



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on July 19, 2023

Turkey's Erdoğan Puts Sweden's NATO Status on Hold

After convening with Sweden and NATO leaders in Vilnius, Lithuania, on July 10, before the two-day NATO summit in Vilnius, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan agreed to back Sweden's attempt to join the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), leading to much jubilation among pro-NATO advocates. While not officially acknowledged as such, the fact that America gave the green light to the long-requested Turkish purchase of F-16 fighter jets might have contributed to Ankara's decision to back Sweden's NATO bid.



AP Images
Recep Tayyip Erdogan

However, the president declared on July 12 at a [press conference](#) that the Turkish Parliament would not ratify Sweden's application until the end of its summer recess (which is poised to end on October 1). "The parliament is not in session for the upcoming two months," Erdoğan said, "but our target is to finalize the matter as swiftly as possible."

In the meantime, observers have pointed out, Erdoğan is planning to get as many political concessions from the Swedes for as much as he can, including Sweden's support for Turkey's EU accession bid and an increase in bilateral counterterrorism efforts, particularly against PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which Turkey considers a terrorist group) and associated organizations.

However, since the agreement inked between Turkey and Sweden was agreed to by moderate Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and done without the consent of the conservative Sweden Democrats (SD), Turkey's requirements have supposedly divided members of Sweden's government coalition.

In context, Turkey previously submitted extra requests in exchange for the ratification on Sweden's NATO bid, with PM Kristersson concurring to the requests during a recent meeting.

Notably, Erdoğan said during a press conference that Ankara plans to follow up on Sweden's implementation of Turkish requirements before any ratification can happen. He [indicated](#) that Sweden will have to lay out a detailed, 17-point blueprint on how to comply with all the requirements, apart from inking a deal on a joint Turkish-Swedish action plan for the future with the Turkish Parliament.

"A bilateral security mechanism will be established at the ministerial level and we will increase our cooperation ... against the terrorist organizations," Erdoğan [said](#). "At the same time, Sweden will actively support the Republic of Turkey in the update of the customs union, visa liberalization, and the membership process of Turkey to the European Union."

Ankara also insists that Stockholm adopt tangible measures to counteract what the Turks deem



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“Islamophobia,” including pro-Kurdish demonstrations linked to PKK and the controversial Quran burnings, which Erdoğan called a “barbaric form of terrorism.” Erdoğan said that Turkey “will not accept such insults against over two billion Muslims.”

Feathers were ruffled in Stockholm, as Kristersson accepted the Turkish terms without discussing them with his conservative coalition partners. Aron Emilsson, a member of the Sweden Democrats and chairman of the government’s foreign affairs committee, opined that the agreement between Kristersson and Erdoğan requires a complete second assessment before going any further.

“There are parts that the SD and the government have not discussed. It is important that we do so when the agreement is to be specified,” Emilsson [said](#). “Among other things, I am thinking about how Sweden should be a voice for a possible future Turkish EU membership. SD’s view is known before and we look critically at a Turkish-EU connection.”

Emilsson pointed out that the Sweden Democrats would like specific answers on how the moderates hope to fulfill Turkey’s requests, elaborating that as it is the larger of the two coalition partners, SD has “no reason to believe that [the Moderates] would not deepen their view on how this will work in practice.”

On the Turkish end, the strongest parliamentary ally to Erdoğan’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Ankara, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), has expressed its disapproval of the president’s backing of Stockholm’s NATO membership, according to an article by the Swedish daily *Samnytt* on July 16. If the MHP were to oppose ratification in October, it could undermine Sweden’s NATO bid.

Although Erdoğan’s AKP holds the government with 263 seats, it depends on the backing of 60 MPs of four allied parties (in a confidence-and-supply agreement) to reach a majority in the 600-seat house — 50 of whom hail from the nationalist MHP.

What this implies is that if all the opposition parties vote one way and the MHP adheres to their stance, the ruling AKP cannot pass any major decision in the Assembly, including the ratification of Sweden’s NATO membership.

Sweden is “a country that threatens our national existence, embraces bloody terrorist organizations, and tolerates their recruitment in their own capital,” MHP chairman Devlet Bahçeli [said](#) in a recent press statement, declaring that as long as Sweden does not extradite Kurdish activists convicted of terrorism in Turkey, his party cannot back the Scandinavian country’s NATO membership.

The MHP leader contended that neither the promise of F-16s nor relying on Sweden’s aid to attain EU membership is an adequate reason to gloss over Stockholm’s “failure” to adequately deal with the Kurdish problem and ratify its NATO accession.

Erdoğan [met](#) Bahçeli on July 13 to discuss his party’s opposition, but the outcome of that meeting remains uncertain.

Nonetheless, some observers posit that Erdoğan might not even require MHP for ratification, as the largest opposition force, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) — which ran on an explicitly pro-Western platform — previously [announced](#) it would back Swedish membership.

Regardless of whether Erdoğan manages to get his coalition partners to back Sweden’s NATO bid, the question remains whether Stockholm can succeed in appeasing Erdoğan in terms of his requests by the time Parliament reopens this October.



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