

# Europe Monitor

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## Finland/Sweden

### NATO's reaction on Erdogan blockade

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg no longer believes that Finland and Sweden will be included in NATO at the same time. "The main question is not whether Finland's and Sweden's memberships are ratified together," he said in Brussels. Rather, it is important "that they are ratified as full members as soon as possible". In addition, it was pointed out internally that Finland's earlier accession was strategically justified due to its exposed location on the border with Russia.



Jens Stoltenberg / Photo: dpa

NATO is responding to statements by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said that his country could ratify Finland's accession from Sweden.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Cavusoglu had previously explained why his country is considering ratifying Nato's accession in Finland regardless of Sweden. In a joint press conference with

NATO general secretary Jens Stoltenberg, he rejected his assessment that both countries fulfilled the obligations that they had received in a joint explanation with Turkey last year. "We don't have a bigger problem with Finland. But we underline that Sweden should take concrete steps," said Cavusoglu. It is not enough if the Turkish concerns are "only met on paper", this must also be reflected in concrete actions. The Kurdish groups PKK and YPD in Sweden would continue to recruit fighters, finance terrorism and show symbols and poster with their guide in public.

Stoltenberg then met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In addition to the help for earthquake victims-the occasion of his visit to the Turkey-it was also about the NATO joining of the two countries. Only Hungary and Turkey have not yet ratified their membership protocols of the thirty Member States.

Erdogan had publicly said at the end of January that his country "could convey a different message to Finland" and "Sweden would be shocked if it sees our message". Since then, Ankara has discussed separate ratification with Stoltenberg. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said when visiting Stockholm that it was wrong to speculate about Stoltenberg's statements. She promotes that Finland and Sweden can "join as quickly as possible because it is in our joint security interest". Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström said that the decision was with the Turkish Parliament and that there is no influence on it.

## European Union

### New Iran sanctions

The EU foreign ministers have decided on new punitive measures because of the serious violations of human rights in Iran. According to the EU Official Journal, 32 people and two organizations are affected. In addition to judges, prosecutors and prison directors, the Iranian Minister of Culture Mohammed-Mehdi Esmaeili and the Iranian Minister of Education Yussef Nuri were also put on the sanctions list.

Among other things, Nuri is held responsible for the arbitrary arrest of students. According to the EU, numerous Iranian musicians, filmmakers, other artists and journalists were threatened, arrested and prosecuted on flimsy charges under Esmaeili's responsibility. Judges and prosecutors are held particularly responsible for death sentences against demonstrators.

The punitive measures envisage freezing assets held in the EU. In addition, those affected are no longer allowed to travel to the EU.

The aim of the new sanctions is for those arrested in Iran who had previously protested peacefully to be released, explained Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn on the sidelines of the EU meeting at which the sanctions were decided. "It is the right of Iranians to go out and dress the way they want."

The trigger for the nationwide protests in Iran was the death of the Iranian Kurd Jina Mahsa Amini. She died in police custody on September 16 after being arrested by the Morality Police for breaking the Islamic dress code. According to human rights activists, more than 500 people have been killed and almost 20,000 demonstrators arrested since the protests began in September 2022.

## Türkiye

### Turkish justice attacking critical media

The organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has investigated how the Turkish government is pressuring journalists with physical violence, arrests and digital persecution and is trying to prevent critical reporting on state failures after the devastating February 6 earthquake in the Turkish-Syrian border region.

Two days after the first tremor, the journalists Mahmut Altintas and Sema Caglak were arrested in the badly hit municipality of Birecik on the pretext that they did not have official press cards. Altintas reports for the Kurdish Mesopotamia Agency (MA), Caglak for the women's news agency JinNews. Another MA reporter, Mehmet Güles, was released on the same day after his arrest on suspicion of "inciting hatred", but is under police surveillance.



*EU-Commission / Photo: AP*

Other journalists would become victims of intimidation campaigns on Twitter, including by Turkish politicians. The fact that the short message service was temporarily restricted was fatal, especially for the people affected by the earthquake if they wanted to forward calls for help. Just a few hours after the quake, the President of the Turkish media regulator RTÜK, Ebubekir Sahin, warned the media not to use "disinformation" to stir up panic: "We cannot turn a blind eye to media that indulge in manipulation." International media must stand up and strive for accreditations in order to be able to report from the crisis areas. Guillaume Perrier, a reporter for the French weekly *Le Point*, has already been denied entry. "The Turkish authorities must not use the tragedy to further restrict press freedom," said RSF

Managing Director Christian Mihr. The national chairman of the German Association of Journalists (DJV), Frank Überall, said that the reporting benefits “the earthquake victims, as shown by the overwhelming wave of willingness to help



around the world, which would not have come about without the shocking images and reports from the region”. It is the job of the press to shed light on the background: “The regime has to put up with it.” In the ranking of press freedom published by Reporters Without Borders since 2002, Turkey is 149th out of 180.

## **Munich Security Conference**

### **Gulf States demanding dialogue with Syrian dictator**

At a panel at the Munich Security Conference, Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud announced what was interpreted as a paradigm shift in the kingdom’s regional politics. “We have to enter into a dialogue with the government in Damascus,” demanded the chief diplomat. One of the reasons given by the minister was the humanitarian situation in Syria. The minister said a new approach is now being “formulated” to address the problem of Syrian refugees in neighboring states and the suffering of civilians, especially after the devastating earthquake that hit Syria and Turkey. “So this must eventually lead to a dialogue with the government in Damascus to achieve at least

the main goals, especially in relation to the humanitarian situation, refugee returns, etc.,” he said. Asked about reports he would be visiting Damascus following visits by his Emirati and Jordanian counterparts after the earthquake, Prince Faisal said he would not comment on rumours. In fact, the United Arab Emirates have already normalized relations. The Jordanian and Emirati foreign ministers met with Bashar al-Assad earlier this year, and the red carpet was rolled out for Bashar al-Assad in Oman. Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq personally received him at the airport. At the same time, Oman opened its airspace to Israeli civil aviation for the first time - the timing may have been a signal in both directions.



*Faisal Al Saud at the MSC / Photo: AP*