Peace in the Ukraine conflict?

Why efforts to date have not been enough

by Ralph Bosshard,* Switzerland

Ralph Bosshard.
(Picture mt)

(CH-S) The association "Swiss Standpoint" invited Ralph Bosshard to speak and participate in discussions at its New Year's conference (2–4 January 2026). The article below picks up on current developments and links them to the central themes of his presentation.

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Amidst the commotion surrounding the US invasion of Venezuela, which violated international law, preparations for the annexation of Greenland and threats against Iran, Cuba and other countries, things have quietened down in Ukraine.

Considering the events of recent weeks, it seems like a bad joke that the *Trump* administration, of all people, wants to present itself as a great peacemaker here. It remains committed to its manifest belief that all pressing problems can be solved through economic and military power.

After US President Trump presented his 28-point peace plan to end the war in Ukraine, Western Europeans, particularly the UK, France and Germany (E3), responded with a counterproposal.[1] This sought to correct those points in Trump's proposal that the E3 found unacceptable. This alone revealed a certain lack of strategic independence, which would be a prerequisite for actively shaping European security.

The excluded issue of European security

The discussion about possible promises made to the Soviet Union regarding NATO's eastward expansion during the talks on German reunification is and remains controversial. However, the Russian leadership made it clear as early as 2000 that NATO membership for the Baltic states would be seen as a threat.[2] These concerns were ignored in the West, probably because Russia's powerlessness in the 1990s was apparent and there was a desire to exploit its moment of weakness to create a *fait accompli*. With the failure of the Ukrainian summer offensive in autumn 2023, Russia gained new confidence and now sees an opportunity for a *rollback*.[3]

NATO's eastward expansion reminds Russia almost daily of the trauma of the invasion on 22 June 1941, which continues to shape the mindset of the Russian military to this day. Currently, NATO's eastern border runs close to the original position of the Axis powers in 1941, albeit with a significant change in the Baltic states: there, NATO forces are stationed 200 km further east than in 1941. And they are 100 km from St. Petersburg, which was the victim of the greatest war crime of the Second World War in terms of loss of life.[4] To demand that the Russians forget this would be comparable to demanding that Jews around the world erase Auschwitz from their collective memory.

After 2013, Russia's support for the uprising in Donetsk and Luhansk was aimed at preventing Ukraine from joining NATO: it was hoped that a

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See also: Ralph Bosshard, *"People are looking at Switzerland!"*

historically conscious population in Donbass would influence the domestic political debate in Ukraine accordingly. Furthermore, they did not want to allow a violent suppression of the uprising. When, in December 2021, neither NATO nor the US showed any willingness to make concessions on the issue of Ukraine's NATO membership, Russia opted for a military strategy: war to comprehensively weaken Ukraine. Regardless of any assessment of Russia's actions against Ukraine under international law, the question must be asked whether NATO and the EU, of all organisations, are justified in pillorying Russia internationally. However, if these states want to bring the Putin administration or the president himself before an international tribunal, they will have to listen to Russia's defence without bias. Is that really what the West wants?

NATO in a bad light

Outside Western Europe, NATO is not perceived as a defensive alliance, because of the nine conflicts that the West has fought over the past quarter of a century, four were clearly contrary to international law and the rest were controversial. The mistake made in NATO's eastward expansion was that, in parallel with its expansion, NATO did not propose any measures to build trust with Russia but instead neglected existing instruments and in some cases even abused them.[5] It is hardly surprising that the modernisation of military infrastructure in Eastern Europe and the stationing of NATO troops on the border with Russia were interpreted as a threat.

However, Brussels and Kiev are still pushing for Ukraine to join NATO and, as an alternative, are pursuing EU accession, at a time when there are increasing calls for a European security policy and a common army. Moscow has long recognised that a *peacekeeping* mission in Donbass and security guarantees could be further vehicles for enabling the deployment of NATO troops on Russia's borders. Brussels' alliance policy efforts at a time when the most important member of the alliance, the US, is increasingly giving it the cold shoulder, are increasingly casting the alliance in a bad light, as they are blocking a solution to other conflicts underlying the war, namely territorial ones.

Security architecture instead of security guarantees

Military security alone cannot be an end in itself in a world where wars are no longer decided by military means alone. In the current case, however, it is a prerequisite for resolving a whole series of other problems within Ukraine, in the inter-state relationship between Russia and Ukraine, and in the tensions between Western Europe and Russia. For this reason, security guarantees of any kind for Ukraine will not solve the problem, but at best will set the framework for a new Cold War, which could become a heavy burden for the countries of Eastern Europe in particular. Simply discussing treaties on conventional armed forces in the Black Sea region and the Baltic states could prove helpful. The aim must be to compensate for the imbalances between the neighbouring states on both sides of the newly created front, some of which are due to geographical factors. In the current atmosphere of mistrust, it will be difficult to achieve more than this.

Of course, Ukraine fears that Russia could reassert its territorial claims after a few years of ceasefire. However, countries that give Ukraine security guarantees would have to be prepared, in extremis, to go to war with Russia. The circle of countries that are willing and able to do so is probably very limited. The ability of Europeans to offer effective security guarantees remains questionable, and the US may prefer strategic arms agreements with Russia to aid for Ukraine, especially in the context of a possible arms race with China. In the current situation, it would probably make more sense to talk about a European security architecture than about security guarantees for Ukraine. It would be the task of the E3 to put forward proposals in this area, but their counterproposal offers nothing convincing.

Zelensky fails

Given the numerous gaps and weaknesses in the peace plans from Washington and Brussels, it would have been up to *Volodymyr Zelensky,* as the main victim of the current war, to fill the vacuum and present a convincing peace plan of his own. But far from it: his plan expresses the desire to maintain Western interest in Ukraine while Ukraine's human and economic resources are dwindling.[6] Zelensky is running out of time. His actions testify to an almost desperate effort to secure Ukraine's relevance and continue to receive financial support. The most visible expression of this is the idea of an army of 600,000 to 800,000 men, which has been presented in various peace plans. Such an army would make Ukraine a military superpower in Eastern Europe even without access to nuclear weapons, for-

cing Russia to maintain a permanent presence of strong forces on the border and thus cementing a state of tension in the region. This then raised the question of the need for security guarantees in general. This huge army would make an agreement on conventional forces in the Black Sea region almost imperative.

It is hardly conceivable that Ukraine could maintain such a large army on its own with its foreseeable financial, economic and human resources. It would remain permanently dependent on Western funding. If Western European – namely German – taxpayers are not prepared to finance the notoriously corrupt government in Kiev for decades to come, Russia is being painted as a bogeyman and, if necessary, the reintroduction of conscription is being threatened.

Back to Minsk?

Even though several US administrations had convinced Presidents *Poroshenko* and Zelensky that the *Minsk agreements* were a bad deal that was not worth adhering to, the authors of the *Minsk package of measures* from spring 2015 deserve credit for addressing some of the old problems and those that arose because of the 2014 uprising.[7]

One of these concerned amnesty for all those who had taken part in the uprising and also for those residents of the territories conquered by Russia who had come to terms with the Russian occupation and sought to continue living their lives as before. To now label them all as high traitors and threaten them with drastic punishments creates a group of hundreds of thousands of people who cannot have any interest in a return of Ukrainian power and will also make it more difficult to restore the family and social ties that still exist.

The constitutional reform for the federalisation of Ukraine agreed in the Minsk package of measures should not be seen as a mere concession by Putin, but as a necessity resulting from the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country. Nationalist groups reject the idea of federalisation and strive for a centralised state with a single language. However, a comparison with similar arrangements elsewhere, such as the South Tyrol-Trentino Statute in Italy, shows that similar arrangements would also be perfectly acceptable for Ukraine.

Given the complex situation of Russian-speaking minorities in the former Soviet repub-

lics, the language and minority issue is one of great significance. The fact that Russian is regarded as the lingua franca throughout the former Soviet Union is not an expression of the allegedly imperial behaviour of Vladimir Putin's government. Certainly, the Medvedev doctrine, which prioritises the protection of Russian minorities in neighbouring countries, is an issue that needs to be addressed. While the protection of Russian-speaking minorities is a legitimate concern, it must be determined how much support from Moscow is acceptable and where the boundaries should be drawn. The fact that Russia's demand for a ban on the neo-Nazi right in Ukraine has been replaced by the concept of "education for tolerance" unfortunately does not suggest much understanding of this problem. Western Europeans will immediately reinterpret this as an LGBTI+ circus. Of course, Kiev wants to spare itself and Western Europeans the embarrassment of the peace agreement mentioning neo-Nazism, which will serve as a long-term reminder that, in times of need, it was not above using avowed old and neo-Nazis. The Russians, on the other hand, will insist on this point.

Neutrality is not defencelessness

Most significant is Zelensky's proposal for joint use of the *Zaporizhya* nuclear power plant, which is undoubtedly owned by Ukraine. Ukraine wants to oust Russia from joint administration, naturally to arouse US interest in its peace plan. In general, the Europeans are to pay for the reconstruction of Ukraine, while the US benefits.

Out of consideration for NATO, Zelensky's peace plan does not mention neutrality, as this would contradict NATO's narrative that neutrality is synonymous with defencelessness. However, the obligations of a neutral power under the *Hague Convention* of 1907 automatically cease to apply as soon as an act of aggression is committed against the neutral party, which includes the possibility of an alliance. This can also be prepared in advance, but the requirement of equal treatment of the parties to the conflict must be observed.

Europe's double incompetence

The Trump administration's peace plan must be considered inadequate, and the European counterproposal even worse. Trump's peace plan is ill-conceived in key areas, seeks to impose peace at all costs, fails to consider the legitim-

ate security interests of either Russia or Ukraine, and abandons the allies in the Baltic states. He certainly does not deserve the Nobel Peace Prize for this achievement. Meanwhile, the self-promoters in Berlin, London and Paris are vying for a leading role in European politics but are merely outdoing each other with military impotence and diplomatic lack of vision. What legitimises them to claim a leading role in the world order remains to be explained.

Zelensky's peace plan is simply a clever ploy designed to pull the wool over everyone's eyes, but it has no real substance. The man they all hate, however, sits calmly in the Kremlin and has not even had to deviate from his maximum demands, because he cannot be forced to do anything, either militarily or economically. Why should Switzerland, Ireland and Serbia go along with this charade?

Now Ukraine is being forced into a peace agreement that Ukrainian governments will not comply with and that does not address important issues. There would have been several years to follow up the Minsk agreements with a treaty that would really last. A hastily cobbled together agreement will now, at best, set the framework for a new Cold War and create the conditions for the next war. European and US diplomacy have failed.

Resolving security issues while safeguarding the interests of both warring parties would have required months, perhaps years, of careful consideration and consultation with the "enemy". At a time when a willingness to engage in dialogue is interpreted as a sign of weakness, this thought process could not be carried out. In comparison, it was much more convenient to engage in Russophobic rhetoric.

If Europe cannot win wars, it should at least acquire the ability to make peace.

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

[1] See "Vollständiger Text des europäischen Gegenvorschlags zum US-Friedensplan für die Ukraine", by Market Screener, on 23 November 2025, online at *https://de. marketscreener.com/boerse-nachrichten/vollstaendiger-text-des-europaeischen-gegenvorschlags-zum-us-friedensplan-fuer-die-ukraine-ce7d5edcdb88ff21*. Cf. Nick Squires, Connor Stringer: Europe agrees to invite Putin back into G8, by The Telegraph, 23 November 2025, online at *https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/11/23/leaked-europe-rival-peace-plan-ukraine-full-russia-war/*.

[2] See "2000 Russian National Security Concept", by *Berlin Information-center for Transatlantic Security,* online at *https://www.bits.de/EURA/natsecconc.pdf*. Among other

things, the following are identified as threats: *"… the strengthening of military-political blocs and alliances, above all Nato's eastward expansion; … the possible emergence of foreign military bases and major military presences in the immediate proximity of Russian borders".* It is significant that the Scientific Services of the German Bundestag do not mention a single Russian-language source in their documentation. See Scientific Services, German Bundestag, Documentation: Russian security policy since 2000. Formal foundations, development, ideological superstructure WD 2 - 3000 - 071/22, 26 September 2022, online at *https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/918488/30971c4459f7f97cf215b8a321dd5699/WD-2-071-22-pdf.pdf*.

[3] The failure of the Ukrainian summer offensive came as no surprise. See "Ukrainian summer offensive: When arrogance costs human lives," at Globalbridge, 14 July 2023, online at *https://globalbridge.ch/ukrainische-sommeroffensive-wenn-ueberheblichkeit-menschenleben-kostet/*.

[4] See "Alte Fragen und alte Rezepte: Finnlands Fortsetzungskrieg", Globalbridge, 06 May.2025, online at *https://globalbridge.ch/alte-fragen-und-alte-rezepte-finnlands-fortsetzungskrieg/*.

[5] This includes, in particular, the misuse of the Vienna Document by NATO, including Germany, which the author witnessed first-hand as an OSCE employee on official trips to Ukraine. See Christian Dewitz: German OSCE military observers abducted in Ukraine, 26 April 2014, online at *https://www.bundeswehr-journal.de/2014/deutsche-osze-militarbeobachter-in-der-ukraine-verschleppt/*. About their release: "Separatists release military observers," at Zeit Online, 03 May 2014, online at *https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-05/freilassung-osze-beobachter*.
See Thomas Wiegold: Sieben Militärbeobachter und viele Fragen, bei Zeit Online, 5 May 2014, online at *https://www.zeit.de/politik/2014-05/ukraine-osze-fragen*. See "Mission unplausibel, Was machen westliche Militärs unter Bundeswehrführung in der Ostukraine?", by AG Friedensforschung, online at *http://www.ag-friedensforschung.de/regionen/Ukraine1/geiseln2.html*, Cf. also Olaf Standke: Nervenkrieg um Militärbeobachter, die OSZE ist mit vielfältigen Missionen in der Ukraine vertreten, Festgesetzte ohne Mandat aller Mitgliedstaaten, ibid., Knut Mellenthin: Misstrauensbildung, Nato-"Beobachter" in der Ostukraine, ibid. And "Kostümverleih, Jürgen Reents on "Geiselnahme von OSZE-Beobachtern", ibid. One of the highlights of false and also unobjective reporting was the report by Paul Ronzheimer, Inga Frenser und Andreas Thewalt: 8 Tage Geiselhölle für OSZE-Gefangene, by Bild, 03 May 2014, online at *https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/ukraine/osze-militaerbeobachter-in-der-ost-ukraine-frei-acht-tage-angst-35764470.bild.html*. In September/October 2014, the author was prohibited by the head of the Mariupol Patrol Hub from travelling to rebel checkpoints in the Mariupol area, which made it considerably more difficult to reach agreements on the use of OSCE drones to monitor the ceasefire.

[6] See "Entwurf in 20 Punkten; Selenskyj stellt Details des Ukraine-Plans vor," by Tagesschau.de, 24 December 2025, online at *https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/selenskyj-verhandlungen-102.html*.

[7] On the Minsk Agreements see Minsk Protocol from 5 September 2014, online at *https://www.osce.org/home/123257*, the Minsk Memorandum from 19 September 2014, online at *https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/1/123807.pdf* and the Minsk Package of Measures from 12 February 2015, online at *https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/b/140221.pdf*; all originals in Russian language. The Minsk Package of Measures was part of Resolution 2202 of the UN-Security Council from 17 February 2015. Written in German Language at *https://www.un.org/depts/german/sr/sr_14-15/sr2202.pdf*.