

# ***Turkey's Blocking the Inclusion of Sweden and Finland in NATO Membership will Drag out the Process for a Long Time***

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## **Introduction**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine had a rather predictable effect: the demand for NATO security guarantees and the accession of new members. Sweden and Finland decided to renounce their neutrality by applying to join NATO. Now the process of accession of these countries depends on the position of Turkey, which has blocked this decision and will use it to put pressure on the United States - the de facto leader of NATO.

For many years, joining NATO was a taboo topic for Sweden and Finland, as they believed that even discussing joining the Transatlantic bloc would provoke Russia, which had always opposed NATO's eastward expansion. Sweden and Finland, fearing the invasion of Russian troops, decided to jointly apply for NATO membership to Jens Stoltenberg at headquarters in Brussels. According to the Secretary General, the alliance was counting on quick steps to formalise the membership of these countries in the bloc. *"Their membership in NATO would increase our shared security, demonstrate that NATO's door is open and that aggression does not pay"*, the Secretary General said (*"NATO Foreign Ministers discuss Sweden, Finland membership application, reaffirm Ukraine support"*, 2022). According to military experts, Sweden and Finland already meet the standards of the transatlantic bloc, which would speed up the process of joining this organisation.

However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced his disagreement with Sweden and Finland joining NATO. He accused Helsinki and Stockholm of supporting terrorism: these countries provide asylum to political opponents of the president, whom Ankara considers terrorists. At first glance, it can be assumed that a valuable *"trump card"* fell into Erdogan's hands, which he will definitely use.

## Turkey's Demands

Ankara is pressing Sweden and Finland to publicly denounce the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its offshoots, which is a terrorist organization in Turkey. Previously, all NATO members recognized the PKK and even armed its Syrian offshoot as part of the fight against the Islamic State, which caused great discontent among Turkey and was the main source of tension in the bloc (*Kucukgocmen, 2022*).

Turkey also says it will agree to the entry of new members into the bloc if Ankara receives advanced F-35 fighter jets that have already been ordered. Earlier, the United States imposed sanctions against Turkey by refusing to supply F-35s due to Turkey's purchase of the S-400 anti-ballistic missile complex from Russia, as there were fears that the integration of the S-400 Russian military specialists would be able to gain access to Turkey's air defence system. The US is Turkey's most important ally, but relations within NATO remain strained - Turkey did not participate in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and does not support sanctions against Russia today. The US also supports militants who are linked to the PKK in Syria. There are many contradictions in relations between Turkey and the United States, which makes it very difficult to reach a consensus on some issues.

According to Klaus Wölfer (former Austrian Ambassador to Turkey), Turkey is an indispensable, strong military ally, situated in a key location with respect to Ukraine and Russia. Resuming U.S.-Turkey cooperation on weapon systems would be a logical element of starting to assuage Ankara's grievances against Washington. The U.S. will be well-advised to keep an eye on the extremely low popularity that U.S. positions have within the Turkish population (*Wölfer, 2022*).

## Analysis

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Given the specifics of Turkey's foreign policy, which is based on balancing between the West and Moscow, there is a high probability that the West knew in advance about the impossibility of unconditional inclusion of Sweden and Finland in the near future. Despite all the military and humanitarian support provided by the

Western community to Ukraine, the official position of NATO, as a separate organisation, regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict remains blurred.

It is difficult to imagine a situation where the decision to change the vector of foreign security policy, which implies joining a military bloc, was made without consultations taking into account possible obstacles and. That is, knowing the interests of certain parties, it is possible to predict the outcome of events in advance. Returning to the topic of Turkey, one can assume with great certainty that no one counted on the unhindered inclusion of Sweden and Finland in NATO. The declaration of these countries about their intentions is more like a signal to Moscow, which directly refers to the expansion of the bloc to the east.

Neither NATO nor Russia is interested in further escalation of the war in Europe, and Ukraine will remain a buffer zone between the two blocs, so at present, statements about NATO's eastward expansion can most likely be regarded as a demonstration of a possible outcome for Russia in the event of further escalation wars in Ukraine.

## **Greek Factor**

The US and NATO war against Russia in Ukraine has now rekindled the longstanding conflict between Turkey and Greece. After Turkey vetoed new NATO membership, Washington invited Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to give a speech to the US Congress condemning Turkey (*United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2022*). Greece would be outraged if Turkey received the F-35 and of course would lobby against it, which Mitsotakis demanded in principle during his speech to the US Congress. Athens is building up its military capabilities so as not to be left behind in the arms race in the Aegean that it is leading with its partner-rival Turkey. Moreover, due to territorial disputes, Athens and its Cypriot allies are a key obstacle blocking Turkey's bid for EU membership.

Therefore, today it is too early to say that the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO depends only on Turkey, since in the future it will depend on Greece, which in turn is a member of the EU. The EU is an economically important partner for Turkey, which previously applied for membership in the alliance, but nevertheless, against the backdrop of rising inflation, the flow of refugees from Ukraine and the energy crisis,

the EU cannot afford to spoil relations with Turkey, since the situation with refugees, which keeps Turkey on its territory by agreement with the EU, may get out of control.

## **Relationships with Russia**

Despite the not entirely peaceful history of relations between Turkey and Russia, which included several wars, Ankara is trying to maintain a balance between the EU, the US and Russia. Because of its position in the West, Turkey is called Russia's "secret weapon" in NATO. Fox News recalls that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision to block Sweden and Finland from joining the alliance is not the first time Ankara has gone against the West. Thus, Erdogan is actively trying to destabilise NATO after part of the military wanted to overthrow him in 2016 (*"Is Turkey Russia's secret weapon inside NATO?"*, 2022).

The Administration of the President of Russia is in no hurry to comment negatively on the application of Sweden and Finland to NATO. *"The fact is that Finland and Sweden are countries that have applied and are applying to join the alliance, and Turkey is a member of the alliance, and this is a matter of relations between these countries and within the alliance itself, we would not like to interfere in these relations"*, - Dmitry Peskov, press secretary of the President of Russia, answering a question about Russia's reaction to Turkey's statements (*"Russia does not interfere in relations between Sweden, Finland and Turkey"*, 2022). Moscow understands that the accession of the Scandinavian countries is currently probably impossible, given the current state of affairs.

## **Forecast**

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The US may unlock the purchase of more F-16 fighters instead of F-35s, but that option for the Turkish Air Force will depend on the removal of the S-400. At the same time, the talks could include sending these missile systems to Ukraine itself to greatly increase the air defence capabilities of Ukrainian army, but this would anger Moscow and affect the credibility of Erdogan, who overlooks the Turkish lira's rapid downward spiral and the growing discontent of the people.

After the beginning of the conflict, Turkey is trying to play the role of a mediator in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Turkey will not engage in an open confrontation with Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as it seeks to balance its ties with both Moscow, which is critical to protecting Turkish troops stationed in Syria, and Kyiv, to which Ankara has supplied armed drones.

In the West, arguing in favour of strengthening NATO's position in the Baltic Sea, they started talking about expelling Turkey from the bloc for its ambiguous position, but such an outcome of events is hardly possible due to the lack of a specific mechanism for expelling a member.

At present, the Transatlantic bloc is going through hard times. For many years, there has been talk among the EU countries about how much NATO membership is necessary in the absence of clear threats, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the demand for security guarantees has approached Cold War levels. With the inclusion of new members in NATO, the current conflict will move to a new level, which will create additional geopolitical risks in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic, which will soon become a new region of clashes between the West and Russia. Therefore, against the backdrop of EU countries' doubts about the US as a guarantor of Europe's security, the US will use internal strife among NATO members to delay the inclusion of new members in the bloc.

Turkey's blocking the inclusion of Sweden and Finland in NATO membership will drag out the process for a long time. Turkey is pursuing only its own national interests and will agree to NATO expansion if it receives written guarantees that satisfy the concerns expressed about the Scandinavian countries. Given the very low support ratings for Turkey in the EU countries, new potential NATO members are unlikely to make concessions to Turkey.

Ultimately, it is worth noting that contemporary politics is not always based on critical analysis. Especially when the vector of foreign policy depends on one person, as in Turkey and Russia.

#### New comments on Turkey's position

On July 29, the Madrid Summit was held, which brought together the leaders of NATO member countries to discuss the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. One of the results of the Madrid Summit was that Turkey gave its consent to Sweden and Finland joining

NATO. Earlier, Erdogan demanded that Sweden and Finland publicly denounce the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its offshoots, which is recognised as a terrorist organization in Turkey.

Sweden and Finland made concessions by giving written guarantees that Turkey's demands would be met - before the summit, Turkey and the new members of NATO signed a memorandum of understanding.

After Turkey received written guarantees (preliminary), Sweden and Finland are back in the process of joining NATO, but this will take several months (up to one year), since the protocol on joining the transatlantic bloc must be ratified by their national parliaments. Erdogan said that Turkey's ratification of the protocol depends on whether Finland and Sweden fulfil their obligations or not.

"If the application of the Scandinavian countries is not approved by the Turkish parliament, the process of admission to NATO will not be completed. Therefore, Finland and Sweden must fulfil their obligations" - the Turkish president said.

Earlier, Erdogan named the number of militants whom he wanted to extradite to Turkey, but among them there are also citizens of Finland and Sweden, which will make the extradition process impossible or cause public condemnation. So far, there is no clear guarantee that this fulfilment of the obligations by Sweden and Finland will actually happen.

As stated in the main article, the accession process for Sweden and Finland will be very long due to the ratification process. And there is still no guarantee that the Scandinavian countries will actually fulfil their obligations and whether Turkey will consider that the obligations have been fully fulfilled. However, this is a diplomatic victory for Erdogan. Now he will be able to manipulate his position in the future.

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