

NATO: Finland Joins as Sweden's Accession Faces Delay

Updated April 7, 2023

On April 4, 2023, [Finland acceded to NATO](#), enlarging the alliance to 31 members (see **Figure 1**). Amid heightened security concerns about Russia after its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, both [Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO in May 2022](#) with the intention to accede to the alliance at the same time. Sweden's accession has been delayed by concerns raised by Turkey (Türkiye) and Hungary. The [Biden Administration](#) and many [Members of Congress](#) support NATO enlargement to both Finland and Sweden, viewing the addition of these two [mature democracies](#) with [advanced militaries](#) as [enhancing Euro-Atlantic security](#) and serving U.S. interests.

Finland, Sweden, and NATO Enlargement

[Finland's](#) and [Sweden's applications](#) to NATO marked a [historic shift](#) for these traditionally militarily nonaligned countries that [for decades](#) 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 [capable 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; as of mid- to late 2022, polls indicated support at [78% in Finland](#) and [64% in Sweden](#).

U.S. officials from the Departments of [State](#) and [Defense](#) concur with [Finnish](#) and [Swedish](#) assertions that the two countries would [strengthen](#) NATO's defense posture, especially in the [Baltic Sea region](#). Finland [spends](#) roughly 2% of its GDP on defense (as [called for by NATO](#)) and [plans to increase defense spending in 2023](#); Sweden intends to meet NATO's 2% defense spending goal [by 2026](#).

[Some analysts have expressed concern](#) about NATO's ability to defend [Finland's 830-mile border with Russia](#) (which doubles NATO's overall borders with Russia). [Finnish officials](#) contend that Finland has long defended its own borders and will continue to do so as a NATO member. [Finland](#) and [Sweden](#) also have strong traditions of societal resilience and substantial experience dealing with Russian disinformation efforts, cyberattacks, and hybrid threats. Russia has largely sought to downplay concerns about Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO, but [Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) has warned NATO

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against deploying troops or expanding military infrastructure in either country. Following Finland's accession, Russian officials asserted they would [closely watch](#) NATO's use of Finnish territory.

NATO's Accession Process and Current Status

All NATO allies must approve admitting new members. Allied governments unanimously agreed to [invite](#) Finland and Sweden to join NATO at the alliance's June 2022 Madrid Summit, following a [trilateral agreement](#) concluded to address security concerns raised by Turkey and gain Turkey's support for the formal start of NATO's accession process. In July 2022, allied governments [signed](#) protocols to NATO's founding [North Atlantic Treaty](#) that must be ratified by each ally (according to national procedures) to allow Finland and Sweden to join the alliance.

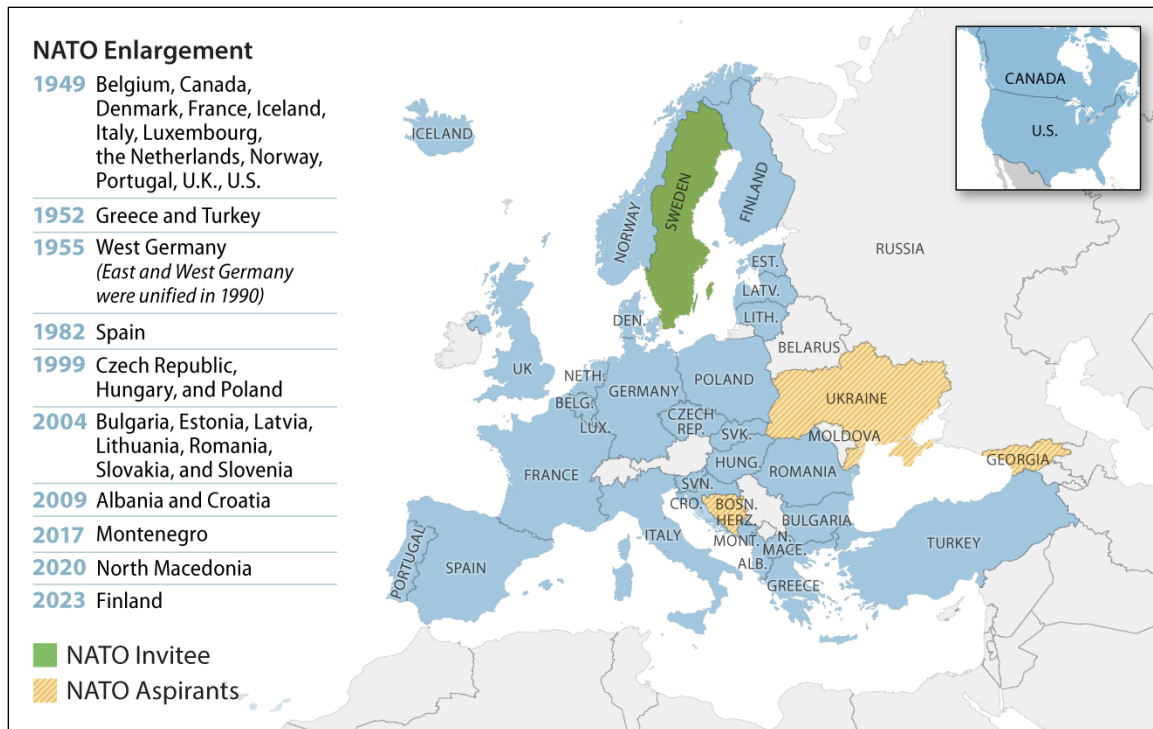
Twenty-eight of NATO's then-30 allies concluded the ratification process for both Finland and Sweden [by late September 2022](#). Turkey, however, [remained concerned](#) about what it viewed as Swedish—and to a lesser extent Finnish—support for terrorist groups, especially those linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (or PKK, a U.S.- and EU-designated terrorist organization). In mid-March 2023, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [announced](#) that Turkey's parliament would move to ratify Finland's accession but not Sweden's yet. Turkey continues to press Sweden to grant Turkish [extradition requests](#) and take a [harder line](#) against pro-Kurdish groups. Reasons for Hungary's delay in ratifying Finnish and Swedish accession are [more opaque](#) but may be [linked](#) to EU and Swedish criticisms of the Hungarian government's respect for the rule of law. Hungary's parliament approved Finland's accession on [March 27](#), but officials announced that a vote on Sweden's accession would be held [“later.”](#) Turkey's parliament approved Finland's accession on [March 30](#).

[Swedish](#) and [NATO officials](#) maintain that Sweden is fulfilling its [obligations](#) under the aforementioned trilateral agreement and that Sweden's accession is [not a question of “whether” but “when.”](#) Sweden's government hopes that a [proposed new law](#) against participating in or otherwise supporting terrorist organizations will be finalized in June and will [convince Turkey](#) to proceed with ratifying Sweden's accession (movement by Turkey to approve Sweden's membership [could prompt Hungary](#) to do likewise). NATO leaders [hope Sweden will be able to join](#) the alliance by NATO's July 11-12, 2023, summit in Lithuania. [Some experts suggest](#) a long delay in finalizing Sweden's accession could make the alliance appear weak and divided and could complicate NATO defense planning.

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 subsequently [reported favorably](#) on the resolution of ratification, 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 117th 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 delay in approving Finnish and Swedish NATO accession “threatens the Alliance's unity at a key moment in history.”

The United States and NATO have [enhanced security cooperation](#) and conducted [more joint training exercises](#) with both Sweden and Finland over the past year, in part to provide [reassurance](#) during the period before accession. [The Biden Administration](#) continues to urge Turkey and Hungary to ratify Sweden's membership [“without delay.”](#)

Figure I. NATO Members and Aspirants

Source: CRS Graphics. Map updated April 2023.

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