

Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum (Bucharest, 22 May 2025)

Speaking Points of Ambassador Tacan Ildem

Panel on “War or Peace! Peace, but at What Price?”

1. Framing the Issue

- In the more than three years of the ongoing war the stakes are high, not only for Ukraine’s sovereignty, but for the principles underpinning the European and global security order.
- The question before us, *peace, but at what price?*, requires a candid and strategic response that prioritizes justice, sustainability, and legitimacy.

2. Current Realities of the Conflict

- The war has reached a protracted stalemate: Ukraine's resilience remains remarkable, but the pace of territorial recovery has slowed.
- Russia has fortified its defensive positions and continues to target Ukraine’s critical infrastructure with devastating consequences.

- War fatigue is rising, not only in Ukraine and Russia but among international supporters.
- Recent diplomatic overtures, particularly from President Trump's administration, have introduced new momentum, but also significant controversy.
- While proposing a ceasefire and territorial "arrangements," these initiatives have so far failed to shift Moscow's strategic calculus.
- Recent negotiations in Istanbul between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations have amply demonstrated that Putin is not ready and serious yet to reach a deal with Ukraine.
- It is hoped that the US Administration has also drawn the necessary conclusions from Putin's uncooperative attitude.

3. Key Risks of a Premature or Imbalanced Peace

- Peace driven by artificial deadlines or external political calendars risk ignoring realities on the ground.
 - The U.S. proposals would effectively reward Russia's aggression, recognising its illegal annexation of Crimea, barring Ukraine from ever joining NATO, and lifting sanctions imposed after the 2014 and 2022 invasions. In exchange, Washington offers no security guarantees to Ukraine, nor support for any European-led guarantees. There's also no indication that sanctions relief would be tied to future Russian compliance. What Ukraine would get is a ceasefire along current lines, for as long as Vladimir Putin keeps his word.
- Such major concessions, such as accepting Russian control over occupied territories or shelving Ukraine's NATO aspirations for the long term, could undermine international law and embolden future aggression.
- A hasty deal that excludes Ukraine's voice or bypasses European consensus could fracture Western unity and compromise core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Many NATO Allies believe lasting peace must be earned, not imposed, and that pressure must remain on Moscow, not Kyiv.

4. Elements of a Sustainable Peace Framework

- Any roadmap to peace should include the following key components:
 - A ceasefire tied to clearly defined benchmarks, not just a “freeze” of conflict lines that entrenches a *de facto* Russian gain.
 - UN-mandated international peacekeeping or deterrent forces to monitor compliance and deter violations.
 - Robust, interim security guarantees for Ukraine until full NATO membership is realized.
 - A broader diplomatic framework than the Minsk format that includes all relevant actors to contribute to the negotiating process. In this context Türkiye has proven its utility in pragmatic diplomacy, as seen in the Black Sea Grain Initiative and past and current mediation efforts.
 - No recognition of illegal annexations. A temporary status for disputed territories might be a transitional measure but must not become permanent.
 - Crucially, Ukraine must be *at the table*, not just on the menu.

5. Toward a New European Security Architecture

- Any peace settlement must be embedded in a new European security order that addresses structural vulnerabilities and strategic imbalances.
- This includes:
 - Reviving Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs),
 - Modernizing arms control to reflect emerging domains like cyber and AI, taking into account the impact of the emerging and descriptive technologies (EDTs),
 - Creating new dialogue platforms, perhaps building on OSCE principles, but with renewed engagement methodology and political will.
- Russia cannot be excluded from the long-term vision.
 - While it remains the most significant and direct threat, as NATO’s Strategic Concept affirms, the aim must be its eventual reintegration into a rules-based

order, conditional on full compliance with the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right of every state to determine its security alignments. Therefore a clear change in Russia's pattern of aggressive behaviour would be critical for it to be part of the new order.

6. Final Note – Diplomacy as Strategy, Not Surrender

- Diplomacy must not be confused with weaknesses or retreat.
- The success of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, though temporary, showed that dialogue and compromise are possible even amidst war.
- But diplomacy must be principled.
 - Peace at any cost is not peace, it is postponement of the next war.
 - The challenge is to reconcile realism with responsibility: to create incentives for de-escalation while upholding the values that underpin international order, which admittedly have suffered serious setbacks in the international stage.
- Türkiye is well-positioned to play a bridging role, geographically, diplomatically, and strategically supporting efforts toward both conflict resolution and a reimagined European security architecture.