pressure on Kyiv to enter into such negotiations?***

I wouldn’t put it that way. I am pragmatic about the security of Europe and NATO’s eastern flank. [...] Our interest is the same as that of Ukraine. Ukraine wants to regain full control of the occupied territories. This is also important for the whole world, because it is a sign that international law holds. Russia will have to comply with it by withdrawing its troops from Ukraine.



Aleksandra Ketlerienė, Andrzej Duda / J. Stacevičiaus / LRT nuotr.

I have not heard any talk about peace talks. They are certainly not happening at the moment. I know that Volodymyr Zelensky has a very strict position on the defence and recapture of territories. We must do everything we can to enable Ukraine to regain all the territories that have been taken from it. [...]

***Poland has been one of the staunchest supporters of Ukraine since the start of the war and ordinary Poles have welcomed Ukrainian refugees. Today, however, this relationship is under pressure as Polish farmers are organising blockades on the Polish-Ukrainian border. Why is it taking so long to resolve this issue?***

Because this is indeed a very serious problem, and it will remain a problem in the future. I want to stress that it was Brussels that decided to lift restrictions on food imports from Ukraine to the EU. Unfortunately, this has consequences outside Ukraine, including in Poland.

We are a predominantly agricultural country, and suddenly our market is flooded with gigantic quantities of agricultural produce from Ukraine, which, as is well known, is a world power when it comes to agriculture. Because of its excellent, extremely fertile black soil, Ukraine is the world's breadbasket, and a large part of the world has benefited from this.



Polish farmers protest in Warsaw / AP

But this is really a problem for our farmers, because food from Ukraine is cheaper and it is destroying local markets. Our market is much smaller, we are half the size of Ukraine. [...] I would like to draw particular attention to industrial agriculture, which is not really run by Ukrainians, it is run by big companies from Western Europe, from the USA. If we look today at the owners of most of the land, they are not Ukrainian companies.

This is a paradoxical situation, and no wonder that farmers are defending themselves, because they have invested in their farms in Poland [...] and cheap agricultural produce coming from Ukraine is dramatically destructive to them.

However, we should not confuse the two things: how the Poles have helped and are helping Ukrainian refugees on the one hand and political issues on the other. People have opened their hearts, they have let Ukrainian refugees into their homes, they are giving Ukrainians jobs in Poland, they are looking after them in many ways – that is a question of human relations, of good relations between people.

On the other hand, the issue of Ukraine's future accession to the European Union and the relationship between the EU and Ukraine is purely political. In this area, we do have the issue of Ukrainian agricultural exports, which is essentially a political matter, one that, of course, affects ordinary people, ordinary farmers.



*Andrzej Duda / J. Stacevičius / LRT nuotr.*

We need to resolve this, but Poland will not resolve this problem on its own, because if we were to try to restrict the flow of Ukrainian products into the European Union, we would be in breach of Community regulations. So, it is up to Brussels to find the terms that will also protect the member states from the situation we're in today. That problem must be resolved at the political level.

***There was a discussion in Lithuania recently when our prime minister said that Poland cannot defend us because of legal constraints. Can you reassure Lithuanians that Poland will help Lithuania defend itself if it is attacked or threatened?***

Let's start with the fact that both Lithuania and Poland are NATO members, there is a clear Article 5 commitment. If this commitment to collective defence [...] were to be broken, it would be a catastrophe and it would indeed mean the disintegration of the alliance.

I therefore say quite firmly that I find it difficult to imagine a situation in which, in the event of an attack on Lithuania, it would not receive assistance from NATO, including from Poland. I am talking about military assistance. In short, the Polish military would come to the defence of Lithuania. I cannot imagine any other way.

Of course, there are questions about other situations that are worrying but would not trigger the activation of Article 5. These questions have to be resolved bilaterally between our countries, our governments, because we can agree on mutual support. I repeat we are talking about situations not yet at the military level, only at the threat level. These are two separate questions.



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