

# Europe Monitor

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## Sweden

### Sweden preparing for delayed NATO accession

The Swedish Prime Minister has confirmed that his country is preparing to join NATO after Finland. That's what Ulf Kristersson said yesterday at a joint press conference with Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin. The signs of the past few weeks pointed out that Turkey was preparing to ratify Finland's accession before Sweden's. "We are also prepared for this situation." But make no secret of the fact that Sweden would prefer joint accession with Finland. "We believe we are ready for ratification. But we respect that only Turkey can make Turkish decisions," he said.



Scholz und Kristersson in Berlin / Photo: ZDF

Scholz reiterated that Germany wanted both countries to join NATO quickly. In terms of duration, it is also a fast accession process. "But we already have the goal that this will soon become something and that Sweden will become a member of NATO very quickly," he said. "It's good for

Sweden, it's good for NATO and our alliance, which has reaffirmed its importance and importance in recent months."

After the Russian attack on Ukraine, Sweden and Finland broke with their long tradition of military non-alignment and jointly applied for NATO membership in May last year. However, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had announced opposition to accession. In addition to an embargo by Sweden on arms exports to Turkey, the handling of Kurdish activists was one of the points of criticism. After an agreement was reached between the three countries, Sweden tightened terrorism legislation, among other things, but Turkey has not yet fully implemented the points from the agreement and is demanding the extradition of Kurdish activists. Most recently, Erdogan made it clear that he could let the Finns pass before the Swedes. 28 out of 30 NATO countries have ratified the accession of Finland and Sweden, only Hungary and Turkey have not yet. Meanwhile, Finland's President Sauli Niinistö is expected in Turkey this Thursday. First of all, a visit to the south-eastern Turkish earthquake region is planned, followed by a meeting with Erdogan in Istanbul on Friday. The working visit is to deal, among other things, with the bilateral relations between the two countries and the NATO accession of Finland and Sweden.

## European Union

### EU criticizes Italian migration policy

Tensions are rising in the European Union because Italy is no longer willing to comply with the rules of the Dublin Regulation. Since the beginning of December, Rome has refused to take back asylum seekers who have to apply in Italy. The German interior minister said after a meeting of EU interior ministers that she had demanded that Italy comply with the law in force again. Her French colleague said that the Dublin system “virtually no longer works in some countries, especially in Italy”. These states would have declared the system “dead”.

In a joint statement, Germany, France and five other countries called for “loyal cooperation”. Otherwise there is a risk “that public trust in European solutions will dwindle”. The conflict is burdening the negotiations on a reform of the EU asylum law. “We have to make further progress there by summer,” said the German. She offered to take in migrants in Germany who survived a serious shipwreck off the southern Italian coast. “But I also demand this solidarity from others,” she added.



EU-Interior Ministers in Brussels / Photo: Reuters

According to current law, asylum seekers must submit their application in the first EU country they reach. If they travel further, that state is obliged to take them back up to six months after they entered the country. This cooperation has been difficult for a long time. In Germany, only 362 people were returned to Italy in 2022, with more than 14,000 applications and more than 9,000 approved applications. Only five people were transferred to Greece because German courts consider the accommodation of asylum

seekers there to be unreasonable.

EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson commented on the British government’s new draft law to amend the right to asylum. This violates the country’s international obligations. The government wants to deport irregular migrants to Rwanda – without examining their asylum claims. France’s interior minister said the planned reform “must not have any negative consequences for our bilateral relations”.

## Türkiye

### Election date stays

Despite the earthquake disaster, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has set May 14 as the date for the parliamentary and presidential elections. Addressing the parliamentary group of the AKP, he said: “God willing and the time is coming, this nation will do what is necessary on May 14.” According to the constitution, the elections must be held by June 18. Erdogan can set the election date as president by decree and without the approval of parliament. As a test balloon, former Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arinc proposed on February 13 that the elections be postponed until March 2024. When objected that the constitution did not allow it, Arinc replied that constitutions are not scriptures.



The Turkish opposition bloc / Photo: EPA

The High Electoral Council has since declared that despite the disaster, the elections could be held legally. The chairman of the largest opposition party, CHP, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, said there was enough time to prepare the infrastructure for the elections. 14 million people lived in the provinces affected by the quake, and millions have since left the region. The number of dead is still unclear, numbers of missing persons are still not pub-

lished. Erdogan himself announced on Wednesday that more than 200,000 buildings had either collapsed completely or had to be demolished due to damage.

### **Turks living in Europe can vote from April 27**

From April 27, Turkish citizens outside their home country can cast their ballots in the parliamentary and presidential elections in May. The elections at the border crossings and abroad begin on April



*Pro-Erdogan supporter / Photo: dpa*

27 and end on May 9, the electoral authority YSK announced on Tuesday.

As already mentioned, elections will take place in Turkey on May 14. If no candidate wins the presidential election, there will be a runoff on May 28. In that case, Turkish citizens abroad can vote between May 20 and 24, according to the YSK. According to polls, Erdogan's re-election is anything but certain. Last week, an alliance of six parties put up opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu (74) as an opposing candidate. Smaller parties also want to register candidates. It is still unclear whether the important pro-Kurdish party HDP will put forward its own candidate or whether it will do so in favor of Kilicdaroglu.

For the parliamentary elections, both Erdogan's Islamic conservative governing party AKP and Kilicdaroglu's centre-left party CHP are running in alliances with other parties. The most important partner for Erdogan is the ultra-nationalist MHP, for Kilicdaroglu the national-conservative Iyi party.

