

SCANDINAVIAN RECIPES: HOW IS THE EXPERIENCE OF INTEGRATION OF SWEDEN AND FINLAND INTO NATO USEFUL FOR UKRAINE?

Author:

Marianna Fakhurdinova

“The Finnish model” at certain stages in the past has aroused the interest of Ukrainian researchers as one of the security options that would involve close cooperation with NATO without joining it. For decades, Finland and neighboring Sweden have implemented North Atlantic Alliance standards, conducted joint exercises, and developed defence cooperation with NATO member states while maintaining neutrality.

However, after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, both countries moved quickly to join NATO, and within the Alliance itself, the applicant countries were granted accession “externally,” without the need for implementing a Membership Action Plan (MAP). After the both countries made the irrevocable decision in favor of NATO and the concept of “Finlandization” gained a whole new meaning, the Finnish and Swedish case—however, this time of a whirlwind accession to the Alliance—has once again become of interest to Ukraine.

Accession to NATO, which, according to the latest poll, would be supported by 71% of citizens in a referendum¹, remains one of the main security options for Ukraine after victory. Just as relevant is the formula for Ukraine’s effective preparation for accession, which has long been repeated like a mantra by NATO officials and Ukrainian experts: “*Ukraine needs to acquire maximum interoperability with NATO member states, so that when the political window of opportunity opens, it will be ready to jump on board the train rushing forward at high speed.*” But how exactly do we acquire this interoperability and make sure that the political window of opportunity actually opens one day?

¹ Геополітичні орієнтації жителів України: результати телефонного опитування, проведеного 6-20 липня 2022 року, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, July 29, 2022. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1125&page=1>

DIFFERENT BACKGROUND

At first glance, the cases of Ukraine, on the one hand, and Sweden and Finland, on the other, are hard to compare, because the path of these countries to NATO is markedly different. Firstly, while Ukraine during 31 years of independence pursued multi-vector policy, declared its movement to NATO and was non-aligned, Sweden (since 1814) and Finland (since 1948) have invariably preserved “armed neutrality”.

Secondly, while Ukraine over the past 8 years at various platforms, including in the person of President Volodymyr Zelenskyi, has publicly called on the Alliance to grant us MAP and support Ukraine’s movement toward membership, Sweden and Finland have not sought to become NATO members. In the last 10-15 years, 60-70% of Finns were against the country joining NATO, and political parties mostly left the question of membership open². The prevailing view among Swedes was that Sweden is special and should remain neutral, while the ruling Social Democrats aligned with Finland on the matter of Alliance integration and believed that Finns would never want to join NATO. Thus, describing Sweden’s decision to join the Alliance, Swedish experts say they have never seen such a reluctant application to join NATO³.

Third, while both countries were developing their own defence capabilities, Ukraine began to strengthen its army only after 2014. In particular, Finland, apart from its armed forces formed on a contract basis, has a strong national-territorial defence—the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF)—and can mobilize about 280,000 soldiers in case of war⁴. Sweden has significantly reduced its military personnel since the end of the Cold War, but the country has good military equipment and some of the strongest air and naval forces in Europe and the world⁵.

Finally, while Ukraine has for years been denied even a MAP, arguing that Ukraine’s accession would extend Russia’s border with NATO, the Alliance has agreed to the accession of Sweden and Finland “externally,” despite the fact that with Finland’s accession the total border of NATO with Russia would increase by 1,300 km. There are a number of reasons for this, which could be of use to Ukraine in the future, despite different backgrounds in the past.

BENEFITS TO NATO

In making the political decision to allow the applicant state to join NATO or not, member states consider, among other things, whether such accession will enhance the Alliance’s security or, conversely, bring more risks. Though the accession of Finland and Sweden to

² Замінник членства в НАТО: фінська модель? Charly Salonijs-Pasternak, New Europe Center, 2015. <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ukrayina-y-NATO--Diagnostyka-partnerstva.pdf>

³ The art of not taking sides, MONOCLE, 30 July 2022. <https://monocle.com/radio/shows/the-foreign-desk/448/>

⁴ Sweden and Finland are on their way to NATO membership. Here’s what needs to happen next. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 22 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ed6bR0>

⁵ Sweden would strengthen NATO with fresh thinking and an able force. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 18 May 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/sweden-would-strengthen-nato-with-fresh-thinking-and-an-able-force/>

NATO, on the one hand, almost doubles the border of the Alliance with Russia (currently 1,200 km), it also brings a number of significant geopolitical advantages to NATO.

In particular, it will completely ***change the balance of power in Northern Europe***, because at that point the Alliance will control the vast majority of the Baltic Sea coast, which will become an “internal lake of NATO”. The main base of the Russian Baltic Fleet in Kronstadt will be locked in the Gulf of Finland between Estonia and Finland, and with Finland the Alliance will become closer to Russia’s Kola Peninsula, where the Russian Northern Fleet and nuclear submarine bases are located.

The Baltic countries will become much more secure: in case of a Russian attack, NATO will be able to block the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Fleet of Russia, as well as to provide support to the Baltic countries from the sea. In particular, the Swedish island of Gotland would ensure the defence of a large part of the Baltic Sea⁶. Sweden’s and Finland’s accession to NATO will also ***reinforce the defence of Norway*** and reduce the risk of Russia attacking it from the north⁷.

Baltic Sea security and naval exercises in the region have always been an essential element of Swedish and Finnish cooperation with the Alliance. When applying for NATO membership, these Nordic countries were able to offer the added value to the Alliance through access to the Baltic Sea. Ukraine has repeatedly tried to put Black Sea security in the focus of Ukraine’s cooperation with NATO, particularly within the framework of the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP)⁸. Developing a NATO Black Sea strategy and restoring the security of the strategically important Black Sea remains a promising area of interest for Ukraine to the Alliance after the de-occupation of southern Ukrainian territories.

In addition, Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO will impact ***NATO’s presence in the Arctic*** and ***increase the Alliance’s military supply***: Sweden has one of the best conventional submarine fleets in the world⁹, keeps in service Leopard 2A tanks and modern anti-air systems of Patriot type and has its own production of advanced JAS-39 fighters and CV90 infantry fighting vehicles¹⁰. Finland also has state-of-the-art F35 fighters, Leopard 2A6 tanks, etc.

⁶ Росія програє Балтику: що змінить вступ до НАТО Фінляндії та Швеції. *Європеїска pravda*, 2 May 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/05/2/7138713/>

⁷ Двері НАТО відкриваються: що змінює для України вступ Фінляндії та Швеції до Альянсу. *Європеїска pravda*, 17 May 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/05/17/7139534/>

⁸ Ukraine-NATO: What’s next after Enhanced Partnership? Alyona Getmanchuk, New Europe Center, 29 July 2020. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB_Ukr_NATO_eng.pdf

⁹ Analysis: Baltic Sea Heating Up as Friction Point Between U.S., NATO and Russia. USNI news, 25 April 2016. <https://news.usni.org/2016/06/08/sweden-us-agreement>

¹⁰ Sweden would strengthen NATO with fresh thinking and an able force. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 18 May 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/sweden-would-strengthen-nato-with-fresh-thinking-and-an-able-force/>

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, the Alliance members have always viewed Ukraine's accession to NATO as a risk rather than an asset. The Ukrainian side has repeatedly sought counter arguments. In particular, in 2021, the New Europe Center highlighted such Ukrainian contributions to transatlantic security: valuable experience in combating hybrid threats, assistance in pandemic times, participation in Alliance missions and operations, etc¹¹. After victory, Ukraine will need to further advocate for the benefits to NATO of Ukraine's membership in light of the combat experience gained.

MILITARY INTEROPERABILITY

Military interoperability, or the ability of member states' armies to act coherently and understand each other during joint exercises, missions and operations, is the foundation of NATO and the cornerstone for new member states to join. It is achieved through the implementation of Alliance standards (standardization documents) in operational, administrative and material (technical) areas, the adoption of NATO security policy concepts, etc.

According to some reports, Sweden and Finland achieved full interoperability with NATO as early as 15 years ago¹². For comparison, by the end of 2021 Ukraine had introduced 21% of Alliance standards (255 standards and guiding documents of NATO, mainly operational and administrative ones)¹³. However, even during the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has also introduced a large number of NATO practices, sometimes without even noticing it¹⁴.

Despite the disparity in achievements, it is conspicuous that Ukraine has access to almost all the same tools for acquiring interoperability with the Alliance as Finland and Sweden:

– Since the 1990s, Finland and Sweden have used the *Planning and Review Process (PARP) and Partnership Goals (PG)*, which Ukraine also participates in.

– In 2014, Finland and Sweden joined the *Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP)* program, which gives access to Alliance operations planning and eligibility for all NATO exercises, provides for in-depth intelligence exchange between the parties, and also authorizes partner countries to have their own representation in NATO structures. However, relations between Finland and Sweden had already reached such a level by the time of participation in the EOP that it is difficult to determine what exactly was the effect of both countries' participation in the program. Ukraine joined the EOP in 2020, back then the New Europe

¹¹ Route to membership. Why should Ukraine have a roadmap to NATO accession? Alyona Getmanchuk, Sergiy Solodky, Marianna Fakhurdinova, New Europe Center, 7 June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3Dop9Pc>

¹² Ukraine-NATO: What's next after Enhanced Partnership? Alyona Getmanchuk, New Europe Center, 29 July 2020. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB_Ukr_NATO_eng.pdf

¹³ Запровадження стандартів та інших керівних документів НАТО. Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 15 December 2021. <https://www.mil.gov.ua/diyalnist/vprovadzhennya-standartiv-ta-inshih-kerivnih-dokumentiv-nato.html>

¹⁴ Стефанішина: Вікно для вступу України до НАТО може відкритися ще до завершення війни з Росією. Yevropeiska pravda, 29 August 2022. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/interview/2022/08/29/7145770/>

Center provided a number of recommendations on how to fill this partnership with practical content: focus on Black Sea security, strengthening representation in the governing structures of the Alliance (in particular, in the NATO International Secretariat), etc.¹⁵

– *Participation in joint exercises* (BALTOPS, Northern Wind, Hedgehog, Cold Response, Vigilant Knife), including those under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty within the EOP, is the bedrock of Finnish and Swedish cooperation with NATO to gain interoperability between armies, which was the post-2014 focus of Finnish (and probably Swedish) policy towards NATO¹⁶. Ukraine also has access to this tool of the North Atlantic Alliance and is actively engaged in it. At the same time, one should understand that it was easier for the countries under analysis to achieve compatibility with the Alliance, given the smaller number of armed forces: 16,000 in Sweden and 23,000 in Finland (active military manpower)¹⁷. By comparison, as of February 2022, the number in Ukraine ranged from 200,000 to 246,000, according to various sources¹⁸. In addition, some military experts from member countries of the Alliance note that it remains unclear how compatible the territorial defence forces and reservists in Sweden and Finland are with NATO¹⁹. In this context, it is positive for Ukraine that our military is now acquiring interoperability with the armies of the member states of the Alliance through the use of Western weapons, application of NATO doctrines, etc. Therefore, even the military reserve, which will appear in Ukraine after volunteers serving in the ranks of the AFU return to civilian life, will be compatible with the Alliance for the most part.

– To gain wider access to Alliance standards and procedures, Finland and Sweden joined NATO's two *strategic airlift initiatives*, *SALIS* and *SAC*, and participated in the *NATO Response Force (NRF)* in 2008. During the pandemic, Ukraine became an important contributor to European security when hundreds of tons of medical supplies were transported by Ukrainian planes as part of the Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS) program; the country also joined the NATO Response Force in 2010²⁰.

Areas in which Ukraine still lags behind Sweden and Finland in terms of interoperability with NATO are as follows:

– The Finnish and Swedish armies' *material support* has been in line with Alliance standards since the 1990s²¹. This was possible thanks to the high standards of their own

¹⁵ Ukraine-NATO: What's next after Enhanced Partnership? Alyona Getmanchuk, New Europe Center, 29 July 2020. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB_Ukr_NATO_eng.pdf

¹⁶ Commentary by Matti Pesu, Senior Research Fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Relations.

¹⁷ Active Military Manpower (2022). Global Firepower 2022. <https://www.globalfirepower.com/active-military-manpower.php>

¹⁸ Чисельність ЗСУ і витрати на утримання в 2021 році. Ukrainian Military Pages, 18 February 2021. <https://bit.ly/3cOh7En>

¹⁹ Sweden and Finland are on their way to NATO membership. Here's what needs to happen next. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 22 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ed6bR0>

²⁰ Участь України у міжнародних операціях з підтримання миру і безпеки під проводом Альянсу, Силах реагування НАТО та навчаннях. Mission of Ukraine to NATO, 16 June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3etpYf5>

²¹ Замінник членства в НАТО: фінська модель? Charly Salonijs-Pasternak, New Europe Center, 2015. <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ukrayina-y-NATO--Diagnostyka-partnerstva.pdf>

defence industry—during the Cold War, Swedish arms were compatible with armaments of many countries (for example, Gripen fighters)—and access to the common EU market after the joining the Union in 1995²². In this area, Ukraine lagged far behind Finland and Sweden before the full-scale invasion. Currently, the situation is undergoing a dramatic change: with the acquisition and mastery of Western weapons, the country has begun the transition to the Alliance’s material and technical standards²³.

– *English language proficiency*, which is necessary to handle NATO documents and for military personnel to understand each other, is high among Finnish and Swedish military personnel. This is due to the high level of English proficiency in Sweden and Finland as a whole (according to various data, 90% and 70% of the population, respectively)²⁴. Although the specific aim of increasing the level of knowledge of one of the official languages of the Alliance is stipulated in a number of Ukrainian documents, the problem of insufficient knowledge of English persisted in Ukraine before the full-scale war, in particular because the military was resigning from the army²⁵. Reasons included inadequate pay and housing, limited career opportunities, mistreatment of personnel, etc.²⁶

TRUST THROUGH COOPERATION

One of the most important factors that Alliance members evaluate when making a political decision to accept a state into NATO is trust. It is vital for NATO member states to feel that the applicant country is “one of them,” not just having a strong compatible army.

Sweden and Finland began to develop a closer partnership with NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when both countries joined the Partnership for Peace program (1994) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (1997). Over two decades of deepening cooperation they have greatly enhanced trust with the Alliance, although Sweden was called NATO’s “sixteenth member” back during the Cold War for its active cooperation with the Alliance²⁷.

Moreover, both countries have not only used existing NATO instruments to strengthen their own capabilities, but have also been proactive in contributing to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area in their own right:

²² Interview with Elizabeth Braw, Senior Fellow, Foreign and Defense Policy, American Enterprise Institute, 2 September 2022.

²³ Збройні сили України переходять на зброю НАТО – Кулеба. *Suspilne*, 26 April 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ATZGdv>

²⁴ EF EPI. EF English Proficiency Index 2021. <https://bit.ly/3cUIA6c>

²⁵ Ukraine and NATO standards: Progress under Zelenskyy’s presidency. Alyona Getmanchuk, Marianna Fakhurdinova, *New Europe Center*, 5 April 2022. <https://bit.ly/3LcAS5y>

²⁶ Чому військовослужбовці звільняються з армії? *Come Back Alive Foundation*, 10 June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3KNYbIS>

²⁷ Ukraine-NATO: What’s next after Enhanced Partnership? Alyona Getmanchuk, *New Europe Center*, 29 July 2020. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB_Ukr_NATO_eng.pdf

– To underscore the efforts they put into developing a partnership with the Alliance, Sweden and Finland have repeatedly sent their best military and civilian specialists to participate in *NATO missions and operations*. Particularly, since 1995, Sweden and Finland have participated in NATO-led operations in the Balkans (IFOR, SFOR, KFOR), Afghanistan (ISAF, Resolute Support Mission), Iraq (NMI)²⁸; Sweden was also involved in Libya (OUP)²⁹. As a consequence, Finland was the first non-NATO country to be entrusted with operational command of the Alliance Brigade (Center), which in turn fostered interoperability.

– In addition to participating in numerous joint exercises with NATO member states, Sweden and Finland *themselves conduct trainings* on crisis management, humanitarian assistance and democratic control of the armed forces for member states of the Alliance at the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre (SWEDINT) and the Finnish Defence Forces' International Centre (FINCENT). Sweden also regularly conducts large-scale multifunctional civil-military police exercises (the Viking exercises), in which other countries and international organizations participate. Ukraine is gaining invaluable experience that the armies of NATO member states do not have: fighting and using Western weapons in a full-scale war against a commensurate or even stronger opponent; creative use of these weapons, much admired by Europeans and Americans (use of guerrilla Javelin and NLAW in a position war, building wooden HIMARS models³⁰); identifying weaknesses in Western weapons (speed of artillery, etc.). After victory, Ukraine will need to consider how to systematically share this unique experience with the armies of Alliance member states.

– The countries under study are also finding quick, creative solutions to develop *new in-demand areas of cooperation with the Alliance*. Since 2017, for example, Finland has established the Helsinki European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, signed a political framework agreement for cooperation with NATO on cyber defence and participated in the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, etc.³¹ With ample experience in combating hybrid and cyber attacks since 2014, Ukraine could have secured this area of cooperation with the Alliance among NATO partner countries and pursued it more actively.

– An important demonstration of trust between the Alliance and the two Nordic countries is the signing of “*Memoranda of Understanding on Host Nation Support*”³² in 2014. According to them, foreign units, in particular the NATO Response Force (NRF), can move freely in Swedish and Finnish air, land and sea space during exercises, crises or military

²⁸ Relations with Finland. NATO, Last updated: 05 Jul 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm

²⁹ Relations with Sweden. NATO, Last updated: 06 Jul 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52535.htm

³⁰ Ukraine lures Russian missiles with decoys of U.S. rocket system. The Washington Post, 30 August 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/30/ukraine-russia-himars-decoy-artillery/>

³¹ Relations with Finland. NATO, Last updated: 05 Jul. 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm

³² Memorandum of understanding between the Government of the Republic of Finland and Headquarters, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, as well as Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe regarding the provision of host nation support for the execution of NATO operations/ exercises / similar military activity. <https://bit.ly/3RHgcEM>

operations. Therefore, in the event of a threat to these two countries, the North Atlantic Alliance can technically provide support. Ukraine signed an identical memorandum with the Alliance back in 2004³³, but Russia's full-scale invasion has shown that technical tools are not enough—political will and trust between partners are needed to apply them.

At the same time, Sweden and Finland also developed bilateral and multilateral cooperation with NATO member states:

– Both countries have worked closely with Denmark, Iceland and Norway in the *NORDEFCO* regional defence initiative, which has not only boosted closer cooperation and trust, but also enhanced the capabilities of the participating states. Finnish analysts point out that the confidence-building process could be accelerated through strong bilateral relations with NATO member states, which would act as “sponsors” and offer opportunities for cooperation that would benefit the partner country and the Alliance³⁴. For Ukraine, the United Kingdom and Poland could be such sponsors within the newly created trilateral cooperation format, which the parties view as a framework for security assistance to Ukraine³⁵.

– While remaining committed to a policy of neutrality, Sweden has actively pursued close defence cooperation with partners, a phenomenon that Finnish researchers have called “the paradox of Swedish defence policy.”³⁶ Even during the Cold War, Sweden used the tool of nonpublic *bilateral defence agreements* signed with a number of NATO member states³⁷. In particular, the country secretly cooperated with the United States to receive military assistance in case of Soviet aggression, provided the U.S. with intelligence on Soviet military activities in the Baltic region, etc.³⁸ Realizing that the country's own defence capabilities were not enough to defend itself against aggression, after the collapse of the USSR Sweden signed a series of declarations and memoranda on defence cooperation with the U.K., the U.S. and Germany³⁹.

³³ Меморандум про взаєморозуміння між Кабінетом Міністрів України і штабом Верховного головнокомандувача об'єднаних збройних сил НАТО на Атлантиці та штабом Верховного головнокомандувача об'єднаних збройних сил НАТО в Європі щодо забезпечення підтримки операцій НАТО з боку України. <https://bit.ly/3RDOM2j>

³⁴ Замінник членства в НАТО: фінська модель? Charly Salenius-Pasternak, New Europe Center, 2015. <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ukrayina-y-NATO--Diagnostyka-partnerstva.pdf>

³⁵ Prospective directions for the development of trilateral cooperation in the Ukraine-UK-Poland format, with regard to national interests and declared foreign policy priorities of Ukraine. Alyona Getmanchuk, Sergiy Solodkyy, New Europe Center, August 2022. <https://analytics.intsecurity.org/en/prospective-directions-for-the-development-of-trilateral-cooperation-in-the-ukraine-uk-poland-format/>

³⁶ Bilateral defence treaties with the United States: Not an alternative to NATO. Leo Michel, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 10 April 2016. <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/bilateral-defence-treaties-with-the-united-states?read>

³⁷ Ukraine-NATO: What's next after Enhanced Partnership? Alyona Getmanchuk, New Europe Center, 29 July 2020. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB_Ukr_NATO_eng.pdf

³⁸ U.S. Security Assistance to Non-NATO Countries: The Swedish Case and Post-Communist Eastern Europe. Paul M. Cole, RAND, 1992. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/notes/2009/N3327.pdf>

³⁹ Bilateral cooperation. Government Offices of Sweden. <https://bit.ly/3AP7cGK>

– Close collaboration with partners has recently yielded results, with an unprecedented willingness in NATO history of the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway and Iceland to provide Sweden and Finland with *security guarantees* during the most dangerous period—between application and direct membership in the Alliance. Such a non-public agreement with the U.K. was signed in May 2022⁴⁰, and the Nordic countries provided assurances in a joint statement⁴¹. Ukraine should take this experience into account. At the same time, the pace with which member states ratify accession treaties also demonstrates the level of understanding of threats and the desire to welcome Sweden and Finland to the NATO family as soon as possible (accession protocols were signed on July 5, and as of August 27, they had been ratified by 24 out of 30 member states of the Alliance⁴²).

POLITICAL AND VALUE-BASED COMPATIBILITY

The willingness of a number of NATO member states to provide Sweden and Finland with security guarantees during the formal accession procedure and, in parallel, the long resistance of NATO countries to supply Ukraine with weapons after Russia launched a full-scale invasion show that political and value-based compatibility is no less important than military one.

Even the MAP includes political and economic among the criteria for joining the Alliance: democracy, rule of law, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic and civilian oversight of the armed forces, etc.⁴³

Even though Sweden and Finland were neutral after World War II, they still belonged to Western Europe in terms of values: they were independent, had a democratic system and market economy, etc. *Accession to the EU* in 1995 finally integrated both countries into Europe and thus made them fully economically and politically compatible with most NATO member states. This was a great advantage for the early accession procedure of Sweden and Finland to the Alliance in 2022.

In fact, typically, or at least during the most recent waves of enlargement, the applicant countries have integrated first into NATO and then into the EU. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (EU accession in 2004); Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia (accession in 2007 and 2013), among others, have taken this path⁴⁴. After applying for membership and opening accession negotiations, the applicant countries began to carry out reforms and implement

⁴⁰ UK agrees mutual security deals with Finland and Sweden. BBC, 11 May 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61408700>

⁴¹ Statement by Denmark, Iceland and Norway on Finland and Sweden's decisions to apply for NATO membership. Statsministeriet, 16 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ARC5ub>

⁴² Finland and Sweden Accession. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/finland-sweden-accession>

⁴³ Membership Action Plan (MAP) approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council. NATO, 24 April 1999. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27444.htm

⁴⁴ Funding and impetus for reform: how Ukraine will benefit after obtaining EU candidate status. Marianna Fakhuridina, New Europe Center, 12 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3FSz8f7>

European best practices. This encouraged their entry into NATO, which in turn signaled to investors that these countries were becoming safe for European investment.

At the same time, EU accession not only allowed most of the NATO member states to consider Sweden and Finland as “one of them,” but it also sent a definite signal that both countries were moving from neutrality to military non-alignment, because they became part of the EU’s collective defence and also made certain political commitments⁴⁵.

Therefore, since at least the 1990s, the North Atlantic Alliance has had a consistent policy on Sweden and Finland: NATO member states have never opposed these countries’ membership in the Alliance. As early as 2014, Finnish analysts noted that “*official and unofficial statements indicated that in the case of Finland and Sweden, the accession negotiation process would be short and the result positive.*”⁴⁶ After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the NATO Secretary General repeatedly stated that if Sweden and Finland applied for membership, they would be welcomed by all 30 NATO allies: “*We will find ways to do it quickly.*”⁴⁷

These words were confirmed when a number of NATO member states, including the U.S., facilitated the lifting of Türkiye’s veto of Sweden’s and Finland’s membership in the Alliance. This experience showed that if the Alliance as a whole is interested in the accession of an applicant country, the member states themselves will do their best to secure it. At the same time, Türkiye’s position on Sweden’s and Finland’s accession to NATO has once again highlighted the importance of ensuring stable and trusting bilateral relations with all members before joining a closed club of states, whether the EU or NATO.

THE KREMLIN’S OUTRAGE: WHY DIDN’T RUSSIA’S “VETO POWER” WORK?

The reluctance to worsen relations with Russia has always been an informal, albeit solid, reason for denying Ukraine membership in the Alliance, which would have directly extended NATO’s border with Russia. At the same time, Finland is cordially welcomed into the Alliance, despite the fact that joining NATO would increase that border by 1,300 km. Therefore, the case of Finland’s accession, despite the Russian factor, is interesting for Ukraine, especially considering that it is the war in Ukraine that is the centerpiece of this case.

In fact, as noted above, even before the full-scale invasion, the Alliance itself was ready to welcome Finland, despite its long border with Russia. Swedish analysts point out that *the*

⁴⁵ Interview with Elizabeth Braw, Senior Fellow, Foreign and Defense Policy, American Enterprise Institute, 2 September 2022.

⁴⁶ Замінник членства в НАТО: фінська модель? Charly Salenius-Pasternak, New Europe Center, 2015. <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ukrayina-y-NATO--Diagnostyka-partnerstva.pdf>

⁴⁷ Stoltenberg: Finland and Sweden will be 'very much welcomed' if they decide to join NATO. CNN, <https://cnn.it/3RCBgMu>

*experience of successfully defending its own territories in the 1940s, the development of a strong army and the ability to project strength made Finland an attractive partner for NATO*⁴⁸. It was the ability to speak from a position of strength that distinguished Finland from other countries that border Russia, but would be unable to defend themselves if attacked. The Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrated our country's ability to wage war, defend its own territories, and project strength despite its geographic proximity to Russia. After victory, this argument may become the most convincing in negotiations with partners—Ukraine is not a weak partner seeking protection from NATO, but a strong ally able to defend itself. In addition, the Russian factor in the case of Sweden and Finland has become a source of strength, not weakness: a deep understanding of the Russian threat and historical experience of confronting Russian aggression make Sweden and Finland valuable partners for the Alliance, because they can strengthen NATO's approach to Russia, as military experts from NATO member states point out⁴⁹.

Yet it is fair to say that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine initially undermined the Alliance's position to some extent. Russia's threats to Finland in April 2022 over its intention to join NATO⁵⁰ led to the fact that Western discourse also began to fear a possible attack on Finland at the most sensitive moment—between application and accession⁵¹. The *serious problems of the Russian army and the protracted war in Ukraine* created a window of opportunity for Sweden and Finland to enter the Alliance, while the provision of guarantees to the countries by the U.K. and other partners probably inclined NATO member states to embrace a positive decision. Likewise, the protraction of the war in Ukraine, as well as *the resolute stance of the member states of the Alliance on the accession of Sweden and Finland*, entailed a change in the public rhetoric of Russia itself: as early as summer 2022, the Russian Federation stated that it had no problems with Finland and Sweden and that their accession to NATO would not pose a threat⁵². These statements stand in stark contrast to Russia's ultimatums in December 2021 about further non-expansion of the Alliance⁵³. The experience of Swedish and Finnish accession to NATO in the midst of the war in Ukraine confirms the thesis that Ukraine's accession to the Alliance may also become possible at a time of crisis in or around Russia.

Finally, the consolidation of the Alliance's position on integration of the Nordic countries, despite the Russian factor, was facilitated by the robust advocacy efforts of Sweden and

⁴⁸ Interview with Elizabeth Braw, Senior Fellow, Foreign and Defense Policy, American Enterprise Institute, 2 September 2022.

⁴⁹ Sweden and Finland are on their way to NATO membership. Here's what needs to happen next. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 22 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ed6bR0>

⁵⁰ У Раді Федерації РФ погрожують Фінляндії через її намір вступити до НАТО. Yevropeiska Pravda, 6 April 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2022/04/6/7137335/>

⁵¹ The Case for Nordic and NATO Realism. Robert Skidelsky, Project Syndicate. 20 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3wWih7G>

⁵² Путін заявив, що РФ не має проблем щодо вступу Фінляндії та Швеції до НАТО, але пригрозив реакцією у відповідь. TSN, 16 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3qfQYle>

⁵³ Угода про заходи забезпечення безпеки Російської Федерації та держав-членів Організації Північноатлантичного договору. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2021. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/

Finland through an *active dialogue between their parliamentarians and those of NATO member states, presence in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Alliance's North Atlantic Council*, etc., which are convenient communication platforms. Ukraine has access to almost all the same tools as Sweden and Finland: presence in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the North Atlantic Council, which it can employ for advocacy. At the same time, when the political window of opportunity for accession to NATO will open, Ukraine, as in the case of obtaining candidate status for EU membership, will need to mobilize all available resources to achieve this decision: the President, Parliament, Government, expert community, and civil society.

Thus, the experience of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, despite the Russian factor, once again confirms the policy of the Alliance, which is reflected in Article 7 of the NATO Enlargement Study from 1995: *"There is no fixed or rigid list of criteria for inviting new member states to join the Alliance. Enlargement will be decided on a case-by-case basis."*⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience of Sweden and Finland's accelerated accession to NATO, as well as the Alliance's consistent policy toward these countries, demonstrate that EU and NATO membership walk side by side, and that integration into the Alliance not only requires military interoperability and a strong army, but also trust and political and value-based affinities between partners.

Militarily, Ukraine has almost all the necessary tools to increase interoperability and deepen cooperation with NATO available to Sweden and Finland. Currently, the country should focus on the successful implementation of European reforms and movement toward EU membership, which will promote Ukraine's integration to the Alliance, as well.

Recommendations:

1. "We be of one blood". The process of European integration, reforms implementation and strengthening of democracy will help Ukrainians become "go-to nation" for NATO members. European integration process in Central European and Western Balkan states has shown that once countries gain candidate status and/or begin negotiations with the EU, they usually join NATO. Therefore, Ukraine needs to successfully implement the seven reforms recommended by the European Commission and move to the stage of negotiations with the EU⁵⁵.

2. Enhance interoperability. Ukraine should continue to advocate the provision of weapons to us by Western partners, because this is not only the key to our victory in the war, but also a tool for Ukraine's transition to NATO material and technical standards and for increasing the number of military personnel who can operate it. In addition, Ukraine should actively

⁵⁴ Study on NATO Enlargement. NATO, 3 September 1995. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

⁵⁵ Candidate-check: Where Ukraine is in the implementation of 7 EU recommendations regarding candidacy. New Europe Center, 17 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3DhbF7N>

participate in NATO's program of technological cooperation (Multilateral Interoperability Program (MIP), to which it became an associate member in July of this year. It will allow to join the development of new standards and increase the trust of the North Atlantic Alliance⁵⁶.

3. Bilateral defence agreements vs. NATO membership. Signing bilateral defence agreements with European countries is considered one of the options for achieving Ukraine's long-term security. The experience of Swedish and Finnish integration into the Alliance shows that having bilateral defence agreements with partners and joining NATO are not mutually exclusive, so the signing of such agreements cannot and should not exclude Ukraine's integration into NATO from the agenda. In addition, Ukraine should explore the idea of obtaining temporary security guarantees from partners for the period from application to membership, similar to the guarantees provided to Sweden and Finland by the United Kingdom and Nordic countries.

4. Partnerships beyond NATO. The course toward membership in the Alliance should not exclude cooperation with European countries within other security formats. In particular, close interaction with the EU and NATO member states as part of the Ramstein format may contribute to their more willing integration of Ukraine into the Euro-Atlantic community in the future. In addition, the United Kingdom, Poland and Lithuania could be Ukraine's promoters in NATO. Ukraine could fill the "Ukrainian-British-Polish Triangle" and the "Lublin Triangle" with a Euro-Atlantic agenda (implementation of individual Alliance projects), and close interaction with these countries could improve Ukraine's level of readiness for NATO membership.

5. Advocate for Ukraine's relevance to the North Atlantic Alliance. Ukraine is currently gaining unique combat experience, and the actions of the Ukrainian military and command have been recognized and admired by many abroad. After victory, Ukraine will need to actively communicate to the Alliance that the country is an invaluable potential NATO candidate, which has demonstrated not only the ability to stand up to an aggressor (Russia!) and apply the knowledge gained from NATO instructors, but also to master new weapons extremely quickly. The moment the political window of opportunity for NATO membership opens, Ukraine will need to engage all stakeholders in advocacy: government, parliament, expert community, civil society, as it did in the process of Ukraine's candidate status for EU membership.

6. The special focus of partnership. Despite the great experience in countering hybrid and cyber threats since 2014, Ukraine failed to assert itself to this area of cooperation with the Alliance, and the initiative was taken over by Finland. In addition, Sweden and Finland were able to offer NATO the geostrategic advantages of their membership—access to the Baltic Sea. After the de-occupation of southern territories, the focus on Black Sea security could become a hallmark and niche area for Ukraine's cooperation with NATO. This would require Ukraine to advocate the importance of developing a Black Sea strategy for the Alliance, to actively participate in NATO operations planning, and to initiate drills in the Black Sea on the subject of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.

⁵⁶ Україна долучиться до розробки нових стандартів НАТО — Зеленський. *Suspilne Novyny*, 12 July 2022. <https://suspilne.media/259887-ukraina-dolucitsa-do-rozrobki-novih-standartiv-nato-zelenskij/>

7. Strategic policy instead of crisis management. During the war Ukraine received unprecedented instruments of support from NATO member states: provision of arms and intelligence exchange (which, although envisaged by the EOP, became more in-depth due to the Russian invasion). Ukraine should try to persuade the Alliance to retain the existing crisis tools even after the war, arguing that they could become a kind of investment in the preparation of a new member of the Alliance. Ukraine's further transition to NATO weaponry and enhanced intelligence sharing would promote peace, trust and interoperability between Ukraine and NATO.

8. Consistent policy towards NATO. In order to ensure sustained support from Alliance member states for Ukraine's membership in NATO after the war, Ukraine itself will need to develop a sustainable vision of its own security and a coherent policy toward NATO. Although the course for membership in the Alliance is enshrined in the Constitution, the full-scale invasion by Russia has shown that Ukraine may still question its path towards NATO.

9. Share unique experiences with partners. After the war, Ukraine should develop a more ambitious relationship with the Alliance and not only learn, but also share with partners its own experience (as Sweden and Finland do), which the Ukrainian military gained during the Russian invasion. This refers to the unique experience of warfare and the use of NATO weapons in a full-scale war with a commensurate or stronger adversary.

10. No MAP. The rapid accession of Sweden and Finland set a precedent of new member states joining the Alliance without the MAP stage. Given the acquired combat experience and increased material and technical interoperability with the Alliance, Ukraine could look for new creative ways to join NATO, in particular, without fulfilling the MAP.

11. Stable bilateral relations with member states. Türkiye's veto of Swedish and Finnish accession to NATO once again demonstrated the need to ensure stable and trusting relationships with partners prior to the start of NATO and/or EU accession. Considering that decisions in both communities are made by consensus, Ukraine should secure itself by resolving (at least partially) bilateral sensitive issues in advance so as not to become hostage to them in the integration process.

12. Post-war support for the military and veterans. Prior to the full-scale invasion, the outflow of qualified personnel who were trained by NATO instructors, knew foreign languages and were familiar with NATO procedures was one of the reasons for the slow NATO standards implementation. Among the military personnel who master Western-style weapons and gain real combat experience are many volunteers who will return to civilian life after the war. In the future, in order to retain qualified specialists, the state will have to create proper conditions for the military and eliminate the problems that caused military personnel to be released from the army even before a full-scale war. In addition, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine should establish cooperation with NATO bodies that help the armies of member states achieve their personnel recruitment and maintenance goals⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ We refer to the NATO Human Factors and Medicine task group, part of the Research and Technology Organization (RTO) of NATO.

References

1. Active Military Manpower (2022). Global Firepower 2022. <https://www.globalfirepower.com/active-military-manpower.php>
2. Analysis: Baltic Sea Heating Up as Friction Point Between U.S., NATO and Russia. USNI news, 25 April 2016. https://news.usni.org/2016/06/08/sweden_us_agreement
3. Bilateral cooperation. Government Offices of Sweden. <https://bit.ly/3AP7cGK>
4. Bilateral defence treaties with the United States: Not an alternative to NATO. Leo Michel, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 10 April 2016. <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/bilateral-defence-treaties-with-the-united-states?read>
5. Commentary by Matti Pesu, Senior Research Fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Relations.
6. EF EPI. EF English Proficiency Index 2021. <https://bit.ly/3cU1A6c>
7. Finland and Sweden Accession. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/finland-sweden-accession>
8. Interview with Elizabeth Braw, Senior Fellow, Foreign and Defense Policy, American Enterprise Institute, 2 September 2022.
9. Membership Action Plan (MAP) approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council. NATO, 24 April 1999. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27444.htm
10. Memorandum of understanding between the Government of the Republic of Finland and Headquarters, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, as well as Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe regarding the provision of host nation support for the execution of NATO operations/ exercises / similar military activity. <https://bit.ly/3RHgcEM>
11. Prospective directions for the development of trilateral cooperation in the Ukraine-UK-Poland format, with regard to national interests and declared foreign policy priorities of Ukraine. Alyona Getmanchuk, Sergiy Solodkyy, New Europe Center, August 2022. <https://analytics.intsecurity.org/en/prospective-directions-for-the-development-of-trilateral-cooperation-in-the-ukraine-uk-poland-format/>
12. Relations with Finland. NATO, Last updated: 05 Jul 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm
13. Relations with Sweden. NATO, Last updated: 06 Jul 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52535.htm
14. Statement by Denmark, Iceland and Norway on Finland and Sweden's decisions to apply for NATO membership. Statsministeriet, 16 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ARC5ub>
15. Stoltenberg: Finland and Sweden will be 'very much welcomed' if they decide to join NATO. CNN, <https://cnn.it/3RCBgMu>
16. Study on NATO Enlargement. NATO, 3 September 1995. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm
17. Sweden and Finland are on their way to NATO membership. Here's what needs to happen next. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 22 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ed6bR0>
18. Sweden would strengthen NATO with fresh thinking and an able force. John R. Deni, Atlantic Council, 18 May 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/sweden-would-strengthen-nato-with-fresh-thinking-and-an-able-force/>

19. The art of not taking sides, MONOCLE, 30 July 2022. <https://monocle.com/radio/shows/the-foreign-desk/448/>
20. The Case for Nordic and NATO Realism. Robert Skidelsky, Project Syndicate. 20 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3wWih7G>
21. U.S. Security Assistance to Non-NATO Countries: The Swedish Case and Post-Communist Eastern Europe. Paul M. Cole, RAND, 1992. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/notes/2009/N3327.pdf>
22. UK agrees mutual security deals with Finland and Sweden. BBC, 11 May 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61408700>
23. Ukraine lures Russian missiles with decoys of U.S. rocket system. The Washington Post, 30 August 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/30/ukraine-russia-himars-decoy-artillery/>
24. Геополітичні орієнтації жителів України: результати телефонного опитування, проведеного 6-20 липня 2022 року, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, July 29, 2022. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1125&page=1>
25. Двері НАТО відкриваються: що змінює для України вступ Фінляндії та Швеції до Альянсу. Yevropeiska pravda, 17 May 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/05/17/7139534/>
26. Замінник членства в НАТО: фінська модель? Charly Salonijs-Pasternak, New Europe Center, 2015. <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ukrayina-y-NATO--Diagnostyka-partnerstva.pdf>
27. Запровадження стандартів та інших керівних документів НАТО. Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 15 December 2021. <https://www.mil.gov.ua/diyalnist/vprovadzhennya-standartiv-ta-inshih-kerivnih-dokumentiv-nato.html>
28. Збройні сили України переходять на зброю НАТО – Кулеба. Suspilne, 26 April 2022. <https://bit.ly/3ATZGdv>
29. Кандидат-check: де Україна перебуває у виконанні семи рекомендацій ЄС щодо кандидатства. New Europe Center, 17 August 2022. <https://bit.ly/3KMaMFY>
30. Маршрут до членства. Чому Україні варто запропонувати дорожню карту для вступу до НАТО? Alyona Getmanchuk, Sergiy Solodkyu, Marianna Fakhurdinova, New Europe Center, 7 June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3gkZeem>
31. Меморандум про взаєморозуміння між Кабінетом Міністрів України і штабом Верховного головнокомандувача об'єднаних збройних сил НАТО на Атлантиці та штабом Верховного головнокомандувача об'єднаних збройних сил НАТО в Європі щодо забезпечення підтримки операцій НАТО з боку України. <https://bit.ly/3RDOM2j>
32. Путін заявив, що РФ не має проблем щодо вступу Фінляндії та Швеції до НАТО, але пригрозив реакцією у відповідь. TSN, 16 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3qfQYle>
33. Росія програє Балтику: що змінить вступ до НАТО Фінляндії та Швеції. Yevropeiska pravda, 2 May 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/05/2/7138713/>
34. Стефанішина: Вікно для вступу України до НАТО може відкритися ще до завершення війни з Росією. Yevropeiska pravda, 29 August 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/interview/2022/08/29/7145770/>
35. У Раді Федерації РФ погрожують Фінляндії через її намір вступити до НАТО. Yevropeiska Pravda, 6 April 2022. <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2022/04/6/7137335/>

36. Угода про заходи забезпечення безпеки Російської Федерації та держав-членів Організації Північноатлантичного договору. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2021. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/
37. Україна долучиться до розробки нових стандартів НАТО — Зеленський. Suspilne Novyny, 12 July 2022. <https://suspilne.media/259887-ukraina-dolucitsa-do-rozrobki-novih-standartiv-nato-zelenskij/>
38. Україна і стандарти НАТО. Що зроблено за президентства Зеленського? Alyona Getmanchuk, Marianna Fakhurdinova, New Europe Center, 5 April 2022. <https://bit.ly/3mosT8N>
39. Україна-НАТО. Що після посиленого партнерства? Alyona Getmanchuk, New Europe Center, 29 July 2020. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PB_Ukr_NATO_ukr.pdf
40. Участь України у міжнародних операціях з підтримання миру і безпеки під проводом Альянсу, Силах реагування НАТО та навчаннях. Mission of Ukraine to NATO, 16 June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3etpYf5>
41. Фінансування та поштовх до реформ: що дасть Україні статус кандидата на членство в ЄС. Marianna Fakhurdinova, New Europe Center, 12 May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3FSz8f7>
42. Чисельність ЗСУ і витрати на утримання в 2021 році. Ukrainian Military Pages, 18 February 2021. <https://bit.ly/3cOh7En>
43. Чому військовослужбовці звільняються з армії? Come Back Alive Foundation, 10 June 2021. <https://bit.ly/3KNYbIS>

© New Europe Center

Author:

Marianna Fakhurdinova

The information and views set out in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

New Europe Center

Email: info@neweurope.org.ua

<http://neweurope.org.ua/>