



Lithuania - Italian Fighter Jets Shot Down a Drone from Belarus

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Two Italian Eurofighters took off urgently after a drone entered Lithuanian airspace. **Vilnius: "NATO is vigilant".**

Italian fighter jets in flight overnight over Lithuania. Two Eurofighters of the Italian Air Force took off urgently after a drone violated Lithuanian airspace, as part of the **NATO air defense mission on the eastern flank** of the Alliance.

The take-off order, defined in military jargon as **scramble**, is issued when it is necessary to rapidly launch fighter jets to identify or intercept a possible intruder or potential threat.

The two **F-2000s of the Task Force Air "Baltic Thunder III"** intercepted the unmanned aircraft and **neutralized it**, according to NATO operational procedures. This was announced today by the Italian Ministry of Defense.

It is the **second episode within a month** involving Italian fighter jets engaged in the NATO mission in the Baltic countries, tasked with contributing to surveillance and security of the

Alliance's airspace on its eastern flank.

Italians on the eastern flank

The presence of Italian military personnel on NATO's eastern flank is **"fundamental" for collective security**. This was stated by Defense Minister **Guido Crosetto**, commenting on the intervention of the two Eurofighters.

"It is also because of episodes like this that the presence of our military on the Eastern Flank is fundamental, to guarantee collective security. Today I will be there by their side to bring the closeness of the Government and Italy and thank them, on behalf of Italians, for the precious work they are doing."

According to the Ministry of Defense, Italian crews intercepted and neutralized the drone in compliance with NATO operational procedures.

Crosetto's visit to the Alliance's eastern flank continues today following yesterday's stop in Bulgaria. The minister will be in **Poland, Latvia and Lithuania**, where institutional meetings and visits to Italian contingents are scheduled.

"NATO is vigilant" says Lithuania

"NATO is 'vigilant, determined and ready'", Lithuanian Foreign Minister **Kestutis Budrys** said on Tuesday, after an allied fighter destroyed a drone that entered the country's airspace **from Belarus**, the latest in a series of aerial incursions testing the alliance's eastern border with Russia.

Budrys attributed the interception to the solidity of collective defense, thanking the allies whose air presence, he said, protects Baltic skies and strengthens regional security.

But the message goes beyond Vilnius: with Russia's war against Ukraine continuing, eastern members of the alliance are increasingly viewing airspace violations, intentional or not, as **tests of NATO's determination**. Tuesday's response was presented as proof that the system works.

President **Gitanas Nauseda** confirmed the incident on social media, stating that the drone had been destroyed:

"A drone that had just entered Lithuanian airspace was destroyed by NATO fighters. With Russia intensifying its aggression against Ukraine, a level of readiness like this is vital for our region."

Lithuania's **National Crisis Management Center** stated that the drone had crossed the border from Belarus, had flown over the areas of Lentvaris and Trakai heading west, and had crashed in a rural area near the village of Pratkūnai, in Kaunas County. **This is the first time a drone has been shot down over Lithuanian territory.** Moscow has not commented on the incident.

A complex regional picture

The episode is not isolated. A few hours later, **Poland announced that it had launched its own "air operations"**, citing jet drones striking Ukrainian territory near its borders. Warsaw described the measures as preventive, intended to secure airspace in regions adjacent to the conflict, a sign that vigilance is extending well beyond the Baltic States.

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have reported repeated drone incursions since the beginning, in 2022, of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, intercepts by NATO aircraft remain rare enough to attract attention.

The alliance's air policing mission shot down in May a Ukrainian drone that had strayed into Estonian airspace: it was the first interception of this kind since the start of the war. European officials have also reported that Russia is diverting Ukrainian drones directed against industrial and oil facilities near Saint Petersburg, in the Gulf of Finland.

Diplomatic developments and political scenarios

The incursion comes at a delicate diplomatic moment. Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** has stated that Kyiv is ready to take "de-escalation steps" if Moscow does the same, after U.S. President **Donald Trump** announced that the two sides have agreed to suspend attacks against each other's energy infrastructure.

Despite this, fighting continued overnight: Ukrainian forces struck Russian military targets in Krasnodar territory, while Russia launched 102 drones against Ukraine.

The episode is also part of a broader shift in Lithuanian policy. Since July, when Nauseda declared he wanted the country involved in Western nuclear deterrence against Moscow, **Lithuania has initiated the process of revoking the constitutional ban on hosting nuclear weapons**, a move set to attract renewed attention in European capitals, as the debate on continental deterrence intensifies.