

# NATO Enlargement

## The future of the Open-Door Policy

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was founded in 1949 in Washington DC by 12 countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. Since its inception, the Alliance has more than doubled its size, notably with the integration of Eastern European countries after the end of the Cold War.

At the core of this enlargement is NATO's Open-Door Policy. Based on Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, it provides a process and criteria for any country that intends to join the organisation. Based on the principle that European nations have the right to security and self-determination, it can include any "European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area." Eight enlargement rounds were conducted in 1952, 1955, 1982, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2017 and 2020, when North Macedonia became NATO's 30<sup>th</sup> member state.

The Open-Door Policy is designed to promote European security and stability by creating a unified defence against possible aggression by external countries. Acceding member states must uphold the values and commitments of the Alliance, which include democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law, and respect for international law. Allied nations have supported this policy throughout NATO's existence and assisted countries seeking to join the organisation.

### Collective Defence: An Attractive Security Guarantee

European countries have been attracted by the security guarantees of NATO's collective defence. Enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, it is a cornerstone of the Alliance and lays out the principle that an attack on one member is an attack on all that triggers a collective response. It has been a key factor in deterring aggression against any Allied nation since 1949.

This security guarantee continues to be significantly attractive for European countries, and five partner countries are currently aiming to join NATO: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Moldova, Sweden, and Ukraine.

This principle demonstrates the commitment of the member states to protecting each other and their willingness to take collective action to guarantee the security of their allies. Collective defence is also essential for the political stability of Europe. It ensures that all members of the Alliance have a vested interest in each other's security and safety, which contributes to preventing conflict. This strengthens the nations' bond and helps create a more stable and peaceful environment in the region.

Collective defence is a key pillar of the NATO Alliance and an essential part of its core values. It is a powerful deterrent against aggression. By guaranteeing the security of its members, it provides a strong foundation for international peace and stability.

### The Process of the Open-Door Policy

NATO's enlargement is based on a long process that includes several steps for candidate countries.

It begins with a discussion between NATO and the candidate country's representatives on the preconditions for membership and the contributions that will be made to the common budget. The prospective member must confirm the willingness and ability to meet the membership's political, legal and military obligations. The Accession Protocol can subsequently be prepared and ratified by the member states. The organisation's Secretary General invites the country to accede to the Treaty, which is done according to national procedures and becomes effective after depositing their instruments of accession to the US State Department, the depository state of the Washington Treaty.

NATO has introduced measures to facilitate this process, including the establishment of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) and a revised Strategic Concept.

They provide criteria and help to reduce the time of transition into membership. The Open-Door Policy gained visibility with Finland and Sweden's recent applications, as well as Ukraine, following Russia's invasion of the latter.

## The Impact of the War in Ukraine

In February 2022, the unprovoked Russian invasion of its neighbour Ukraine pushed Finland and Sweden to end their long-upheld neutrality and seek to join the Alliance. In the past, the two countries had been apprehensive of the political and military implications of NATO membership. However, the invasion replaced these fears with a greater sense of urgency to join the Alliance and enhance the protection of their national security in the face of possible Russian aggression.

Finland and Sweden are close partners of the organisation. They have cooperated in a multitude of military exercises and have a high level of interoperability. For this reason, the NATO Heads of State and Government extended an invitation to the two countries to join the Alliance only one month after their application, during the Madrid Summit on 29 June 2022. To finalise this process, all Allies have to ratify their accession protocols. However, this last step has been blocked by Türkiye and Hungary, which have sought diplomatic gains in exchange for their ratification.

The Kurd communities living in the two countries have long been Erdogan's primary target. The Turkish president views them as harbouring members of and supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a terrorist, armed and militant political group in Türkiye. In this context, he is aiming to obtain cooperation, especially from the Swedish government, on the extradition of 130 people accused of terrorism by Ankara, a number that has risen from 73 in the summer of 2022. In other words, he has conditioned the ratification of their accession protocol to the completion of the extraditions. Some cases are particularly problematic for Stockholm, which do not criminalise the alleged "crimes" such as journalism work and political beliefs. In this context, Sweden's supreme court has already blocked one case. In addition, there is no guarantee that Türkiye will not make additional or increased demands.

In addition, Erdogan demanded from Stockholm and Helsinki the reestablishment of arms exports, which had been effectively banned after the country's incursion into Syria to attack the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, which Sweden rapidly met. In a similar dynamic, Hun-

gary is using this opportunity to obtain concessions from the European Union (EU). Prime Minister Orbán is bargaining with Brussels, which has been blocking billions of funds for Hungary due to concerns over democracy and the rule of law. The government claimed other internal reforms were needed before the Hungarian Parliament could focus on the NATO issue. Nonetheless, Hungary is expected to ratify the Nordic countries' accession early in the first part of 2023.

In light of the blackmailing and pressures exerted on the two candidate countries, and with the backdrop of a perceived need to ensure their national security, how have and will the recent developments influence the future of the Open-Door Policy?

## The Risks of a Grey Zone

The lengthy and, at times, obscure accession process creates doubts about a country's likelihood to obtain a NATO membership, incentivising the use of pressure or even threats to limit their success. As the collective defence does not yet protect the countries, they remain vulnerable to outside influence. Though some countries feel an urgent need to increase their security, the process may take more than one year, and even multiple years, for specific cases such as North Macedonia and Ukraine.

### Jamie Shea

*Board of Directors for Friends of Europe, former Spokesperson for NATO, and former Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for the Emerging Security Challenges Division*

There is a grey zone between a country's application and official integration, which invites hostile powers to test NATO. The Alliance needs to limit the potential for blackmailing and the obtention of concessions by member states if a country adheres to NATO's entry rules.

Recommendations:

1. **Shorten the time between the invitation to join the Alliance and its full membership of, and integration into NATO.** A lengthy time-frame between the two dates only increases uncertainty and invites hostile powers to test NATO's commitment and resolve. The invasions of Georgia in 2008, and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 illustrate this risk.

2. **After issuing a formal invitation, Allies would pledge to let the accession and ratification processes go forward without introducing bilateral disputes** in order to exert leverage or blackmail and gain concessions, especially on issues unrelated to the obligations of alliance membership. This is what Turkey has been doing with respect to Finland and Sweden and despite the latter two countries concluding an agreement with Turkey on the margins of the Madrid Summit to resolve these issues in a cooperative spirit. The Turkish parliament has still not ratified the accession of Finland and Sweden.

## Dual Standards in a Selective Process

Candidate countries have experienced the Open-Door Policy very differently. The length of the application range from a few years up to 21 years for North Macedonia, which accession was blocked by Greece over a naming dispute.

In search of security and sovereignty guarantees against Russia, Ukraine has been seeking NATO membership for many years. As early as 2008, the country applied to join the Alliance without success. In 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament reiterated their nation's intention to become a member state of the political and military organisation. The question of the country's integration into NATO is still pending and unlikely to be resolved soon because of the war.

In contrast, after Russia invaded Ukraine, Finland and Sweden rapidly applied, followed by an invitation only one month later. One explanation for this rapidity is the already close partnership and alignment between NATO and the two countries. However, this poses the question of differences in the accession process and the degree to which the door is really open for all European states.

## Amanda Paul

*Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had a profound impact on European security, creating a new geopolitical reality, including pushing Sweden and Finland to apply for NATO membership. While NATO claims to have an Open-Door Policy, getting through the door – or in some cases even finding it – can be difficult. Though Sweden and Finland found the door and their membership bids were fast-tracked, Turkey refused to ratify the accession until both states – particularly Sweden – met a set of conditions, including deporting asylum seekers Ankara wants to prosecute for terrorism offenses. For Georgia and Ukraine, which were promised a seat at NATO's table in 2008, membership remains a distant prospect. Ukraine's application to join NATO in September 2022, received a rather tepid reaction, while Georgia has tried but continually failed to receive a Membership Action Plan, despite being more prepared than some countries that already joined.

Recommendations:

1. **NATO must prove that it does not have a selective *Open-Door Policy* by progressing the applications of Georgia and Ukraine.** The *Open-Door Policy* has been applied differently between nations. Some countries found the candidacy process largely difficult and lengthy while other have seen their application fast-tracked.
2. In recognition of the new geopolitical reality, **NATO should enhance its presence and position on the Baltic Sea and further strengthen the security and the resilience of states around the Black Sea.**

## NATO enlargement on the Eastern Flank

NATO enlargement towards the East has incorporated former members of the USSR after the end of the Cold War. Russia has heavily criticised their membership, which blamed the organisation for increasing insecurity in the region. Critics of the enlargement argue that it is unnecessarily provocative and raises tensions be-

tween Russia and NATO member states. On the other hand, supporters of enlargement argue that it helps increase stability in the region, allows NATO to better address regional security issues, and benefits the countries obtaining membership.

## Alena Kudzko

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Recommendations:

- 1. Discussions about the Alliance’s enlargement should be underpinned by a general understanding that NATO membership is neither an encouragement nor a trigger for Putin’s Russia to launch aggressions against other countries.** It is, in fact, a deterrence against such aggressions. The decision of Sweden and Finland to join the Alliance has demonstrated that the war Russia has launched is not a response to any perceived threat of an attack by NATO. Otherwise, Russia would have been much more vehement about a new long border with NATO in the North and would thus have been adjusting its military posture. This narrative is rather shaped by Putin’s endeavour to influence countries that are weak enough to him and to which he would like to broaden his sphere of influence.
- 2. Prospective members should focus on acquiring as many comprehensive, immediate, and future security guarantees and as much security assistance as possible.** Receiving all the benefits – military support, alignment on doctrine, strategies, training, intelligence sharing, weapon acquisition and standards – also means that when the time is right, stable democracies will have a convincing case that transitioning from de facto membership to full membership would be too easy to be refused.

## European Political Community – A Solution to Reduce the Grey Zone?

In light of the struggles some countries face to obtain membership in both NATO and the EU, the concept of a European Political Community (EPC) offers another solution to develop closer ties in the region. It could be a stepping stone to making a convincing case for an application at a later stage.

Although the EPC has been compared to a “waiting room” or a “consolation prize” for countries facing an up-hill struggle to join the EU or NATO, in the current format, this platform could serve as a forum to obtain diplomatic support, discuss regional security, and cooperation with its European neighbours. The EPC could serve as a bridge between a candidate country and NATO member states to expand collaboration and show support, which could reduce the margin for pressure and blackmail by adversarial countries.

## Benjamin Haddad

*Member of the French Parliament*

NATO is back at the heart of European collective defence in which France is playing a full role, notably by increasing its presence in Romania and the Baltic states. Alongside the Alliance, the European Union (EU) has a decisive and complementary role to play to bolster security capacities and engage with countries in the region. The European strategic autonomy objectives will contribute to this goal by strengthening the defence capabilities of EU countries and reducing their vulnerability to external threats and influences. By being more active in its neighbourhood, the European Political Community can also help increase regional and security cooperation in order to reduce the risk of escalation of tensions. Overall, these efforts contribute to preventing conflict and ensure that the region remains stable.

In addition, an important but often overlooked dimension of transatlantic cooperation is the economic and technological cooperation between the US and the EU. It has been shaken by recent American administrations and economic crises

but is essential to integrate member states and develop European defence capacities. By working together, we can develop new technologies and innovations to tackle security challenges. Collaboration can also generate the creation of income and increase support for transatlantic cooperation and its institutions, including NATO.

will contribute to NATO remaining a pillar of strength and security in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Moreover, by being more active in its neighbourhood, the European Political Community can also contribute to increasing regional and security cooperation and reduce the risk of escalation of tensions.

## Conclusion

NATO's doors remain open to European countries that aspire to join the Alliance. The war in Ukraine has increased the attractiveness of such membership and the urgency to acquire it. The path to membership can be arduous, and candidate countries may experience challenges and influence from both external and internal sources. Despite these obstacles, the security guarantees provided by NATO remain extremely attractive.

NATO stands as a cornerstone of European security, and its *Open-Door Policy* is an important commitment to the stability and security of the Euro-Atlantic area. To ensure its efficacy, the Alliance must be consistent with its implementation. This includes ensuring that all prospective members are treated fairly and receive equal opportunities to join the Alliance. To do this, NATO must focus on shortening the timeframe between invitation and full integration and pledge to let the accession and ratification process go forward without blackmailing. This is especially important since Türkiye and Hungary have been allowed to exert leverage with respect to Finland's and Sweden's accession, despite approving their invitation to the Alliance at the Madrid Summit.

The Alliance should ensure the provision of sufficient assistance to countries interested in membership. This includes providing military support, alignment on doctrine, strategies, training, intelligence sharing, weapon acquisition and standards. By doing so, candidate countries will be much better positioned to transition from de facto membership to full membership.

NATO should continue to enhance economic and technological cooperation with the US and the EU and continue to foster innovation and development. The positive outcome will not only ensure that NATO remains a pillar of strength and security in the Euro-Atlantic area but also increase support for the organisation in its member and partner states. All these efforts

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