

**30 April 2025**

**SPEAKING POINTS OF AMB TACAN ILDEM FOR THE PANEL ON “RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE AND FOOD SECURITY: IMPACT OF THE BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE” AT THE NATO PA GSM SEMINAR JOINT WITH ECONOMICS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE**

**1. Opening/Framing**

- Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this timely discussion.
- Russia’s war against Ukraine has had far-reaching consequences beyond the battlefield — it has triggered, among others, a global food security emergency. Nevertheless, the grain deal is a symptom of larger geopolitical fractures. Addressing it in isolation is insufficient. Therefore, we need to discuss this issue from a broader perspective, within the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine and how to bring an end to it.

**2. The prospects for a ceasefire and a comprehensive peace deal in Ukraine remain highly complex, though recent developments, including President Trump’s initiatives, have introduced fresh momentum into the diplomatic landscape. Few realities to bear in mind:**

- The conflict has entered a protracted stalemate, with neither Russia nor Ukraine able to achieve a decisive military breakthrough.
- Ukrainian forces have shown remarkable resilience, but territorial recovery has slowed, while Russia maintains significant defensive positions in occupied areas and

targeting critical infrastructure causing collateral damage with tragic civilian casualties.

- War fatigue is mounting on both sides, and among international backers, making the diplomatic track somewhat more relevant than at any time before.
- President Trump's initiatives after having assumed office positioned the U.S. as a central broker of a ceasefire.

**While details remain emerging, his approach appears to blend realpolitik with transactional diplomacy, focusing on:**

- Immediate cessation of hostilities,
- Territorial arrangements pending a long-term settlement,
- A potential freeze of NATO enlargement, or security guarantees for Ukraine outside NATO.
- Following State Secretary Rubio's visit to Paris in mid-April, for talks with his European counterparts, it is clear Russia seeks Ukraine's defeat, not peace. The Trump administration's push for a quick settlement, driven by political timing rather than battlefield conditions, has failed to alter Russia's stance.
- Despite major U.S. concessions, eased sanctions, rejecting Ukraine's NATO membership, recognizing Crimea as Russian, and accepting Russian control of occupied territories, Moscow continues to reject the offers. The U.S. is reportedly open to elections in Ukraine and peacekeeping without U.S. backing.
- Last week Russia launched its deadliest attack on Kyiv since 2024, killing at least nine and injuring dozens, at a time when diplomatic efforts are ongoing.
- Many European Allies believe the US approach lacks pressure on Russia and wrongly treats Ukraine as outside Europe, excluding it once and for all, from NATO. They insist that peace requires sustained support to Ukraine and firm pressure on Moscow, not outright concessions.
- Some NATO allies and EU partners worry about undermining Ukraine's sovereignty. They have serious concerns that a Trump-led deal could sideline

Ukraine's legitimate expectations and set a dangerous precedent regarding the use of force to alter borders.

#### **Then what would be the parameters for a Ceasefire and Peace Deal**

- A temporary or ambiguous status for occupied territories might serve as a bridge to a final settlement, without leading to territorial concessions at the outset.
- The aim must be a dynamic process leading to peace, not a static ceasefire line that converts the situation on the ground to a 'frozen conflict' with the potential to trigger future escalation and hot conflict.
- UN-mandated international peacekeeping or deterrence forces could help guarantee compliance.
- Until NATO membership is realized, Ukraine would require robust interim security guarantees from Western powers.
- Contrary to the Minsk format, in an enlarged negotiating framework, multi-diplomacy actors like Türkiye, China, and the EU could play supporting roles, enhancing legitimacy and scope for implementation.

#### **3. Any peace settlement must link to a broader reconfiguration of the new European security architecture, including:**

- Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs),
- Modern arms control frameworks,
- Renewed dialogue platforms (possibly modeled after the OSCE but establishing a methodology for a genuine culture of engagement).

**We cannot write off Russia from the future European security architecture from the outset. Russia must eventually be reintegrated into a rules-based order, but only when it returns to compliance with core principles:**

- Respect for Sovereignty,
- For territorial integrity, and,

- Recognition of states' right to determine their own security arrangements, including whether to be part of a military alliance.

#### **4. Now let me briefly talk about the impact of Russia's War on Global Food Security**

- The war has affected global food security through disruption of the Black Sea grain corridor. Russia has used grain shipments as leverage in the broader geopolitical context, affecting vulnerable regions globally.
- The Black Sea deal illustrates how critical infrastructure and commercial channels are entangled with war aims. Ensuring the corridor's security is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a strategic necessity for regional stability.
- A stable agreement on Black Sea navigation hinges on broader security arrangements that must include assurances for civilian infrastructure, including ports and shipping lanes.
- Ukraine is among the world's top exporters of wheat, maize, and sunflower oil, critical to the food supply of many low-income countries, especially in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.
- The war disrupted planting, harvesting, and exports, crippling the agricultural sector. Landmines, labor shortages, and fuel scarcity have compounded the problem.
- Russia's attacks on grain storage and port infrastructure have weaponized food, deepening global price volatility, and pushing millions closer to hunger.
- The food price spikes of 2022 had severe humanitarian consequences, especially in import-dependent countries already dealing with climate shocks and economic fragility.
- The Black Sea Grain Initiative was a rare example of successful multilateralism amidst conflict, providing temporary relief to vulnerable nations. But its collapse has exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in the global food system.
- Brokered by the UN and Türkiye in July 2022, the Initiative allowed over 30 million metric tons of grain exports to resume via safe corridors.
- It had a disproportionate benefit for developing countries, with significant exports to Egypt, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Bangladesh.

- But the deal had limitations: constant Russian obstruction, delays in inspections, underinsurance of vessels, and uneven distribution of grain, with a large share still going to developed countries.
- Nevertheless, it demonstrated the value of pragmatic diplomacy even in wartime conditions.
- Russia's unilateral withdrawal in July 2023 reintroduced high risks to maritime security in the Black Sea and caused fresh spikes in grain prices.
- Ukraine responded with alternative routes via the Danube and EU land corridors, but these are logistically limited and economically inefficient.

**After establishing control over Snake Island, Ukraine also began exporting grain through an alternative route along the Constanța–Varna–Istanbul line by monitoring its territorial waters, though this remains insufficient to fully meet demand.**

- Moscow has used the narrative that it would support African nations directly, but the volumes promised are minimal compared to global need.
- Meanwhile, Russian grain and fertilizer exports have remained largely unaffected, raising serious concerns about the politicization of food.

## **5. A few words on the broader strategic and policy implications:**

- The weaponization of food demands urgent multilateral action to insulate global food supply chains from conflict-related shocks.

### **Key measures include:**

- Diversifying export routes and investing in resilient infrastructure—ports, rail, and storage, in Ukraine and neighboring countries.
- Strengthening global grain reserves and pre-positioning aid supplies in food-insecure regions.
- Depoliticizing food trade in a multilateral framework, reinforcing international legal norms that treat food as a protected commodity in wartime.

- Renewed efforts are needed to revive a similar initiative or establish alternative humanitarian/grain corridors.
- Strengthening food security must become a central pillar of international crisis response and conflict diplomacy.
- Türkiye, the UN, and other regional actors should continue to play a facilitating role.

## **6. Closing Note – The Bigger Picture**

- Any sustainable peace in Ukraine must be tied to a renewed European security architecture.
- Any initiative will need to strike a careful balance between ending the violence and ensuring that fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are not sacrificed.
- Past frameworks (such as the CFE Treaty, Vienna Document, Open Skies) are now defunct. Future arms control must incorporate emerging technologies, such as AI, and cyber capabilities.
- A new security order should mitigate risks of escalation through enhanced transparency, force posture controls, and confidence-building measures.
- While Russia's behavior has made it, as NATO's Strategic Concept describes, the most significant and direct threat, the long-term objective should be its reintegration into a European security framework, conditional on its return to compliance with international norms.
- The Black Sea Grain Initiative, among other things, underscored the stakes of the war for global stability and human survival.
- Its collapse is a reminder that the consequences of war are not confined to battlefields, they ripple across continents in the form of hunger, instability, and lost human potential.
- The international community must act with resolve to restore safe grain exports and protect food security as a global public common good.

- The interlinkage between Ukraine's sovereignty, regional stability, energy and food security, and European security underscores the need for a multidimensional diplomatic approach.
- Preserving unity among NATO Allies must remain a top priority, with particular emphasis on reinforcing the strength and resilience of Transatlantic bonds.
- Türkiye, given its geography and diplomatic reach, can play a pivotal bridging role in supporting both the grain deal and the broader peace process toward building a new European security architecture.

**Thank you.**