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The End of Neutrality in Europe:

Ukraine and Globalism have Forced Change

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg accepts Sweden and Finland's application to join NATO.

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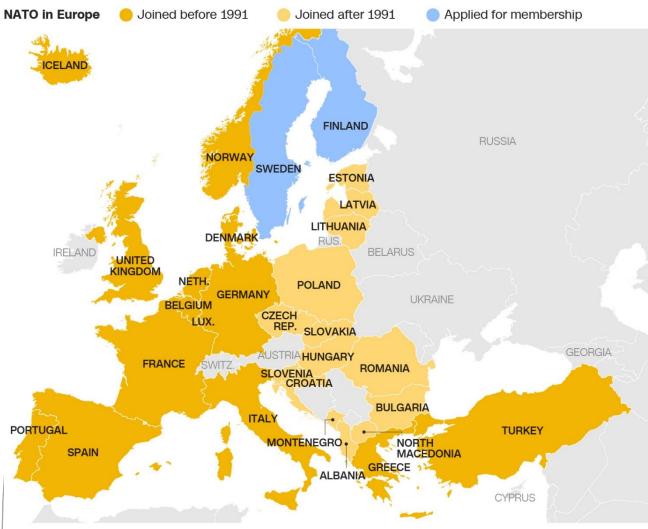**The America-Eurasia Center**
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NATO's European member states

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO – was founded by 12 countries in 1949. The alliance expanded to Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

NATO in Europe ● Joined before 1991 ● Joined after 1991 ● Applied for membership

Note: United States and Canada are also NATO members. The former East Germany became part of NATO when Germany reunified in 1990.

CNN
Source: NATO
Graphic: Natalie Croker and Henrik Pettersson, CNN

There are several nations in Europe and across the global that have a strategic position of military neutrality, which garners not getting involved in wars or getting involved in any military alliances. In terms of Europe, Sweden and Switzerland have held this position as neutral since the Napoleonic wars in 1812 and Finland and Austria have been neutral since the mid-20th Century, including Ireland during the second world war and afterwards. A few other small European nations

like Malta, Andorra, and Liechtenstein have strategic neutrality positions as well. Despite these nations not engaging in various wars over the past few centuries, there has been contemplation or even reversal of strategic neutrality positions by some European nations recently. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, February 24, 2022, has forced neutral as well as formerly Russia-allied nations to change their stance not only on Russia, but on where their allegiance should be and what the future strategic architecture of Europe will be.

The most strikingly dramatic change of policy came from Sweden and Finland, who on May 18, 2022, jointly applied to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.[1] As nations both in relative proximity to Russia, Finland bordering Russia, these nations made strategic decisions to join the alliance in opposition to the reigning regime in Moscow. Most of the members of NATO were receptive to these decisions made by Sweden and Finland, and the general secretary of the NATO Alliance, Jens Stoltenberg stated that "this is a good day, at a critical moment in our security."[2] Both nations in early June conducted joint naval exercises with NATO in the Baltic Sea, breaking the long history of non-alignment in strategic naval and militaristic neutrality.[3] In response, General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that, "It is important for us, the United States, and the other NATO countries to show solidarity with both Finland and Sweden in this exercise."[4] Not all NATO members were so keen for the Scandinavian nations to join NATO. Turkey had initial doubts as to the two nations joining the alliance due to their willingness to support Kurdish militants, but on June 28, 2022, Turkey agreed to lift its veto from Sweden and

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[1] https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-sweden-submit-application-join-nato-2022-05-18/

[2] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm

[3] https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-sweden-moscow-finland-295fcad0d4c56887209107157c26c143

[4] Ibid.

Finland's invitation into NATO with the signing of a Memorandum for Joint Security with NATO in Madrid.[5] This formal joining of Sweden and Finland into NATO is a dramatic change from their decades, or in the case of Sweden centuries, of long standing neutrality in Europe, representing a stunning shift in European strategic alliances.

As a result of the war in Ukraine, those previously neutral nations, or those remaining neutral have had tremendous pressure placed on them to respond to the Russian invasion and come to the defense of Ukraine, with military and humanitarian assistance. The most notably neutral nations in Europe besides Sweden and Finland are Austria, Switzerland, and Ireland, and each of these nations has faced pressures by the other major European powers to respond in a manner which may alter their stances on neutrality and make them abandon neutrality as a strategic stance wholesale. For instance, Switzerland in recent days has joined the EU's sanctioning Russia, has barred Russian flights from entering the country, has prevented five oligarchs close to President Vladimir Putin from entering the nation, and has sanctioned Putin personally as well as other members of the Russian Government.[6] While this is short of the steps Finland and Sweden have taken, it shows a dramatic reversal of policy in favor of one commensurate with other non-neutral nations of Europe. In the words of Chancellor Karl Nehammer, 'Austria was neutral, Austria is neutral, Austria will remain neutral."[7] Despite this, several prominent leaders across Austrian society have brought up the issue of neutrality and Austria's position on it.[8] For the time being, it appears that Austria will not cave to these pressures. In terms of Ireland, Simon Coveney,

[5] https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/28/nato-reaches-deal-with-turkey-to-admit-sweden-and-finland-secretary-general-says.html

[6] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/28/switzerland-neutral-ukraine-russia-sanctions/

[7] https://www.dw.com/en/will-austria-abandon-neutrality-to-join-nato/a-61880804

[8] Ibid.

Ireland's Defense and Foreign Affairs Minister has stated that the war between Russia and Ukraine could cause a shift on public opinion in the nation on their stance of neutrality.[9] Thus far, Ireland has sent humanitarian supplies to Ukraine, but no military equipment. Due to the brutal nature of Russia's invasion in Ukraine, the debate on neutrality is changing in Ireland and it may be open to foreign military compacts moving forward.[10] These are just a few examples of how the Russian invasion has shifted views on neutrality in Europe, but they are representative of the pressures being placed on all the nations of Europe to show not just humanitarian support, but military support as the conflict draws on.

These changes in policy beg the question, how has the Russian invasion of Ukraine so dramatically affected the strategic military and political policies of Europe? Putting aside the need for individual national security, the answer may be found in globalism. The world is now more interconnected than it ever has been before and events in one nation, or, in this case, between two nations, can radically shift responses by other nations. The most striking example of this are the sanctioning steps that the EU has taken against Russia as the war has progressed especially when it comes to energy imports and the dramatic rise in global energy costs as a subsequent result.[11] Many of the nations of Europe are seeking energy from Middle Eastern nations, or the US, and trying to find ways to curb the high cost of energy in an effort to prevent Russia from being able to fund their war in Ukraine.[12] Another issue that faces especially the developing but also developed world is a food shortage crisis, due to Ukraine and

[9] https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/05/ukraine-war-testing-irish-neutrality/

[10] Ibid.

[11] https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-netherlands-moscow-brussels-9f3fef34db1f41ea8f2aaaed05e923a2

[12] Ibid.

Russia being the source of 30% of the world's wheat.[13] The interconnectedness of the nations of the world economically, socially, and politically, and the current war in Ukraine have caused public opinion pressures or shifts on the concept of strategic neutrality when it comes to geo-politics. We will see how other nations who claim neutrality will change their stances or not and what that means for military alliances and conflicts in the future.

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