

**Interview with Valdas Adamkus, former president of Lithuania**

Interviewers: Paweł Kowal, Kateryna Pryshchepa

Place of record: Vilnius

Date: 28 September 2016

P.K.: What we can say about reception of Ukrainian events; I mean the moment of independence of Ukraine in the end of Soviet Union. What was the reception in Lithuania of Ukrainian independence?

V.A.: I believe it, looking back I mean, it was a natural process, I mean the reaction of the Ukrainians, because breaking away from the Soviet Union in the Baltic countries, I mean that movement actually spread among other nationalities. And we were absolutely no surprised that Ukraine was going to the same way I mean seeking the break away from the Soviet Union, establishing its own independence as a free country -and seeking the democratic – I would say – reforms and seeking the implementing them for the democracy into the Ukraine. Definitely as always in those cases there become differences I mean of opinions between the politicians. That's what happened actually with Yushchenko's and Yanukovych's confrontations, which at the very beginning I don't believe every one of us, convinced I mean that something like this could happen in Kyiv. You never can forget I mean all the demonstrations and all those conflicts over there.

I remember very well when President Kuchma called me from Kyiv And says, you know, we have a big problem, you know a political problem. These people are out in the streets, demanding I mean some changes and all that. And it's very difficult I mean and you have quite an influence on Ukrainian people I mean, We need your intervention and your help to maybe ease up the political tension over there. So I said you know, I mean, let's see what happens. I just delayed, thought I will delay you know for a couple days. I think I will talk with European Union I mean members like Solana and others and definitely with Aleksander Kwaśniewski. And I

delayed, I mean We finished that conversation with President Kuchma without any results. So The next day I remember at about noon time, I received a second call from President Kuchma, and says I mean, we needed immediately reaction and I said let me talk, I mean some of the friends and he says, you know it could be too late Because that one single shot and the blood will flood, flow I mean, because the army has the live ammunition distributed already. So then I said ok, we will see what I can do.

I will immediately call Kwaśniewski and says you know, I have such a important message from Kuchma request I mean for our intervention. So he said I know already about the situation developing in Ukraine and he asked me, how long will it take you to fly from Vilnius to Kyiv? No He says ok I can probably get to immediately, I mean . If i drop everything in 2-3 hours I will probably be in Kyiv. So he says ok let's do it this way, If you will come first in Kyiv, wait at the airport. If II will come first I will wait for you and then in one car we are going to wherever we have to meet. And then I landed actually fifty minutes before him, so I waited for fifty minutes over there and on the way I found out that we're driving to the Polish embassy. And when we arrived over there I see the full room of people, international United Nations representatives, SBO representatives some of them, already Yushchenko's members and so on. We started to discuss the situation. Oh and Polish and American and English ambassadors were present. We started to discuss I mean how to react, how to come out and meet the people on the street, to come down and try to resolve the conflict over there. After long discussions we said, we will try to do it, but without very clear plan I mean what are we going to do? Then we went together already in the private residence of President Kuchma and sat down and listened to his position. But we heard that actually he is probably leaning to talk to Kremlin and see the Kremlin's position, pulls out from the Ukrainian situation, I mean the Ukrainian revolution. Then finally we found a solution that in the evening, at seven o'clock, we were all meeting in the green palace, the presidential palace over there, and started the international discussions. Participating of two of us – Kuchma, Yushchenko, Yanukovych and other international delegations over there – to meet it short I mean, during the discussions we could see that there is no way the two parties are going to agree. Yushchenko presented I mean accused Yanukovych I mean falsifying the elections, presidential. He definitely responded the same way, I mean finally, this I mean was going on for hours. Interesting, what impressed me at the moment, that something came up

which was clearly indicating that somebody was standing behind Yanukovych. He actually acted immediately asking for 15 minutes break. And ok we said 15 minutes break, and he gets up from the table and goes into the one corner. When we found out that sitting the delegation from Moscow and the chairman of the delegation from Moscow.

P.K. Gryzlov

V.A.: Was the President of the Russian Duma.

P.K. Gryzlov

V.A.: So that was very clear I mean, what's going on and who is behind. To make this short we could probably talk about this long time. The discussions, negotiations, and all that stuff, we finally came to the point. We started seven o'clock in the evening it was four 30 in the morning without a break, we got hungry, there was no coffee left, some of the people was sleeping already on the couches and so on, we finally came to the agreement that ok, I mean there will be the secondary elections of the President, and trying to pacify the people on the streets and so on - we will come up with a proposal - that meeting finally found a decision and both sides are going to comply to it. So that's why actually we finished the first crisis in Ukraine.

P.K.: Did you remember, Mr. President, any differences in the position of Kuchma and Yanukovych?

V.A.: It's very difficult for me to remember because we talked different topics were one on top of the other. Basically I would say Yushchenko actually was accused that Yanukovych actually with his Eastern part of Donetsk, region I mean, falsified the elections and that there was not fair dealing with this. Of course, Yanukovych responded with same thing but I mean Yushchenko position was actually using that some support from Western and all that stuff, but he actually not expressing results of the elections. Basically the issue was I mean demand from Yushchenko part and Yanukovych was saying a different approach, that the new election should be.

P.K.: And why, President Kuchma decided to call to you, to Lithuania? What's your interpretation?

V.A.: Before I mean, I would say it this way, we after declaring the independence I met a couple times I mean with Kuchma. I was in Kyiv meeting with some of the people. Not even being in office before as an environmental office from the United States. I probably established some friendly atmosphere over there in Ukraine, a man that can definitely find the answers and probably some support for the new Ukrainian government from the new environmental activities over there. And people very warmly received me. I met with Kuchma a couple times, and I left a very good impression on him. And he decided that in cases like this he should ask me, try through me and I believe that he stopped Aleksander Kwaśniewski just as well and decided that two of us probably get together with the opposing sides and on the street will probably be accepted with more sympathy and neutrality in resolving this entire case.

P.K.: And it was any problems with coordination of position that you were negotiating between you and President Kwaśniewski?

V.A.: No, we were united we stood I mean in one voice we took that Ukraine has to have the stable new government which will be supported by the entire nation with one goal I mean. Definitely I mean in eyes of some of Yanukovich's people were not very correct, but we stood for Western democracy and Western government supported by all the people of Ukraine. So for kremlin definitely it was not acceptable. And I believe that all the protest from Yanukovich's side was that we are unfairly pushing Ukraine into the Western influence, zone of interest. Maybe it was right, but definitely we had our position very strongly expressed and expressed I mean appealing to the that all Ukrainians get united. So this is a very solid and Aleksandr Kwaśniewski and I were simply not retreating from that position until the very last. President Kuchma was actually, in that meeting, I mean in my interpretation, leaning a little bit for the flexible position. I mean don't separate itself from Moscow because it's I mean an important factor in it and definitely when he saw that we we are not giving in and we are gaining more support for Yushchenko, so he went along with us.

K.P: I just wanted to clarify, because you mentioned that it was clear that Yanukovych was something behind Yanukovych that he went to talk to Russian delegation. So when this agreement was reached in the end, do you think it was that Yanukovych accepted the offer or it was Moscow delegation which decided that?

V.A.: No I think it was definitely agreement that finally unofficial delegation, which was not seeking around the table, but Yanukovych, every time the situation got tense, every time asked for 15 or half an hour and they were discussing. And at one point, I mean during that 15 or 20 minutes, I went to the, I got up from the table and went to I had to pass that Russian group of people with Yanukovych and when they saw that I was coming closer and I had to pass through, on their side was total silence, nobody spoke over there until I passed and went away. So it was definitely very clear indication who was playing the role over there. We were very happy, we had another meeting in the parliament, with the parliamentary group over there, but it was more or less a meeting with the Ukrainian parliament's people. Solana, Reicht from Brussels, I arrived and Aleksander Kwaśniewski arrived and we tried to agree about the date and how fast the elections, about the observers from the West, I mean how it was conducted and so on. It was more or less a technical meeting where we decided. We didn't followed the formal agreement, I mean that the election should be recalled, I mean and that there will be new elections. We were just meeting at that parliament over there to discuss the technicalities of it.

P.K. And if I may ask about your feeling at the time? Did you feel that you act on behalf of EU, or of Lithuania-Poland?

V.A.: Oh I believe that we acted with Aleksander together, representing the democracy. We even asked the European Union, I mean Solana: "can we act independently, I mean without using the EU's name so that it's not the European Union pushing, but us neighbors, as friends of Ukraine? Trying to give support, and support the movement which is very close to our hearts and our understanding of what democracy means. And in that capacity we were acting. EU leadership they agreed with us, because we changed, we asked I mean being members of the EU we don't want to be asked that we pushed the EU aside and we were acting on our own. That was the meeting with Brussel, ok if you succeed go ahead and do it.

P.K.: And what about US position at the time?

V.A.: Officially US position was not surfaced during that negotiation period. Absolutely no contacts with them, but definitely they were watching what's going on. But I have to reassure everybody, that there was absolutely no contact with the embassy members, no discussions with them. Even on our part - they never asked us, but we never asked them I mean come in and help us, or we want to talk to you and see how to do it best. That was absolutely free independent actions of two countries trying to resolve and help the Ukrainian nation.

P.K.: Listening to you, it was really important the people, the people who participated in the revolution in Ukraine. Can you describe your impression the first time you met the opposition leaders? From the position of a very experienced politician?

V.A.: You know we came in with a very clear picture what we want to do it. But we respectfully actually listened what the opposition wants to say. Because we felt to find the way not for confrontation, but the way which actually resolves the crisis on both sides. I believe by trying to very clearly ask you, the people, to understand that they are pushing the country in almost a bloodshed. We felt, I mean, that this is definitely not the way to go and resolve the problems. I believe that we worked this from our deep belief, I mean him and myself, Aleksander and myself, that we are with our position very clear without any other indicating position of other big powers, that's the way we'd like to see the Ukrainian nation to go along.

K.P.: About the opposition, did it take long, or what happened, to convince the opposition side, especially Yushchenko, because it was a compromise, but he had to agree to a reduction to his powers in the constitution as a President? How long did it take to?

V.A.: I believe that after we originally agreed that the new elections will be held. I have to give respect to the Opposition that they have accepted our agreement. There were no problems just to go and, that was the best proof I mean during the second run of presidential elections, I mean after results were agreed, it was very calm accepted by all the Ukrainian sides.

P.K.: Did you remember any differences between position for example Yushchenko and Tymoshenko at the time?

V.A.: I believe that my first impression was, that it was exceptionally good cooperation between two politicians. We met again, I mean two of us, we went to Yushchenko's headquarters and for the first time I saw Yulichka, as I called her, in a very friendly way, coming into the room to meet with us and discuss it. My impression was that they are really very connected and seeking resolution of the problems. And that continued, I mean to the even a new government was formed after the presidential elections. I don't know, I mean where the breaking point came in this agreement with President Yushchenko and Yulichka. I mean I definitely don't know. I participated in later time, I mean when she was Prime minister and he was the President. And during some of the ceremonies of honoring some of all the losses of that Russian-imposed, remember that hunger when millions of Ukrainians were died over there, there was remembrance and opening over there in Kyiv. I was present at the ceremonies. Even at that time I believe I saw some friendly talks between them. I didn't expect it, that later I mean, a few months later there was a break and confrontation between President and Prime Minister.

P.K.: What was reaction of Lithuanian society for deep involvement of Lithuanian President in as we say internal relations in Ukraine?

V.A.: It was very welcome because it was not , I mean seen that we were interfering in the other country's internal political policies of. It was accepted that Lithuania is supporting Ukrainian nation, defending the democracy and freedom. This was not viewed that we were participating in something who was going to be better and who was going to take that side. It was very clear understanding that they are confrontation of I would say dictatorship and democracy . And since the Lithuanian stood for the principles of democracy, and the call came in on the personal basis. I mean come in and see if we can resolve, or I mean ease up the situation. So in Lithuania it was accepted very friendly, very politely, and very supportive.

P.K.: I think that your personal activity and activity of Lithuanian diplomacy for sure influenced for example Lithuanian-Russian relations.

V.A.: Definitely, I have to admit that this was probably the moment when our relationship which was neutral until that time correct. I mean we didn't have any confrontations with Russia, it was a very neighborly disagreement. Russia knew that we did not love them, for I mean 50 years of occupation, and that did not change I mean our position. But I mean diplomatically, correctly that continued our relationship with Russia. Like I said until that moment there was no tension. But Ukraine probably changed the entire view and our relationship with Russia and since then it never regained that very cooperative way between two countries. And I felt that during those European Union meetings, when European Union meetings were meeting in Brussels, during some of them President Putin was invited, so he actually very openly ignored me. And very very *\*inaudible\** I mean the meeting in Finland, when EU met in outside of Helsinki in *\*inaudible\** areas, 30 km outside of the meeting place. All the Presidents of EU, when already in Helsinki, and the president of Finland went to the airport to meet Mr. Putin because he was invited as the guest of the evening dinner with a speech, so he arrived at that meeting. I was standing with a group, I very well remember Mr. Chirac [from Russia], Mr. Kaczyński and I believe Sweden's Prime Minister and in another position some other people, and the President of Finland was bringing him to each group, Mr. Putin I mean, introducing him and shaking hands to each group. And I was watching him and finally he comes towards our group over there. But, he had I was told later, that whenever he meets somebody he never looks into your eyes. Somehow he comes in first, but never looks into your face. And so it happened, he came up and greeted Sweden's and others, but finally he comes up to me and extends the hand but he never looks at me. So I said in Russian, I mean, "Здравствуйте господин президент"(Zdravstvuyte gospodin president), but he lifted his eyes, he pulled his hands from my extended. He never finished greeting the others, and walked away, I mean to another group. I remember my friend, French President Chirac, smiled at me, and said "he really loves you."

P.K.: What about reaction of Lithuanian opposition?



V.A.: We never discussed that, I mean it never came up, what are you doing in Ukraine and so on. I would say, the relations became a little bit more formal, but like I said correct, and we are still continuing to that kind of a policy. So if they don't love us, what can I say? That's alright. As long as we respect each other, our positions, that's fine with us.

P.K.: I'd like to ask you about your assessment of reforms in Ukraine after Orange revolution? I remember at the time you worked with Lech Kaczyński at the time and others with energy issues. Let's start with your general assessment, how do you feel about the success, or the lack of success of Ukraine's Orange team ?

V.A.: I would say that Ukraine started very nicely and I believe Ukraine was accepted in EU's community, as a participator, not as a member, of the EU. But they were participating as observers, it was very I believe that every European country was very positively impressed with that. But once those disagreements in Ukraine started, and when I would say the criteria, that was necessary for a country to be a member, and Poland I mean had to come up to that agreement to implement its reforms, Lithuania was doing it the same time, but this was not happening in Ukraine. I believe this was the beginning, I mean of all the problems that even Ukraine I mean wanted to become members of the Western society, but failing to implement the reforms, and definitely not implementing them, because some I would say some financial sources, big corporations, let me be very frank, the corruption in Ukraine was actually stopping any reforms. This was probably the beginning of falling apart any parties in Ukraine I mean agreements in Parliament total disagreement. You can feel I mean, sorry I mean even with the help of Western countries, I mean the democracy is still very far away from there.

P.K.: Did you discuss with Yushchenko or Tymoshenko the problems after revolution?

V.A.: I did not meet with Tymoshenko after revolution, but I met a few times with Yushchenko a few times, and he was very pleasant, helpful and very grateful for what we were doing for Ukraine. But he agreed he has internal problems, in general in solving the economics. Internal problem politically, he has not a united I mean far away from united parliament, which doesn't have the majority supporting him. Definitely the last point, he indicated himself, Tymoshenko

actually is creating her own group and has ambitions to become President and this all pulling together and creates this difficulties for him to, to actually get some process and some necessary reforms to implement which is required by Western countries.

P.K.: Did you discuss about this internal situations in Ukraine for example with the Polish Presidents with Kaczyński or Kwaśniewski? You had a really close relationship with both? What about Americans?

V.A.: No I don't believe we never had actually in our informal meetings with President Kaczyński. We did whatever we could to help Ukraine, but this is up to Ukraine itself to resolve the internal problems so that they can get the recognition from the international community. We said we cannot do any more than what we have done. That was the feeling, and with Lech Kaczyński too, I mean he agreed with that kind of a position.

K.P.: You mentioned the reaction of Russia to you personally, and to relations with Russia and Lithuania and so forth, but do you remember your reaction to this first gas crisis between Ukraine and Russia? It was also perceived in Ukraine as the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, what was the reaction in the European Union to that? Was it any interest to resolve it?

V.A.: I mean it was definitely very well received, I mean with the friendship towards Ukraine as such, but it was very definitely very clearly indicated that Ukraine has to meet the criteria which is applicable to all the countries who want to be a member of it. But I remember the meeting, which almost broke up that what I was responsible for it, it was the meeting I believe in Bucharest, and participating was not EU, but NATO and the President Bush was present at that meeting and other NATO meeting and even Putin was invited to speak at that meeting. Before he came in the membership of Ukrainian in NATO organization was discussed. There was a disagreement between the member states, some of them said if Ukraine doesn't make the criteria let them do whatever they want and so on. Well, I was on the opposite side, I said no, we cannot let them do that. We have to find the way to give them more initiative I mean and show them that it's in our interest to have Ukraine in NATO. In that meeting it was finally we had to accept I mean what the resolution at what time Ukraine can meet and all the requirements and become the

members of it. But i didn't know the night before that meeting, the big nations, the big powers, the US, French, Germany, and some others, they drafted the resolution which we had to vote the next day. That resolution was almost very strict, I mean dates and requirements expressed until even the NATO countries can vote for membership of Ukraine in NATO. Right before the voting came in, Angela Merkel from Germany came in, she was sitting four places in between us, stood up with a piece of paper and said "Here is the resolution which we agreed", and my first thought was, we agreed? We never even knew about such a discussion. So she read the resolution. That resolution was simply the rejection of NATO participation by Ukraine until some future date. So I got up from my seat, I came up to her, and feel very bad to this day, I took out of her hands that piece of paper with the resolution was written on, and I walked around all tables up to the chairmanship, where President Bush was sitting. I came up to Mr. Brush and I showed him that resolution and said "Mr. President, is that true? What's in it?" And President Bush says, he called me Val (Valdez), and said "Val, this is the best I could do of it." So I looked at him and I said "Mr. President, this is not good enough for me." And I turned around to walk away from him and right behind him Cindy was sitting, Secretary of State, so he turns around and says "Cindy, go with the President." I heard that, but by the way going out by the table I tapped and President Lech Kaczyński shoulder and other Presidents friendly I mean, I called them let's get together to discuss it. Of course the President of the meeting tried to keep the order, I mean but it was already out, I mean everybody was getting out of their chairs. We looked around, whoever we could gather. We found a corner in the room and even Angela Merkel joined us and we started to discuss that resolution, why that date was the way it was, and why this was expressed, I mean pulling that tooth one by one. The President presiding NATO called for a one hour break from procedures. During that one hour break we finally agreed that the resolution we call, so that until the end of November when the foreign ministers will meet of NATO countries, that Ukraine has to change all those points which did not fit the NATO requirements, and then the foreign minister can formally, without waiting for the approval of the entire NATO, propose the agreement to accept Ukraine into the NATO organization. So I remember that I even was going back into the room I mean to start the meeting, I was thinking "My God, I had such a good working relationship with Angela Merkel, now how should I establish this what I have done?" But somehow she said, "that's the way we should come to the conclusion." We continued our

good relationship and after the new resolution was proposed at the meeting, it was unanimously accepted.

P.K.: Could you say a few words more to describe German position towards Ukrainian events at the time?

V.A.: I believe I could say that probably Germany was a little bit, not formally decided, that this is the way it should be. They probably felt, we can wait with Ukraine, I mean we are not against Ukraine, but this is not necessary to push the issue of Ukraine and they can wait a year or two or three. But it so happened that waiting one or two or three years that the situation completely changed.

K.P: What do you remember in the discussion in Lithuania or in the EU this issue of very rich Ukrainians was aroused once or those people who are oligarchs now, were they discussed in any discussions about Ukraine in any meetings of the EU?

V.A.: I couldn't say that, I don't know it and I don't remember to answer you that question. This was definitely not come up formally and officially.

P.K: One of the results of Bucharest Summit of NATO was the invasion of Russia against Georgia in August 2008...

V. A.: I was very much involved in it. I went to Georgia and formally declared our support for them. After I saw that (*inaudible*) all the Russians I mean, military plans were shooting rockets I mean into buildings, I formally and openly called the Kremlin as an aggressor, as trying to occupy the countries I mean which are definitely destroying their people's will to be independent and I called this as new imperialism on Russia's part. So from the very beginning I was very strong and I visited Georgia and some many more times and Azerbaijan and all that stuff. They were moving into separate city and so on Ossetia...whatever...

P.K. Abkhazia.

V.A.: ?

P.K.: Abkhazia.

V.A.: Yes. This is my position, I don't believe I was influential, I voiced that formally officially for the rest of world community, that this is the aggression.

P.K.: Did you see any differences between post-revolution elite in Ukraine and Georgia, I mean in Ukraine after Orange and in Georgia after Rose Revolution?

V.A.: I believe probably that Ukraine was some weak spot in the foreign policy of the European Union, which probably more or less pushed the Russian and opened up some of them. Position for those militaries I mean. If the West doesn't stand very firm behind in Ukraine we can try to do this in Georgia and other countries around.

P.K.: Thank you very much for the interview, we will use this material in research way College of Europe Natolin, in Harvard University, in Mohylanka, Mohyla University, we work together on the project of three revolutions.

V.A.: Like I said I can't remember every detail of it, there is so much international position changed during that time, but in general impression which still lives within me I believe that I was correct from the very beginning standing up and speaking out for the countries which were underdog Russian of the Kremlin and I still believe, even today, that policies and foreign policies and attitudes of Russia did not change and they are following the imperial czar's foreign policies, expansion of the policies and trying to I would say, to expand their maybe not territories, but definitely their influence on the rest of the European countries, so I call that imperialistic foreign policy of Kremlin. I don't say intentionally not Russia, because I see some movements in Russia, but this is a long way to go, but this is the Kremlin's position the group of people who are running that country.

P.K.: Thank you so much.

K. P.: Thank you.