The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Poroshenko: Lithuania to Supply Ukraine With Military Aid to Fight Pro-Russia Rebels

November 24, 2014



Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko (R) and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden walk into a hall before a news conference in Kiev on Nov. 21, 2014.

KIEV — Lithuania is to provide Ukraine with some military aid to help in its fight against pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said Monday.

It was not clear, however, if Lithuania was following fellow NATO member the U.S. in providing nonlethal military equipment, or supplying weaponry. NATO countries are reluctant to risk being drawn into conflict with Russia by arming a nonmember.

"We have agreed on supplies of concrete elements of concrete armaments for the Ukrainian armed forces," Poroshenko said after talks with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite.

"This is real help," he told a joint news conference.

Pressed for details, Grybauskaite said only: "Ukraine will receive all the support available for Lithuania and what Lithuania has."

Ukraine has pressed NATO countries to provide weapons to help it defend itself against attacks by well armed Russian-backed separatists who, before a cease-fire came into effect, inflicted heavy losses on government forces in their fight to hive off parts of Ukraine's east.

U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden, in Kiev last week, voiced strong support for Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia but did not offer additional military aid, though a consignment of U.S. radars capable of pinpointing the origin of mortar fire has begun to arrive.

Asked whether Ukraine wanted to join NATO, Poroshenko held out the prospect of a referendum in several years' time, but said attempts to join now would cause "more harm than good."

Before the confrontation with Russia, Ukrainians showed little interest in joining NATO, and the country's constitution specifies a "non-bloc" unaligned status.

But since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and Moscow's open backing for the pro-Russian rebellions, popular support for joining NATO has shot up. One survey by the polling group "Rating" found 51 percent in favor and 25 percent against.

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