

# KAS Nordics May 2022 Newsletter



Photo: [United States Government Work](#)

***A Strategic Turning Point for Europe in the North – Sweden and Finland give up non-alignment. Denmark votes on EU defense integration. Nordic Council indicates the potential of strategic resources in the North.***

## Sweden and Finland submitted their official application for NATO-membership on May 18th

Finland's President Sauli Niinistö was in Stockholm for a state visit on May 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, during which he appeared alongside Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf to reaffirm that both countries are officially on the path to NATO-membership. The two countries' governments had already taken the decision to begin the membership application process following [lengthy political debates in the preceding days](#). On Tuesday the Finnish Parliament made a clear statement of support for the membership bid, with 188 deputies voting in support and 8 voting against it.

Finland has been a driving force in the NATO-Accession process, with polls indicating 73% of the population supporting membership in the alliance and swift, decisive political debates. Sweden remained comparatively hesitant, with approval rates for membership standing at around 53% at the beginning of last week and Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson having stated as recently as March 8<sup>th</sup> that expanding NATO would have a destabilizing effect on the region. The Social democratic party struggled to come to a decision regarding membership until Sunday, which can partly be attributed to a hesitancy to give up on a long-held tradition of neutrality and official non-alignment. On Monday, however, the prime minister appeared before the press together with the leader of the conservative opposition Moderate party, Ulf Kristersson, to announce the government's decision to submit its application to join NATO. "It is best for the security of Sweden and the Swedish people that we join NATO, and that we do so alongside Finland," stated Andersson. Kristersson called the decision "historic" and noted that the decision transcends party politics. The Moderates have called for Swedish membership in NATO for decades and were a driving force in the parliamentary discussions on accession in recent weeks.

In reference to the NATO applications of Sweden and Finland, former Prime Minister Carl Bildt noted on his [blog on May 15<sup>th</sup>](#): "Now begins a formal process which will bring the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region into the fold of a broader European and Atlantic security framework, the like of which has not been seen since the collapse of the Kalmar Union half a millennium ago." (editorial note: the Kalmar Union was a historical alliance of the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden)

**What do Sweden and Finland have to offer the defensive alliance?** A well-equipped air-force, a submarine fleet, Arctic combat experience, and particularly in Sweden a strong defense industry. The Accession of the two countries would greatly strengthen NATO's airpower assets in the Baltic Sea region. Moreover, Finland's army reserve of 280.000 would significantly bolster the alliance's northeastern flank.

**And Russia's Reaction?** Essentially a kind of quiet acceptance. Russia's President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that the proposed NATO-expansion posed "no direct threat to Russia," adding that his government had "no problems" with Finland or Sweden. Putin did, however, [warn](#) that "the expansion of military infrastructure in this territory would provoke a response from us [...], based on the threat that this might create for us." Presumably the questions about the deployment of NATO troops in Finland and Sweden, as well as participation in nuclear deterrence, will dominate discussions in the coming weeks.

**What's next?** In the coming two weeks the NATO accession protocol [is expected to be signed](#) and then submitted to the 30 NATO member states for ratification. Normally the ratification process could take between six months to a year, but this timeline could be significantly accelerated.

**What is behind Turkey's current objection to the accession of Sweden and Finland?** Turkey is insisting the two countries [fulfill pre-conditions](#) before gaining Ankara's approval for membership: the extradition of six alleged members of the PKK from Finland and 11 from Sweden; as well as a further 10 supposed adherents of the Fethallah Gülen Movement from Sweden.

Both Helsinki and Stockholm, however, remain confident that they can come to an acceptable arrangement with Turkey.

### Danish referendum on giving up its EU Opt-out on defense policy on June 1st. Denmark intends to integrate more closely in the EU' security policy.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> a referendum on whether to abolish an opt-out clause for participation in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) will be held in Denmark. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Danish government decided to remove its security reservations towards the EU and cooperate more closely with its European partners. An inter-party agreement has paved the way for this integration process and for a gradual increase in defense spending until 2033. A battalion of [800 Danish troops has been stationed in Latvia](#) since April to reinforce NATO's presence in the Baltic states.

**Elections in Denmark?** The Referendum on participation in the CSDP can be seen as an indication of the popularity of Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her governing Social democratic party. Should a majority of the voting population support the new defense priorities of the government, this could indicate high levels of trust in the social democrats. Frederiksen, who is required by the Danish constitution to schedule elections before June 4<sup>th</sup> 2023, might then be tempted to call for election as early as July or August to capitalize on the support.

### Strategic Resources in the Nordics

To reach its energy and emission targets for the year 2050, the European Union will need to import large amounts of mineral and metal resources to provide the basis for sustainable infrastructure and technology production. The Covid-19 pandemic and the geopolitical fallout of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have furthermore driven home the need for predictable and secure supply chains in this process.

A recent [review by the Nordic Council](#) found that several of the resources deemed critically important by the EU can be efficiently sourced in the Nordic countries, particularly in areas North of the Arctic circle. Until now these reserve have not been sufficiently explored or exploited, which can partially be attributed to lacking interest and the logistical difficulties in accessing key locales. Moreover, the growing tensions in the goals of local and regional environmental movements advocating for protection and the needs to combat climate change by reducing carbon emissions also plays a role in this process.

Particularly important are rare earth elements, which are critically important for wind energy, electrical components and the production of electrical vehicles, and have so far been primarily sourced in China

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