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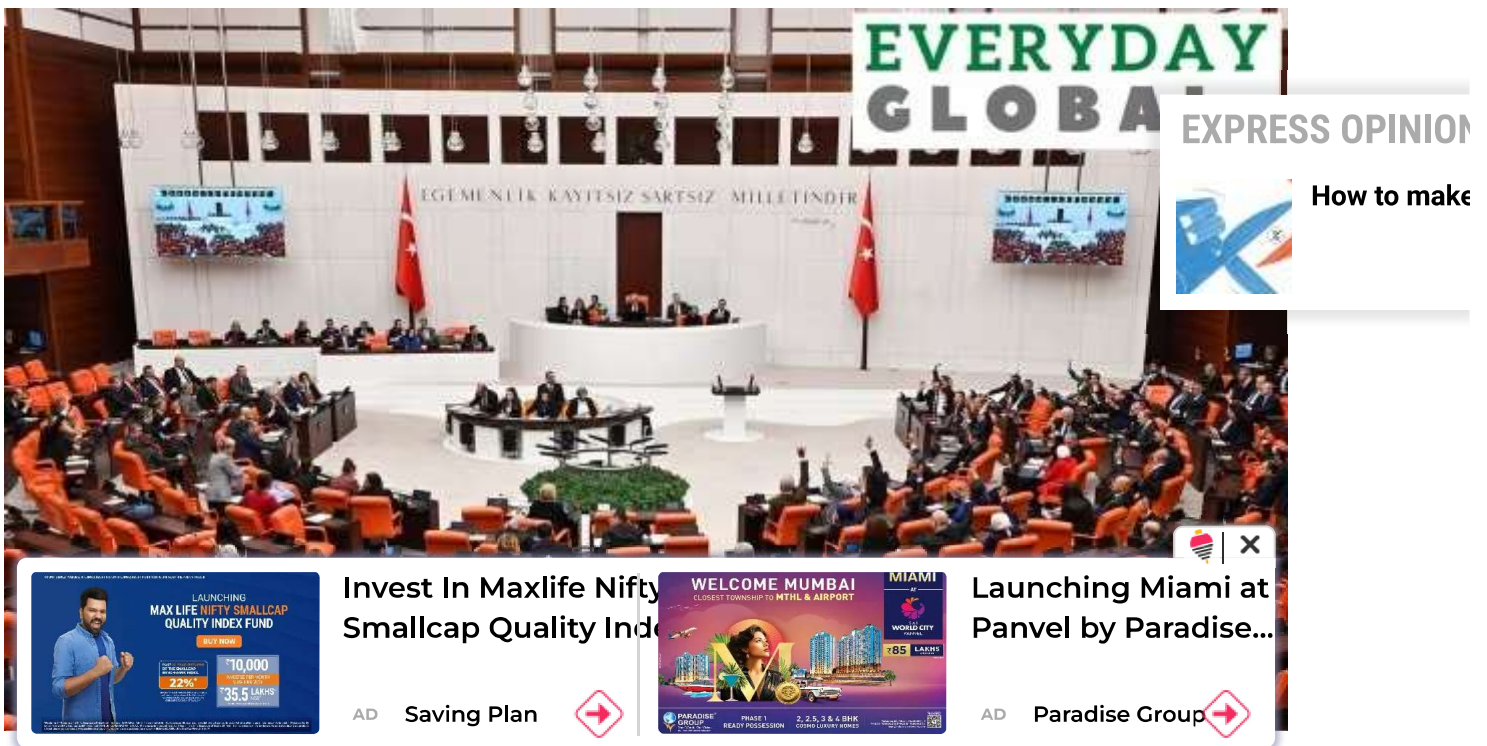
# Turkey finally backs Sweden's NATO bid: Why the opposition, why it changed its stance

Why does Sweden want to join NATO and how can the country help the alliance? Why were Turkey and Hungary blocking its membership? We explain.

By: [Explained Desk](#)

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Turkish lawmakers follow the debate of Sweden's bid to join NATO at the Turkish Parliament in Ankara, Turkey, Jan. 23. (Photo: AP)

Sweden's attempt to join NATO cleared a major hurdle Tuesday (January 23) after Turkey's parliament supported its membership. For a new country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), all the existing members have to approve it. Turkey and Hungary had been opposing Sweden's entry for almost the past two years.

### Why does Sweden want to join NATO?

Sweden has not fought a war in two centuries, staying neutral through the two World Wars and the Cold War. In recent years, while it joined the European Union and collaborated with NATO, it showed no intention of actually joining the military alliance its powerful neighbour, Russia, is hostile to.

However, this neutrality had to be abandoned after Russia invaded Ukraine. With public opinion increasingly in favour of joining NATO, both Sweden and Finland applied for membership in 2022. While Finland's bid was cleared, Sweden ran into stiff opposition from Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

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Once a country is a NATO member, an attack on its territory is considered an attack on the US-led alliance, and all 31 members are obliged to defend each other.



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### Why was Turkey opposing Sweden's bid?

Turkey had accused Sweden of going soft on groups it sees as terrorists, such as the Kurdish militant outfit the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Quran-burning protests held in Sweden, which its government says are protected under freedom of speech laws, further soured its relationship with Turkey.

When Turkish legislators cleared Sweden's bid recently, Fuat Oktay, a senior member of Erdogan's party, told parliament that Sweden had tightened its anti-terrorism laws, cracked down on the PKK's activities, and lifted restrictions on arms sales to Turkey, AP reported. Sweden has also said it will support Turkey's EU membership bid.

Erdogan had also linked Turkey's support to Sweden with the US agreeing to sell 40 F-16 fighter jets to Ankara. While the US had not said the deal would depend on Turkey's Sweden actions, the sale is expected to go through now.

Hungary had been seen as following Turkey's lead in blocking Sweden. Its grievances with the country include Stockholm's negative remarks about the rule of law and state of democracy under Orban. Orban is also more friendly with Russia than other NATO nations. After Turkey's move, Orban said Tuesday that he had invited Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson to Budapest to discuss "future cooperation in the field of security and defence as allies and partners," reported AP.

### What will Sweden bring to NATO?

Once Sweden becomes a member, almost all of the Baltic Sea coastline, except that in Russia's control, will become NATO territory. This will provide the alliance strategic bases close to Russia, make supply lines more streamlined, and make it easier to defend assets in the sea.

Sweden's military, though numerically small, is modern and experienced in past NATO missions. Importantly, it has advanced aircraft and submarine capabilities

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