



Turkey's Erdoğan Submits Sweden's NATO Bid to Parliament for Ratification

On October 23, the office of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan verified in a post on X (formerly Twitter) that Erdoğan had signed Sweden's NATO accession protocol and sent it to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey for ratification.

"The Protocol on Sweden's NATO Accession was signed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on October 23, 2023 and referred to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye," the presidency announced, without elaborating.

NATO allies were pleased when Erdoğan declared at a summit in July this year that he would send the legislation to Parliament when it reopened on October 1, having hitherto broached objections over Sweden's alleged hosting of individuals who Turkey claims are members of terrorist groups.

Since Parliament reopened, nevertheless, Turkish officials have maintained that Stockholm has to adopt more tangible measures to suppress the illegal Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militia before Ankara could ratify its NATO membership bid.

Turkey, the EU, and the United States regard the PKK as a terrorist group.

Sweden's protocol has to be authorized by the Turkish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and then the Grand National Assembly, where a simple majority vote would be adequate for it to pass. There is no fixed timeline in place for such votes.

Analysts say the bill is likely to be passed in Parliament after it has been submitted to the general assembly, but it remains uncertain as to when Ankara will schedule the vote.

Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), together with its nationalist and Islamist partners, holds 322 out of the 600 seats in Parliament.

The main opposition Republican People's Party has articulated support for Sweden's membership.

"Actually, if it would be tabled it would pass," opined Sinan Ülgen, former diplomat and director of the Istanbul-based Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies.

"Unless Erdoğan takes a negative stance which would impact the AKP vote. Now it is more of a question of when Parliament would decide to schedule the vote. Can be quick or maybe not," Ülgen posted on X, elaborating that "the decision rests with 1 man."

On October 24, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson declared his delight following Erdoğan's move,



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stating his country was “looking forward to being a NATO member.”

During a NATO meeting earlier this month, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged Erdoğan to ratify Sweden’s accession to the alliance, reminding Erdoğan he had pledged to submit the matter to Parliament in July and that Sweden had kept its end of the agreement that the two countries’ leaders had reached with Stoltenberg at that time.

In an attempt to win Turkey’s approval for its NATO membership bid, Sweden has altered its counterterrorism laws, restarted arms exports to Turkey, and outlawed support for the PKK and other groups Ankara regards as terrorists.

However, Turkey bemoaned that Sweden was still not doing enough to tackle terrorism and Islamophobia, particularly in Stockholm’s tolerance for Quran-burning during demonstrations, and alleged that Stockholm has vetoed most of its terrorism extradition requests.

Last month, Erdoğan also insisted that the U.S. greenlight the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Turkey as a prerequisite for approving Sweden’s NATO membership.

Eventually, Ankara stopped objecting to Stockholm’s NATO bid after obtaining a pledge from Washington that it would be permitted to purchase 40 new F-16s as well as a promise from Stockholm that it would help revive Turkey’s faltering attempt to join the EU.

Should the Turkish Parliament ratify Sweden’s NATO bid, Hungary will be the only country left to ratify Stockholm’s NATO quest. Notably, a July ratification vote in the Hungarian Parliament did not pass, due to a boycott by the ruling Fidesz party that left the session without sufficient votes to pass the measure, notwithstanding a majority of those present voting in support of Sweden’s NATO membership.

Sweden and Finland both applied to join NATO in May 2022, ditching decades of military neutrality after Russia started its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Finland obtained Turkey’s approval earlier this year after similar legal and political concessions to those required of Sweden, and the country officially joined NATO in April.

On October 17, Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz told lawmakers that the Turkish government will more than double its military spending next year, as Turkey’s flagging economy has impacted its attempts to keep up with its fellow NATO members.

Launched as part of a broader four-year development plan, the proposed military budget for 2024 would see defense spending soar to 1.13 trillion liras (over \$40 billion), compared to around \$16 billion this year, Yılmaz declared.

If passed, the budget would exceed the record set in 2019, when Turkey spent over \$20 billion on its military, based on figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Turkey’s military expenditures have halved since 2019, and have remained below the 2 percent of GDP mandated by NATO since 2020.

While Erdoğan has significantly boosted the domestic arms industry in Turkey, the country remains the world’s 19th-largest arms importer, as per SIPRI figures.

With the Turkish economy beleaguered by enduringly high inflation, former Deputy Defense Minister Muhsin Dere acknowledged in May that Ankara has been unable to afford enough weapons and ammunition for a number of years.

“God willing, Turkey’s economic situation will be much better, and we will meet the needs of the army



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from A to Z,” he proclaimed at the time.

Yilmaz told parliament that Turkish arms exports will almost double in 2024, from \$6 billion to \$11 billion, while the country’s defense industry will be 86 percent self-sufficient, up from 80 percent last year.

Nevertheless, Turkey’s budget deficit is widening, attaining a shortfall of \$4.6 billion in September after a narrow surplus was recorded in July and August. The government has increased value-added and petrol taxes to raise extra money, although these increases alone will be inadequate to cover the proposed defense spending hike, the Duvar news outlet reported.



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