



NATO Enlargement & Open Door

NATO's "open door policy" is based on Article 10 of the Alliance's founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty (1949). The Treaty states that NATO membership is open to any "European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area". It states that any decision on enlargement must be made "by unanimous agreement". NATO enlargement has helped increase stability and prosperity in Europe. It is aimed at promoting stability and cooperation, and at building a Europe united in peace, democracy and common values.

Free choice

NATO respects the right of every country to choose its own security arrangements. Each sovereign country has the right to choose for itself whether it joins any treaty or alliance. This fundamental principle is enshrined in international agreements, including the Helsinki Final Act. NATO membership is not imposed on countries. Article 13 of the Washington Treaty specifically gives Allies the right to leave should they wish to.



Process of Accession

European countries that wish to join NATO are initially invited to begin an Intensified Dialogue with the Alliance about their aspirations and related reforms. Aspirants may then be invited to join the Membership Action Plan, a programme which helps nations prepare for membership. Participation does not guarantee membership, but is a key preparation mechanism.

To join the Alliance, nations are expected to respect the values of the North Atlantic Treaty, and to meet certain political, economic and military criteria, set out in the Alliance's 1995 Study on Enlargement. These criteria include a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy; fair treatment of minority populations; a commitment to resolve conflicts peacefully; an ability and willingness to make a military contribution to NATO operations; and a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutions.

Current NATO members



Enlargement over the years

Since its creation in 1949, NATO membership has grown from the 12 founding members (**Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States**) to today's 29 members through seven rounds of enlargement in 1952, 1955, 1982, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2017.

All countries which have joined have done so freely, and in accordance with their domestic democratic processes. Not one has asked to leave. The first three rounds of enlargement took place during the Cold War: **Greece and Turkey (1952), West Germany (1955) and Spain (1982).**

The end of the Cold War was followed by the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the breakup of the Soviet Union. The reunification of Germany in October 1990 brought the territory of the former East Germany into the Alliance.

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became members in 1999.

At the 1999 Washington Summit, the Membership Action Plan was launched to help other aspirant countries prepare for membership. **Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined NATO in 2004.**

At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, agreement was reached on inviting **Albania and Croatia.** **Both joined in 2009.**

Montenegro joined the Alliance in June 2017, when the instrument for its accession to the North Atlantic Treaty was formally deposited with the US State Department.



The Current Situation

Three further countries currently aspire for membership:

Bosnia and Herzegovina began intensified dialogue with NATO on membership aspirations in 2008. The country has been invited to join the Membership Action Plan, pending the resolution of a key issue concerning immovable defence property.

Georgia: At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, Allied leaders decided that Georgia will become a member of NATO provided it meets all necessary requirements. This decision was reconfirmed at NATO Summits in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016. Since late 2014, NATO and Georgia have been working together to implement the "Substantial NATO-Georgia Package". The measures in this Package aim to strengthen Georgia's defence and the ability of its armed forces to work with Allied militaries. This will help Georgia advance in its preparations towards membership.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ was invited to join the Membership Action Plan in 1999. In 2008, NATO Allies decided that the country would be invited to begin accession talks after it finds a mutually acceptable solution to the issue over its name.

¹ Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) – Press & Media Section

Tel.: +32(0)2 707 5041

E-mail: moc@hq.nato.int

Follow us @NATOPress

www.nato.int