



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on July 10, 2023

## Hungary to Support Sweden's NATO Entry if Turkey Does

During a press conference on July 4, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó announced that Budapest would support a Swedish NATO membership should Türkiye indicate its openness to doing so.

“If there is movement there, then of course we will keep our pledge that Hungary will not delay any country’s membership,” Szijjártó told reporters, before elaborating that he had been, and would continue to be, in “close and continuous” contact with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, on the topic of a potential move toward Swedish membership.



AP Images  
Péter Szijjártó

Szijjártó admitted that he had spoken several times to Fidan and stated that Türkiye would “consult with the Swedes as well as NATO leaders” about attempts to expedite the process of Sweden’s ascendency to NATO.

Earlier that day, Fidan had expressed [Ankara’s](#) hesitancy in permitting Sweden to enter NATO, before urging Sweden to fulfill its obligations under an agreement it inked at a NATO summit in Madrid in 2022 to tackle Ankara’s security concerns.

Previously, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had lifted Ankara’s veto on Finland in the latter’s NATO bid.

“In terms of strategic and security assessment, it is now more open to debate whether Sweden’s membership in NATO will be a burden or a benefit,” Fidan told reporters, alluding to a series of recent anti-Islamic protests, among which encompassed the controversial act of [burning the Quran](#). Additionally, thorny issues such as Kurdish rights in Sweden have significantly damaged relations between Stockholm and Ankara as well as ties between Stockholm and the larger Islamic world.

Hence, Fidan posited that Sweden’s apparent license for such insults against Islam could undermine NATO’s security. Also, the Turks have called into question Sweden’s strategic and security commitments to NATO itself.

That being said, Fidan maintained that Ankara still hoped to expedite talks with Sweden in line with commitments that are already underway. “We call on Sweden to continue its efforts and fulfill its homework just like it has been seen in Finland’s case,” he said, referencing Stockholm’s ability to keep its end of the agreement.

Pressure on Ankara and Budapest has been increasing to ratify Sweden’s NATO bid as soon as possible.

Recent protests entailing the burning of the Islamic Quran in Sweden have led to major riots from members of Sweden’s Muslim community, apart from causing anger among Muslims worldwide.

Consequently, police in Stockholm tried to [ban](#) the granting of permits for Quran burnings in February. Nonetheless, Swedish courts deemed the attempted ban as unlawful, with a court of appeals



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maintaining [the ruling](#) on the grounds that police concerns over security were not adequate to limit the freedom of speech and assembly of those wishing to burn the Quran.

The first Quran burning after the court ruling in Stockholm was held on June 28 by activist Salwan Momika, an Iraqi migrant. The incident happened around lunchtime outside the mosque at Medborgarplatsen in Stockholm, according to a report by the newspaper *Aftonbladet*. One man was arrested at the scene while throwing stones at Momika on the pretext of attempted assault.

Momika spoke to Swedish media before the protest and justified actions by saying, “We will burn the Qur’an. We will say: Wake up Sweden. This is democracy. It is in danger if they say we must not do this.”

The burning coincided with the [Eid al-Adha](#) celebration in Islam, signifying the day after Muslim faithful complete the hajj, a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca that often involves the slaughtering of sheep and goats.

After Momika’s Quran burning, police revealed that they received a number of criminal complaints against Momika for hate speech and for breaching an ongoing fire ban. While the police have said the protest did not fall under the fire ban owing to freedom of expression rights, they are probing allegations [of hate speech](#) as the protest was conducted outside a mosque.

Fidan reacted to the protest by [saying](#), “I curse the heinous act in Sweden against our holy book, the Holy Qur’an. It is unacceptable to allow these actions and refer to freedom of expression. To condone such atrocious acts is to be complicit.”

In January, Danish anti-Islam activist Rasmus Paludan burned a copy of the Quran in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, inciting a stern response from the Turkish government.

“As long as you allow my holy book, the Quran, to be burned and torn apart, we will not say yes to your entry into NATO. Our view of Finland is positive, but not of Sweden,” Erdoğan [said](#) earlier this year following Paludan’s protest.

In response to the aforementioned court’s ruling, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu called the decision racist and likened Quran-burning protests to the book burnings carried out by National Socialist Germany.

“The Nazis started by burning books, then they attacked religious gathering places, and then they gathered people in camps and burned them to achieve their ultimate goals, Çavuşoğlu claimed, adding, “That’s how things like this start.”

Erdoğan slammed the court’s ruling, saying, “The attacks against the Koran are a hate crime. Koran burning cannot be allowed within the framework of freedom of speech. Such actions anger two billion Muslims and must be stopped.”

Key Turkish media outlets, the majority of which are dominated or heavily regulated by Erdoğan’s government, also attacked Sweden, saying that the administrative court that passed the ruling had done so notwithstanding the “global condemnation.”

In recent years, Paludan and his movement Stram Kurs (Hard Line) have been the most conspicuous Qur’an burners in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe.

The Swedish security police (Säpo) has cautioned that the Quran burnings have undermined Swedish security, and arrested five people suspected of helping and abetting terrorist offenses in April, with



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those arrested [allegedly planning a terror attack](#) in response to the January Quran burning by Paludan.



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