



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 21, 2023

NATO Membership: Turkey Gives Green Light to Finland, Vetoes Sweden

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Friday that Turkey's parliament will begin ratifying Finland's accession to NATO, removing the largest remaining roadblock to enlarging the defense bloc as conflict continues in Ukraine unabated. However, NATO entry for Sweden still remains blocked.

"We have decided to initiate the ratification of Finland's accession process to NATO in our parliament," the Turkish president said.

Based on reports from Reuters, Erdoğan made his declaration in Ankara, following a meeting with his Finnish counterpart Sauli Niinistö.

Although Finnish President Sauli Niinistö lauded Turkey's decision, he also voiced hopes that Turkey would approve Sweden's NATO membership application.

Ratification is anticipated to happen prior to mid-April, when the Turkish parliament goes into recess, and before the parliamentary and presidential votes poised for May 14. This ratification would bring Finland one step closer to admittance into NATO.

Any admission of new member states to NATO necessitates a unanimous vote from all existing NATO members. Turkey and Hungary are the only members that have not yet ratified Sweden and Finland's applications.

While having no particular opposition to the accession proceedings of Finland and Sweden, Hungary has been procrastinating on the ratification procedure, a move observers contend is meant to extract concessions from the European Union, which is withholding funds over a conflict on the rule of law.

In a telephone interview with Reuters, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) the declaration was "a good day for everyone that believes in NATO enlargement," and that "Finnish membership will strengthen NATO, it will strengthen Finnish security. It will also strengthen Swedish security."

Moreover, Stoltenberg had also spoken to Erdoğan, who had told him that Turkey was planning to continue talks with Sweden about the latter's NATO ascendancy.

So far, Ankara has refused to budge on Sweden's NATO bid. It states that Stockholm offers a sanctuary for members of what Turkey terms as terrorist groups, especially the Kurdish militant group PKK.

Turkey has insisted on the extradition of around 130 alleged PKK supporters, as well as those of Islamist cleric Fethullah Gülen, who was believed to be culpable for an abortive 2016 coup in Turkey. However, as many of these people hold Swedish citizenship, extradition proceedings are said to be legally complex.



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Last December, Sweden's Supreme Court refused to extradite a significant Gülenist, ruling that various Turkish charges against him were not crimes according to Swedish law and that there was "a risk of persecution based on this person's political beliefs."

Besides, a subsequent series of incidents — including Rasmus Paludan's burning of a Quran in Stockholm as well as the burning of a Swedish flag in Turkey — have only caused Swedish-Turkish ties to plummet even further.

Danmarks Radio (DR) reported Paludan's actions as follows: "Paludan has just burned a copy of the koran in front of the Turkish embassy in Copenhagen. Paludan announced yesterday that he would burn the koran at three different addresses in Copenhagen on Friday. Earlier today he burned one copy in front of a mosque in northwest Copenhagen."

In turn, the Turkish government summoned the Danish ambassador to Ankara for a conversation about Paludan's actions. DR cited the Danish foreign minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who explained Paludan's actions: "Denmark has good relations with Turkey, and this incident will not change that. Our job now is to explain to Turkey what the rules are here in Denmark, with our open democracy, and that there is a difference between Denmark as a country — and us as a people — and individuals, who harbor very different views."

Swedish news outlet *Samnytt* also reported Paludan burning a copy of the Quran outside the Russian embassy in Copenhagen, reportedly in defiance of statements from Chechen UFC fighter Khamzat Chimaev, who voiced anger over Paludan's Quran burning in Stockholm.

As an alleged response to Paludan's actions, SÄPO, the Swedish Security Service, declared in a February [press release](#) that its intelligence had revealed an increased number of Islamic threats of an attack made to the country. Thousands in Afghanistan protested Paludan's actions, which had incensed other parts of the Muslim world as well.

On his end, Paludan stated the protest was anti-Islam in nature and was meant to slam Erdoğan's attempt to influence freedom of expression in Sweden.

SÄPO portrayed the situation as "concerning," with "violent Islamist circles globally" now "focusing more on Sweden."

If these trends persist, the terrorist threat level could nonetheless increase, SÄPO stated. The agency added that it would continue to cooperate "closely with both national and international partners in its work to protect national security, and assess the threat on an ongoing basis."

Fredrik Hallström, head of counter-terrorism at SÄPO, told *SVT Nyheter* that "when it comes to the threats, it is mainly the violence-promoting Islamist environment that is targeting us."

Following the onset of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022, Finland — which shares a long border with Russia — and Sweden both applied for NATO membership, ditching their decades-long policy of military neutrality.

Finland's inclusion into NATO would signify the bloc's first enlargement since 2020, when North Macedonia joined its ranks. The parliaments of all 30 existing NATO members must ratify new applicants.

Meanwhile, Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom said Sweden still hoped to join NATO by the time of the alliance's meeting in Vilnius in July this year.



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“Our partners support us, both in making sure that we can become members of NATO as soon as possible, and in ensuring our security until such time as we become a full member,” he said.

“It is a question of when Sweden becomes a member, not if.”

“Investors would like to see a Turkish pivot back towards closer relations with its traditional Western allies,” said Blaise Antin, head of EM sovereign research at asset manager TCW in Los Angeles.

“Headlines about vetoing NATO enlargement or helping Russia evade sanctions are unnerving to Turkey’s traditional economic and investment partners in the United States and Europe,” he said.



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