

# NATO: Finland and Sweden Seek Membership

Updated February 14, 2023

On June 29, 2022, heads of state and government from NATO’s 30 member states (see **Figure 1**) unanimously agreed to [invite](#) Finland and Sweden to join the alliance. Finland and Sweden formally [applied](#) for membership on May 18, 2022, prompted by heightened security concerns about Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. [Finland’s](#) and [Sweden’s applications](#) marked a [historic shift](#) for these traditionally militarily nonaligned countries. The [Biden Administration](#) and many [Members of Congress](#) support Finland and Sweden joining NATO, arguing that the addition of these two [mature democracies](#) with [advanced militaries](#) will [enhance security](#) in the Baltic Sea region and the broader Euro-Atlantic area. In August 2022, the Senate approved a resolution supporting NATO accession for both countries, and President Biden signed protocols formalizing U.S. approval. As of February 13, 2023, all but two NATO members—Hungary and Turkey—had ratified amendments to NATO’s founding [North Atlantic Treaty](#) to allow Finland and Sweden to join the alliance.

## Finland’s and Sweden’s NATO Aspirations

Russia’s war against Ukraine has [upended decades](#) of [Finnish](#) and [Swedish](#) security policy that sought to balance political, economic, and cultural ties to the West and relations with Russia. After the Cold War, Finland and Sweden joined the European Union (EU) and established close partnerships with NATO. Both [Finland](#) and [Sweden](#) have participated in numerous NATO operations and have [technologically advanced militaries](#) that are interoperable with NATO. Public support for NATO accession—and the [added security](#) of NATO’s “[Article 5](#)” mutual defense clause—has skyrocketed in both countries since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; local polls indicate support at [76% in Finland](#) and [59% in Sweden](#).

U.S. officials from the Departments of [State](#) and [Defense](#) concur with [Finnish](#) and [Swedish](#) assertions that the two countries would be “[security providers](#),” [strengthening](#) NATO’s defense posture in the [Baltic region](#) in particular. Finland is expected to [exceed](#) NATO’s 2% GDP defense [spending target](#) in 2022, and Sweden intends to meet the 2% goal [by 2026](#).

[Some analysts have expressed concern](#) that Finland’s and Sweden’s accession could provoke Russia and question NATO’s ability to defend [Finland’s 830-mile border with Russia](#) (which would double NATO’s overall borders with Russia). [Finnish officials](#) contend that Finland has long defended its own borders and would continue to do so as a NATO member. [Finland](#) and [Sweden](#) also have strong traditions of societal

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IN11949

resilience and substantial experience dealing with Russian disinformation efforts, cyberattacks, and hybrid threats.

## Russia's Reaction

Russia has [long opposed](#) closer integration between NATO and Finland and Sweden. Immediately prior to Finland's and Sweden's NATO applications, [Russia's Foreign Ministry stated](#), "Russia will be forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature, in order to neutralize the threats to its national security that arise from this." Subsequently, Russia has publicly played down the situation. [Russian President Vladimir Putin stated](#) that Finnish and Swedish accession pose "no direct threat for Russia" but emphasized that "expanding military infrastructure" could be viewed as a threat and could "provoke a response."

## NATO's Accession Process and Current Status

Since NATO's creation in 1949, the alliance has grown from 12 founding members to today's 30 members through eight rounds of enlargement. On July 5, 2022, allied governments [signed](#) protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty to allow the accession of Finland and Sweden. As of February 13, 2023, all but two of NATO's 30 members had ratified the amended treaty. Hungary is expected to complete its ratification process in [February or March 2023](#). Turkey's government continues to delay ratification in Turkey's parliament, mainly due to [dissatisfaction with Sweden's efforts](#) to fulfill commitments in a [June 2022 trilateral agreement](#) concluded to gain Turkey's support for the formal start of NATO's accession process. The agreement addressed concerns raised by Turkey about Finland's and Sweden's perceived support for terrorist groups, especially those linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (or PKK, a U.S.- and EU-designated terrorist organization).

Both Sweden and Finland maintain that they are fulfilling their obligations. Swedish officials note, for example, progress on [stricter anti-terrorism laws](#) and a decision to resume issuing [licenses for defense exports](#) to Turkey. Turkey continues to press Sweden, however, to grant Turkish [extradition requests](#) and take a [harder line](#) against pro-Kurdish groups.

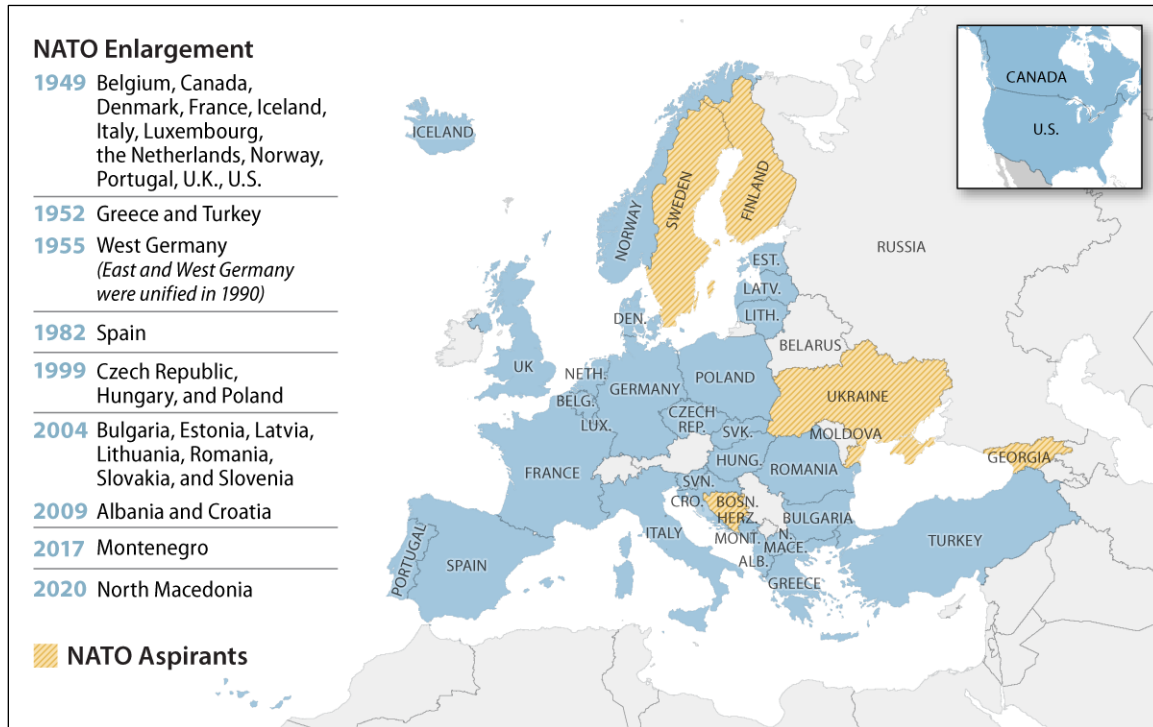
Some experts [assess](#) that Turkey will ultimately approve Finnish and Swedish NATO accession, but most likely [not until after](#) Turkey's upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, expected in May 2023 (although a delay is possible following the devastating earthquakes in early February 2023). Finland and Sweden [hope](#) that both Turkey and Hungary will approve their accession before NATO's July 2023 summit.

## Role of Congress and U.S. Policy

In the United States, once NATO members sign accession protocols, the Administration sends them to the Senate for its advice and consent as part of the ratification process (See CRS Report 98-384, *Senate Consideration of Treaties*). President Biden [submitted](#) accession protocols for Finland and Sweden to the Senate on July 11, 2022. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee [reported favorably](#) on the resolution of ratification in July 2022, and the full Senate approved it on August 3, 2022, by a [vote of 95-1](#). [President Biden signed the accession protocols](#) for both Finland and Sweden on August 9, 2022, completing the U.S. approval process. In the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House passed a resolution of support for Finland and Sweden's NATO accession (H.Res. 1130). In February 2023, a group of [29 Senators](#) sent a letter to President Biden asserting that Turkey's continued delay in approving Finnish and Swedish NATO accession "threatens the Alliance's unity at a key moment in history."

President Biden has committed to help “deter and confront any aggression” against Finland and Sweden during the period before accession. U.S. officials have not provided specifics on U.S. security assurances, which may include an increased U.S. military presence and more joint training exercises.

**Figure I. NATO Countries and Aspirants**



**Source:** CRS Graphics. Map updated June 2022.

**Notes:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine are also formal aspirants for NATO membership.

## Author Information

Kristin Archick  
Specialist in European Affairs

Andrew S. Bowen  
Analyst in Russian and European Affairs

Paul Belkin  
Analyst in European Affairs

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