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Geopolitical Monitor

Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO

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During a press announcement at NATO Headquarters in Brussels on May 18, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that the military alliance stands ready to seize a historic moment and move quickly on allowing Finland and Sweden to join its ranks, after the two countries submitted their membership requests. The official applications, submitted by Finland and Sweden's ambassadors to NATO, set a security clock ticking. Russia, whose war on Ukraine spurred them to join the military organization, has warned that it wouldn't welcome such a move, and could respond.

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Earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded that the alliance stop expanding toward Russia's borders, and several NATO allies, led by the United States and Britain, have signaled that they stand ready to provide security support to Finland and Sweden should he try to provoke or destabilize them during the time it takes to become full members. For now, though, the application must now be weighed by the 30 member countries. That process is expected to take about two weeks, although Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed reservations about Finland and Sweden joining. If his objections are overcome, and accession talks go as well as expected, the two could become members within a few months. The process usually takes eight to 12 months, but NATO wants to move quickly given the threat from Russia hanging over the Nordic countries' heads.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has continued to stress that there would be consequences if the two Nordic countries join. So, it's important for NATO to bring them swiftly into the fold where they can benefit from the security guarantees that membership provides.

NATO officials say the membership procedure could be completed "in a couple of weeks." But the most time-consuming part — ratification of their accession protocols by the alliance's 30 member countries, sometimes involving parliaments — could take months. How many is anyone's guess, although that step has taken eight to 12 months with recent candidates.

On May 21, Russia announces it has cut off gas exports to Finland after Helsinki refused to pay in rubles. This was viewed as more of a symbolic act in that the gas supplied by Russia is only three percent of Finland daily energy usage. But Russia continues to warn that more punitive measures are on the horizon."