

**Turkish politics**

## Erdogan demands Sweden do more to get Turkey's approval to join Nato

Membership hinges on backing by Ankara, which wants Sweden to return people it accuses of terrorism



Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, right, and Sweden's prime minister, Ulf Kristersson. Erdoğan welcomed Sweden's decision to lift an arms embargo on Turkey © AP

**Ayla Jean Yackley** in Istanbul YESTERDAY

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Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said Sweden must do more to persuade him to drop opposition to its bid to join the Nato alliance, including deporting asylum seekers whom his government wants to prosecute for terror-related offences.

[Sweden](#) and Finland ended their longstanding military non-alignment and applied for Nato membership in May. But Turkey, which has Nato's second-largest army, has refused to approve their joint bid. It accuses Sweden of providing a safe haven to people accused of links to Kurdish militants and a religious network blamed for a failed military coup in 2016.

In a press conference on Tuesday with the Swedish prime minister Ulf Kristersson, [Erdoğan](#) welcomed Sweden's recent decision to lift an arms embargo on Turkey, introduced in 2019 after Turkey invaded Syria to fight Kurdish militants. But he said he expected Sweden to take "concrete steps" by the end of November to fully implement commitments it agreed to in a memorandum it signed with Finland and Turkey in June.

"Sweden wants Nato membership for its own security, and we want a Sweden that will support eliminating our security concerns," said Erdoğan. "It is our sincere wish that Sweden realise Nato membership, following full implementation of the memorandum."

Kristersson said that joining the alliance was “of vital national security to us because of the deteriorating security in our part of Europe due to Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine”. The newly elected conservative prime minister has pledged to distance his government from Kurdish groups fighting Islamic State in Syria, because Turkey considers them terrorists for their links to a domestic insurgency.

“My government was elected just a few weeks ago on a mandate to put law and order first, and this includes countering terrorism and terrorist organisations,” he said. “I want to assure all Turks that Sweden will live up to all obligations made to Turkey in countering the terrorism threat before becoming a member of Nato and as a future ally.”

Among Turkey’s demands is the return of dozens of people it has accused of terrorism, despite the Swedish Supreme Court’s rejection of extradition in several of the cases. The June memorandum commits Sweden and Finland to addressing Turkey’s deportation requests and to create mechanisms to facilitate extradition.

Erdoğan said that four people had already been deported to Turkey, and the total number was open to negotiation. But he singled out a journalist by name, accusing him of belonging to an Islamic network led by US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey says masterminded an abortive 2016 coup attempt. “Deporting this terrorist to Turkey is very important to us,” he said.

“Terrorist organisations’ exploitation of Sweden’s democratic environment must absolutely be prevented,” Erdoğan said. “When our citizens see these terrorists walking the avenues of Sweden and Finland with terrorist rags in their hands, they hold me to account.”

Erdoğan said that concessions from Sweden would help him contest next year’s election in Turkey and “appear before our people with a great victory against terrorism”.

All 30 Nato members except for Hungary and Turkey have approved the Nordic countries’ accession. Hungary’s government has said parliament will ratify their entry before the end of the year.

Jens Stoltenberg, Nato’s secretary-general, pressed Erdoğan and other senior Turkish officials last week to drop opposition to Sweden’s application, saying it had delivered on its promises to Turkey and “it’s time to welcome Finland and Sweden as full members of Nato”.

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