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## Transformation of the European security system in the light of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO

**Abstract.** The relevance of this study is conditioned by the accession of Sweden and Finland to the North Atlantic Alliance, which has changed the European security system. The purpose of this study was to analyse the consequences of Finland and Sweden's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance for the European Union's security system. The study used the methods of analysis and synthesis, comparison, and the abstract logical method. The study found that the reasons for the analysed countries' accession to the Alliance were geopolitical, historical, and military-strategic. The key reasons for Sweden and Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance include Russia's invasion of Ukraine, their proximity and shared borders with Russia, a strategy of neutrality that was losing its effectiveness, and the merger of the countries' military-industrial complexes. This accession radically changed the security system of Europe. It was found that the accession of Finland and Sweden to the North Atlantic Alliance had both positive and negative consequences for the overall security system of European countries. On the one hand, the accession of these countries to the North Atlantic Alliance and the integration of their military forces into the Alliance helped to improve military capabilities, especially in the Baltic region, where the Allies did not have sufficient military power. On the other hand, the accession of new countries to the Alliance has also had negative consequences, such as complicating the defence decision-making process and increasing the confrontation between the Alliance countries in northern Europe and Russia. The findings of this study are of practical importance, as they present a holistic picture of changes in the European security system and can be used in practice by the legislative bodies of Ukraine in developing and implementing the country's foreign policy.

**Keywords:** foreign policy; Northern Europe; military-political transformations; regional stability; defence

### Introduction

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that as of 2024, the issue of security of the European system is quite complex, considering the events in Ukraine. A full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is concerning not only because of the occupation of Ukrainian lands, but also because it undermines the security system of Europe. Therewith, Ukraine plays a major role in maintaining European security. During the Russian-Ukrainian war, the neutrality of some states in the European security system, which had been unchanged for many decades, changed dramatically. Finland and Sweden have always conducted their foreign policy based on the principles of neutrality as a conscious choice for development (Lundqvist, 2022). After these countries joined the military bloc, the international community began heated discussions about this step, addressing the fact that Russia seeks to keep Ukraine from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a demand in a military conflict.

The issue of Finland and Sweden joining NATO and changing the European security system has been repeatedly raised by politicians and investigated by Ukrainian researchers. In their study of the problems and prospects of Finland's neutrality policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I. Klymchuk & N. Izhyk (2023) suggested that Finland's neutrality slowed down the pace of the country's integration into the European Union (EU) and negatively affected international security in the region. Focusing on Sweden's neutrality policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ya. Zavada & Ya. Palok (2022) argue that Sweden's neutrality policy during the Russian invasion of Ukraine became ineffective. This forced countries to reconsider their national security strategy. Analysing the national security issues of the Scandinavian countries, R. Kyrpychnyk (2022) found that Finland and Sweden's cooperation with the Alliance is an example of the gradual development of national security and political culture characteristic of the Alliance member states.

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Investigating geopolitical changes in Central and Eastern Europe, N. Nechayeva-Yuriichuk (2022) determined that the main political task in the international partnership of countries is to ensure peace and security. It is international organisations that can ensure security on the continent in the long term. Focusing on the process of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, A. Martynov (2023) concluded that the change in the foreign policy course of the two countries was conditioned by the crisis of the European regional and global security system, which resulted in the attack on Ukraine.

Focusing on the changes in Europe's security system, A. Seyaz (2024) investigated them in the context of the Northern European region, paying attention to the transformations caused by Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. As a result of the study, the researcher concluded that the accession of the two countries to NATO creates powerful opportunities to counter Russia by combining the resources of Finland and Sweden in both the Baltic and Arctic regions. The researcher believes that NATO should draw conclusions from the Russian-Ukrainian war and strengthen the European security system, as one cannot be completely sure that the aggressor will not violate the sovereignty of other states. K.K. Elgin & A. Lanoszka (2023) consider geopolitical changes in Europe from a similar perspective. The researchers concluded that this process was more beneficial for the new members than for NATO as a whole. Sweden and Finland have been granted voting rights and full participation in the key bodies of the North Atlantic Committee, and the daily practice of Swedish and Finnish cooperation with NATO, which has been in place since the 1990s, will not undergo substantial changes. The researchers believe that the accession of Sweden and Finland is less practical than it could be in the case of Ukraine, considering the recent military events. The only aspect why Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO is an important development in the European security system is the addition of the armed forces of these Scandinavian countries in an area where the Alliance's forces have not had much strength before.

Analysing previous studies, it can be concluded that all researchers point to different reasons for Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO: The Russian-Ukrainian war, centrifugal trends in the EU, and the need to ensure national security against other threats. However, much less attention, both in public and academic discourse, has been paid to the consequences that Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO has already caused or could potentially cause, particularly in the coming years. In this regard, the purpose of this study was to theoretically analyse the changes in the European security system that could potentially lead to Finland and Sweden joining NATO.

### Materials and Methods

The study used general scientific methods of scientific cognition in the context of the structural-functional approach. This helped to consider the totality of security measures as a system where individual countries and supranational bodies play the role of elements in the security structure of the region, performing specific functions. The process of establishing and developing cooperation between Sweden and Finland was examined using

the historical method. The reasons and preconditions for Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO and the consequences of this process for the EU were examined using the historical genetic method. The historical-comparative method made it possible to compare the development and transformation of the national security models of the analysed countries, starting from the beginning. The method of synchronous comparison helped to find common and distinctive features in each country's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance. The grouping method was used to separate all the reasons for the analysed countries' accession to the Alliance. Such actions simplified further analysis of the consequences of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO and the impact of such accession on the European security system.

To investigate the topic, the study analysed The North Atlantic Treaty (1949), an international agreement concluded between Western European and North American countries on 4 April 1949, which resulted in the creation of NATO. The analysis of this agreement helped to update NATO's original purpose and compare whether it meets the current challenges and the organisation's expansion in Northern Europe. The results of a survey of the population of the analysed countries on their accession to NATO helped to better understand the domestic political background of joining the Alliance in this region (Statista, 2024a; 2024b). The Swedish survey data covered the period of 2014-2024 and focused on the opinions of 1,092 citizens aged 18-84 (Statista, 2024b). The Finnish survey data covered the period of 2014-2022 and focused on the opinions of 1,382 citizens aged 18-80 (Statista, 2024a). This data provided an insight into the extent to which the opinions of the population of Sweden and Finland on their accession to NATO have changed under the influence of various political events and regional political trends, which were analysed in greater detail in this study.

The study also analysed the Congressional Research Service's 2024 report (CRS, 2024). The report was useful for this study because it contains official statistics on military support and financing of the national armed forces of Finland and Sweden, as well as the process of their accession to the Alliance. This allowed this study to rely on official statistics to support its judgements and thus determine the possible future role of these countries in the Alliance, which was important.

### Results and Discussion.

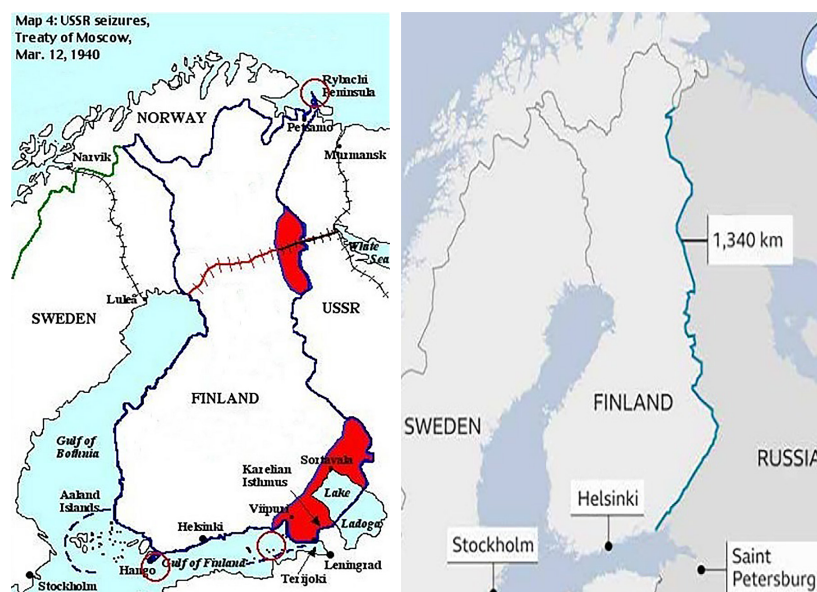
**Historical background of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO.** After World War II, ensuring security in Europe became one of the principal tasks of European countries. Before the creation of NATO, each country in Europe was responsible for its own security, but NATO has been the main security provider on the European continent since its inception. NATO became a global organisation with the aim of uniting countries with shared values in the fight against the socialist camp (Erciyas & Soydemir, 2022). Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 4 April 1949 reads as follows: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of

individual or collective self-defence ... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area" (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949).

Sweden and Finland did not become parties to the agreement, although they were threatened by the Soviet Union (USSR) during the Cold War. The motive for preserving the non-aligned status of these countries was the desire not to be at the centre of a conflict between two military and political blocs. While not joining NATO, these countries have established cooperation with NATO to demonstrate their commitment to the democratic world. Sweden and Finland have expressed a need for coordination and assistance in the event of a military threat from NATO. For the Alliance, it was important to use the defence of these countries and to provide early warning of possible military intentions of the "eastern neighbour". However, over the years, such aspects have become less and less important as the multipolar world system that replaced the bipolar confrontation after the collapse of the USSR has been established (Christiansson, 2023). On 5 July 2022, Finland and Sweden signed protocols on their accession to NATO. First, one should look at the historical factors that prompted both countries in question to abandon their neutrality policy and apply for NATO membership.

Sweden adopted a policy of neutrality in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century after the Napoleonic Wars (Horobets &

Martynov, 2022). Neutrality refers to the state of a country that refrains from taking part in a conflict or war but continues to maintain peaceful relations with other countries, including those in conflict (Dinicu, 2022). This status allowed Sweden to avoid taking part in the First World War between 1914 and 1918 and to strengthen its economy. Conditions became more difficult during the Second World War from 1939 to 1945, when the country found itself in a difficult situation as it had contacts with the warring countries, but Sweden managed to maintain its neutrality. After joining the EU in 1995, Sweden's neutrality status was strengthened. Until 2022, there were no historical preconditions for Sweden to join NATO. Finland, on the other hand, adopted a policy of neutrality after gaining independence in 1917, but this policy did not protect the country from the Soviet attack in 1939. Despite the numerical superiority of the Soviet Union, Finnish troops, with their superiority in mountain and winter warfare, fought back and resisted. A well-known episode of the war was the defence of the Mannerheim Line, where Finnish troops steadfastly repelled Soviet attacks. However, the Soviet Union eventually prevailed and Finland was forced to sign the Peace Treaty in Moscow, losing part of its territory (Fig. 1). The situation became more complicated during the Second World War, when the country had to limit its state independence. Therefore, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, since 1991, Finland has had a greater opportunity to implement a policy of neutrality (Horobets & Martynov, 2022).



**Figure 1.** The territories lost by Finland during the "Winter War" and the length of the country's current border with Russia

**Sources:** F. Murati *et al.* (2023)

Throughout the period when Sweden and Finland were members of the European Union, they supported foreign and security policy and cooperated with NATO through the Partnership for Peace programme, adhering to a policy of neutrality until 2022. For instance, Sweden took part in the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo in 1999, in the mission in Iraq from 2015 to 2017, and provided air

support to the NATO operation in Libya in 2011 (Horobets & Martynov, 2022; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2023). Russia's occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Crimea) in February-March 2014 undermined both the security system in Europe and the international security architecture (Horobets & Martynov, 2022). Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 considerably worsened the security



situation in Europe and underscored the significance of NATO as the main organisation providing defence for European countries. This situation led to a rapid strengthening of NATO's defence efforts. This is why Sweden and Finland quickly applied for NATO membership, even though they had long maintained their neutrality and non-membership in military blocs. This position was determined not only by their security policy, but also formed part of their worldview and self-awareness. Sweden's military neutrality lasted more than 200 years, and Finland's – for about 80 years (Michalski *et al.*, 2024).

In analysing the declining feasibility of the neutrality strategy of Sweden and Finland, A.B. Kaynak (2023) compared the impact of Russia's strategy on both countries. He concluded that NATO enlargement has created a new balance in Europe's security system. The researcher noted that during their time as neutral countries, Finland and Sweden had to constantly invest in their defence to prevent any unforeseen actions by Russia. As members of NATO, these countries have secured the maximum level of security, but this is accompanied by the loss of full sovereignty over the country's military forces. However, cooperation with NATO brings considerable benefits to Finland and Sweden, specifically when it comes to military modernisation, which, although present before joining the Alliance, is more appropriate to do together than separately (Kaynak, 2023). An analogous approach was taken by researcher M. Gunter (2022), who examined the consequences of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO. He noted that the accession of these countries to the Alliance has geostrategic advantages for the EU. At the NATO Summit in Madrid in 2022, leaders agreed to increase the number of NATO troops on high alert from 40,000 to 300,000 (NATO Madrid Summit Declaration, 2022). These steps to strengthen NATO are the best way to deter further Russian aggression, preserve peace, and thus prevent a possible nuclear catastrophe.

**Military and strategic prerequisites for Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO.** As for the military-strategic aspects of Finland's security, one should pay attention to its common border with Russia, which is 1,340 km long (Fig. 1). The Russian Northern Fleet is concentrated in the Murmansk region, which borders Finland. Finland's accession to NATO has led to an increase in the concentration of Russia's military potential on the country's border. Considering Russia's aggressive policy towards its neighbours in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the country needs to maintain a considerable military capability. Thus, Sweden and Finland have a military-industrial complex that meets NATO military standards, which undoubtedly improves their defence potential (Horobets & Martynov, 2022). According to the Congressional Research Service, Finland spends almost 2.5% of its gross domestic product on defence, which is much higher than the average for NATO member states (about 2%). Sweden is aiming to reach the 2% defence spending target in 2024 (CRS, 2024). In 2022, the Finnish government determined that it was necessary to further improve the combat capability of the country's armed forces. A comparable situation arose in Sweden (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2023).

It is also important to consider the military and strategic factors that influenced the Scandinavian countries'

decision to join NATO. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO responded by increasing its monitoring and military presence in Poland and the Baltic states. However, in February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Accordingly, NATO has paid special attention to improving territorial defence preparedness (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2023). After analysing some studies, it can be noted that the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 was a turning point in relations between Europe and Russia and caused the end of the well-established security system in Europe that existed after the Cold War. Russia perceived the continued enlargement of NATO and the EU as a threat to its economic and security interests. Thus, competition between Russia and the EU has become a necessity, as one of the examples of NATO enlargement was the accession of Sweden and Finland to the Alliance (Erciyas & Soydemir, 2022). Notably, Sweden has a significant military industry that could become an essential element in NATO structures. Furthermore, having two countries with exemplary liberal democracies is a win for NATO, as it further reinforces the values the Alliance seeks to defend: democracy, freedom, and human rights (Murati *et al.*, 2023; Thorhallsson & Vidal, 2023).

For Finland, the process of considering NATO membership began in 1995, at the same time as its application for EU membership. However, after 24 February 2022, the process quickly gained momentum, as the Finnish President and Prime Minister decided not to discuss the issue at the evening conference and instead agreed to apply for membership in the Alliance. This procedure has become a tool for ensuring national security. In Sweden, the process of considering NATO membership has been slower, as the country was the last to try to maintain its neutrality status, hoping for a possible truce between Ukraine and Russia. However, in April 2022, Sweden expressed its readiness and desire to join NATO, where the main argument of Swedish politicians was that the war to the east of Sweden makes its non-accession unjustified (Christiansson, 2023).

Analysing Finland and Sweden's rapprochement with NATO in the context of the war in Ukraine, A. Minna & P. Michael (2022) focused on the far north of Europe and its importance for Russia, which was mentioned in passing in this study. A. Minna & P. Michael (2022) concluded that as of 2024, the security of the entire Europe is not at risk, as Russia is only interested in the territories of Ukraine, the Arctic and the North Atlantic region. The economic development and security of the federation depend on these regions. However, such findings of A. Minna & P. Michael (2022) do not factor in the significance of NATO expansion as a guarantor of pan-European security, which cannot be fully achieved without the Alliance's proper consolidation in Eastern Europe. Therewith, the researchers' opinion that economic considerations do not play a priority role in the calculations of the Russian military and political leadership appears to be correct. In this regard, it cannot be ruled out that the leadership of this country may also escalate in the Antarctic. Considering the Putin regime's increased attention to the North, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO is an essential factor in curbing the Russian president's territorial ambitions.

**Geopolitical preconditions for Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO.** The literature review found

that other important preconditions for Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO included the deployment of military forces around the Baltic Sea and China's attempts to increase its influence in Greenland, which were resisted by the United States. Considering that the Russian Federation closely cooperates with China in political decision-making, this situation was another factor that influenced Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO (Horobets & Martynov, 2022; Lundmark, 2022). However, the Ukrainian crisis was the key factor in this decision.

The occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014 had a negative impact on relations between Russia, on the one hand, and the EU and NATO countries, on the other hand, and raised the issue of ensuring a prominent level of security in Europe. Thus, it is worth agreeing with T. Forsberg (2023) who argues that the application of Sweden and Finland, which have been active partners of NATO in some special operations, is not a surprise. What is even more surprising is the rapid accession of states to the Alliance. It was expected that such accession would be more of a technical aspect, characterised by a bureaucratic process that would gradually reduce the costs of accession for these countries and become the logical conclusion of their cooperation. The accession of the Scandinavian states was not so much a bureaucratic process as a vital political decision. According to the researcher, the key to this was the change in public opinion in these countries. After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the majority of the Finnish population began to support the country's accession to the Alliance.

Since public opinion polls on the country's accession to NATO were conducted in the 1990s, the result has been that about 50-70% of Finns opposed such an initiative. This trend began to change as a result of the Russian-Georgian war, the involvement of Russian troops in the conflicts in Syria, its cooperation with Iran, and the annexation of Crimea. As a result of these events, the Finnish population's opinion on the country's accession to NATO became increasingly positive. However, as soon as the news of the conflicts in these territories died down, the number of opponents of the country's accession to the Alliance again approached half. After the events in Ukraine began in 2022, the number of Finns who began to support Finland's accession to NATO was around 80% (Forsberg, 2023). Other statistics show that between 2014 and 2022, the number of Finns who supported Finland's accession to NATO increased by 27% (from 26% in 2014 to 53% in 2022) (Statista, 2024a). According to the Congressional Research Service, as of 2023, 82% of Finns supported the country's accession to NATO (CRS, 2024).

Analysing analogous results of a survey of the Swedish population, it can be concluded that in 2014-2024, the opinion of Swedes on the country's accession to NATO also underwent substantial changes. While in 2014, only 28% of the population supported joining the Alliance, in early 2024, it was already 63% (Statista, 2024). According to the Congressional Research Service, as of 2024, 60% of Swedes supported the country's accession to NATO (CRS, 2024). The change in public opinion in Finland paved the way for the accession to the Alliance in Sweden.

**Implications for the European Security System.** It is worth stating that NATO's role has changed in the current

environment. The Alliance is now perceived not only as a military and political bloc that is a political rival of Russia and China, but also as the military foundation of Western society. The organisation has gained such importance due to the growing threat to the European border from Russia (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2023). NATO's priorities at the beginning of the Alliance's creation were related to the defence of allied territory. However, with each expansion of the Alliance and the accession of a new country, priorities have changed. The latest version of NATO's concept was released in 2022, and the transformation referred to increasing the focus on each country's national security, thus providing new guidelines as Finland and Sweden prepared to join (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2023).

External factors relate mainly to the current NATO enlargement, which is taking place against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. The war has not yet led to the direct use of force by the Allies. However, there have been other active measures, including posturing, force projection, increased security on NATO territory in the immediate vicinity of Russia, and strong support for Ukraine through training, equipment, and intelligence sharing. The key difference is that this is not a flanking conflict, but a conflict initiated by Russia, which affects its core interests and forces the Alliance to change the European security architecture (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2023).

NATO's expansion through the accession of Finland and Sweden is important to consider in the context of the geopolitical changes that the war in Ukraine could bring to Europe. It should be considered that each country in NATO, as a sovereign entity, is entitled to develop its own security policy through participation in military activities that it considers appropriate. The accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance paves the way to strengthening NATO's northern flank, which could help deter Russia from attacking at any point. This becomes especially significant in the context that the Russian public and media space has repeatedly called for an attack on a certain European country (Dinicu, 2022). Analysing the reasons for Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO, it can be concluded that such actions have had a considerable impact on the security system in Europe. That is, such actions affect not only the national security of each of the NATO member states, but also contribute to the global goal of deterring Russia from new acts of military aggression (Horobets & Martynov, 2022). The accession of both countries to NATO has considerably improved the Alliance's military capabilities, which is changing its architecture. Under the influence of NATO, EU countries began to increase their spending on armaments and transitioned to the concept of collective defence (Erciyas & Soydemir, 2022).

On the one hand, in the long run, the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO will result in the consolidation of European military cooperation within the Alliance. However, also in the long run, the accession of countries where the population has long been opposed to participation in the Alliance and has shown only ad hoc support for the Alliance may lead to complications in the decision-making process. As of 2024, the outcome of the war in Ukraine is difficult to predict, but the consequences for European countries are already tangible: an energy and food crisis, a humanitarian catastrophe caused by the large number

of Ukrainian refugees in the EU, pressure on national social assistance systems in European countries, and an increase in the military budget to the detriment of the social budget. All these factors can contribute to discord among NATO members. Therefore, according to A. Dinicu (2022), NATO's future effectiveness and military power in Europe will depend on whether EU citizens are willing to make social policy sacrifices in favour of increased subsidies for military production and the armed forces, including the creation of costly military bases and large-scale exercises. Notably, all Scandinavian countries are known for their active social policies and high levels of budget expenditure compared to other European countries. Therefore, there is a risk that the Swedish and Finnish social democratic and, more broadly, left-wing forces will become an obstacle to the allocation of adequate funds for rearmament and increase in the size of the armed forces.

The conclusions of the study suggest that the transformation of the European security system and NATO is focused on strengthening national defence capabilities. Factors influencing this process include national preferences, NATO priorities, and external factors. These results are fully consistent with the findings of V. Kanniainen (2022). The author of the cited study concludes that two additional ways to strengthen the national security of the Baltic states can be used: investment in defence and joining a defence alliance. In terms of defence investment, socially efficient allocation of resources is achieved by ensuring that each unit of money invested in defence has the same effect on security as it does on social welfare. As for membership in a defence alliance, it creates an additional welfare benefit by providing collective defence as an international public good. This membership is of historical significance, as Finland and Sweden managed to reduce their risk by increasing their defence levels and joining NATO, while contributing to the strengthening of European defence systems.

Analysing the impact of Finland's and Sweden's possible accession to NATO on the Russian threat, N. Lokker *et al.* (2023) concluded that the accession of these countries to the Alliance would have a positive effect not only on their national security, but also on the overall security in Europe. This is consistent with the findings of the present study. While NATO membership will provide additional protection against the Russian threat, it will also change the security dynamics in Europe, altering the perception of the Russian threat and the nature of the challenges it poses to the EU. The need to counter this threat could create a paradoxical situation where the EU, especially its north-eastern regions, could become even more insecure even if NATO's role in the region is expanded (Lokker *et al.*, 2023). Thus, there is an expansion of NATO's influence

to the north, with Finland and Sweden reconsidering their neutrality status. These actions lead to fundamental changes in the European security system. Managing the short- and long-term implications of this evolution is therefore a crucial task for NATO and its members, including Sweden and Finland, in the near future.

## Conclusions

The analysis leads to the conclusion that the preconditions for Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO can be divided into three groups: historical, military-strategic, and geopolitical. The historical reasons for the two countries' accession include their complicated history of political relations with Russia and the loss of the feasibility of a non-aligned and neutral strategy due to Russia's aggressive actions against its neighbours. The military-strategic reasons include Finland's border with Russia, which is more than 1,300 km long, and the significance of the military-industrial complexes of Finland and Sweden for both NATO and the national security of both countries. Therewith, these countries' long-standing partnership with NATO, which began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also contributed to their rapid accession. Geopolitical reasons include the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These factors together became the starting point for Finland and Sweden on the path to ensuring their national security through membership in the Alliance.

Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO has major implications not only for their own national security, but also for the entire security system in Europe. This is leading to substantial changes in the European security landscape, mainly through increased defence spending. However, the accession of these countries to NATO may also have negative consequences for European security, including more complicated decision-making in the Alliance due to the increased number of member states and pressure from the public, which will not be ready for increased military spending and, consequently, higher taxes. NATO enlargement could be key to realising the potential of international security cooperation.

As the issue of NATO enlargement and its impact on EU security stays relevant, further analysis of the topic is needed. Specifically, a major area is the investigation of the economic consequences associated with increased military defence spending and possible changes in social programmes and economic strategies.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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