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Politics

Turkey Agrees to Back Sweden's NATO Bid in Boost to Alliance

- Alliance chief expects Turkey to move 'as soon as possible'
- Turkish official says its key demands on terrorism met









WATCH: Turkey will ask its parliament to advance Sweden's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization "as soon as possible," alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg told reporters Monday. *Source: Bloomberg*

By [Firat Kozok](#), [Selcan Hacaoglu](#), and [Natalia Drozdiak](#)
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Turkey agreed to support Sweden's NATO bid in a major breakthrough for the military alliance's push to strengthen its defenses following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Turkey will ask its parliament to advance Sweden's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization "as soon as possible," alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg told reporters Monday in Vilnius.



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, shakes hands with Ulf Kristersson, right, in Vilnius, Lithuania, on July 10. *Photographer: Filip Singer/Pool/Getty Images*

The about-face comes after months of arduous negotiations over Turkey's demands and on the eve of a critical two-day NATO summit where leaders including US President Joe Biden are eager to show a united front and signal to Vladimir Putin that his war on Ukraine has only strengthened the alliance.

NATO's northern enlargement heralds one of the most prominent changes in the European security landscape after Russia's aggression led to shifts including a ramp-up of defense spending in Germany and plans to bring back conscription in France. The early 2022 attack on Ukraine prompted an almost overnight change in public opposition to membership in NATO in Finland and Sweden.

“Completing Sweden’s accession to NATO is a historic step that benefits the security of all NATO allies at this critical time,” Stoltenberg said in Vilnius. “I will not give you the exact dates for that. But this is a clear commitment.”



The Big Take

An Expanding NATO Reinforces Itself Against Russia

09:00 / 25:16

Just earlier on Monday, Erdogan had made a quid pro quo demand – Sweden in NATO if the European Union opened its doors to Turkey - only to be reminded by Brussels that they are separate processes. After the surprise request, however, a solution to the impasse emerged behind closed doors within hours.

Erdogan met with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and then European Council President Charles Michel. After those conversations were had, Michel said the bloc would submit a report on the EU’s relations with Turkey, ”with a view to proceed in strategic & forward-looking manner.”

According to a Turkish official, Erdogan won assurances on key demands, including Stockholm’s approach to supporters of Kurdish separatists operating in its territory. There was progress too toward lifting defense-related sanctions and EU officials agreed to speed up their membership negotiations, including on upgrading the customs union and on visa liberalization for its citizens.

Stoltenberg expects Hungary, the only other NATO member yet to approve Sweden’s bid, will follow suit as they “said they don’t want to be the last one not ratifying.”

F-16 Jets

What remains unclear is to what extent Biden’s comments over the weekend that Turkey’s purchase of American F-16 fighter jets is “in play” contributed to Erdogan’s U-turn on Sweden. Biden released a statement saying that he welcomed the agreement and the two leaders will meet on Tuesday.

Congress must approve significant U.S. arms sales to foreign allies and a bipartisan group of senators had told Biden earlier this year that lawmakers shouldn’t

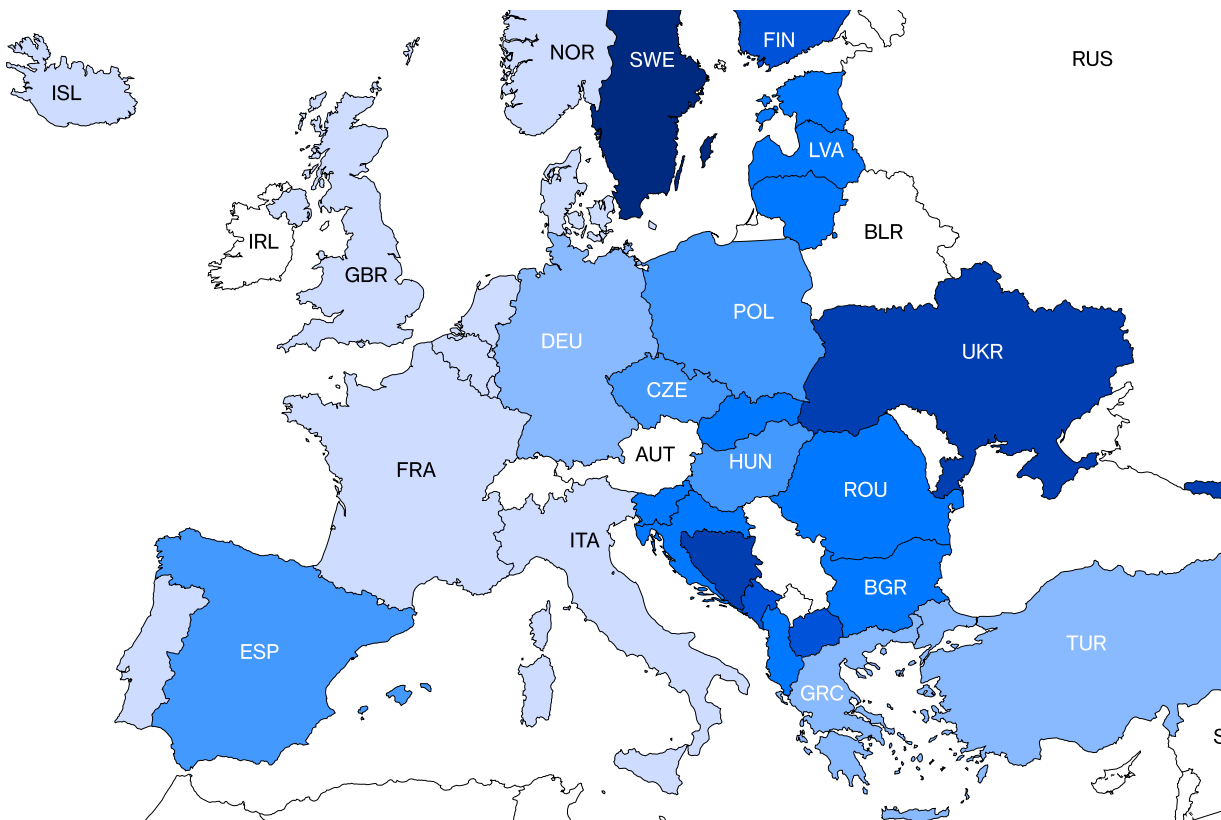
consider the \$20 billion sale of warplanes until the country ratifies Sweden's membership.

Back in Washington, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez, one of the biggest holdouts, appeared to be softening his position when quizzed by journalists. He said "there may be a path forward" in the "next week."

Europe's NATO Members

Sweden is closest to becoming the alliance's 32nd member

Founding member	Joined in the 1950s	Joined in the 1980s/90s
Joined in the 2000s	Joined in 2010s/20s	Wants to join
Ratification pending		



Source: Bloomberg

The decision follows more than a year of stalling and contentious rhetoric, with Ankara repeatedly accusing Stockholm of failing to do enough to crack down on Kurdish groups it views as terrorists.

Turkey's turnaround follows a flurry of diplomatic activity that has seen Kristersson visit Biden in Washington, and Swedish foreign minister Tobias Billstrom meet his Turkish counterpart at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

"I have worked very hard for this to happen, including almost endless conversations with other prime ministers and presidents, and the response has

been very good,” Kristersson told reporters Monday. “Today we took a very large step on the way to completing the ratification process.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy also discussed Sweden’s ambitions with Erdogan during a visit to Istanbul on July 7.

“Today’s decision is very important as it shows consensus can be reached within NATO,” Ihor Zhovkva, Zelenskiy’s deputy chief of staff in charge for foreign relations said. “We hope more political decisions will be taken during the summit and Ukraine will eventually become the 33rd member.”

Read More on NATO:

Erdogan Links Sweden’s NATO Membership to Turkey’s EU Bid
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Zelenskiy to Visit NATO to Rally Support for Ukraine Membership

Once completed, Sweden’s accession would clinch NATO’s control of the Baltic Sea and give the alliance the upper hand in the Arctic region – both strategic gateways for Russia – even as Moscow is bogged down in its invasion of Ukraine. Seven out of eight Arctic nations will belong to NATO.

Bringing Sweden into the fold will also simplify defense planning for the alliance. NATO will benefit not just from Sweden’s combat aircraft, naval prowess and other military assets but also being able to easily shuttle troops or equipment across Nordic territory.

With both Finland and Sweden in the alliance, it will give NATO better access to reinforce the Baltic nations with military support in the event of a crisis.

The area has long been seen as the bloc’s weak spot because troops and equipment arriving by land would have to traverse a narrow corridor between Poland and Lithuania that is sandwiched between Russia’s exclave of Kaliningrad and its ally Belarus.

– *With assistance by Andra Timu, Niclas Rolander, Kati Pohjanpalo, Daryna Krasnolutska, and Zach C Cohen*

(Adds comment from key figure in Congress in 10th paragraph and moves up section on F-16 jets.)

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