ANNALS OF THE "CONSTANTIN BRÂNCUȘI" UNIVERSITY OF TÂRGU JIU
LETTER AND SOCIAL SCIENCE SERIES

ISSN-P: 1844-6051 ~ ISSN-E: 2344-3677

2/2025 ***https://alss.utgjiu.ro***

~ EDITORIAL ~

THINKING PEACE IN TIMES OF WAR: AN EXERCISE IN HUMAN REALISM

Flavius Cristian MĂRCĂU

Lecturer PhD., "Constantin Brâncuși" din Târgu Jiu, Romania

There are historical moments when speaking about peace feels almost out of place. Not because peace has lost its meaning, but because the immediate reality is saturated with violence, insecurity, and disorientation. In such moments, peace is often dismissed as naïve idealism or as an evasion of responsibility. And yet, it is precisely when war seems to dominate the entire horizon of political thinking that reflection on peace becomes indispensable.

The war in Ukraine has forcefully reintroduced high-intensity armed conflict into the European experience, undermining assumptions about linear progress, stabilizing interdependence, and durable security architectures. As classical international relations theory has long warned, peace is not a natural state of the international system, but a fragile political construction, dependent on unstable balances and contingent arrangements (Aron, 1966).

Thinking about peace today does not mean ignoring war or relativizing suffering. On the contrary, it requires acknowledging that prolonged violence generates costs extending far beyond the battlefield. Empirical research conducted in the early phases of the conflict has shown that even societies not directly involved in combat experience heightened levels of anxiety, insecurity, and perceived vulnerability, revealing the diffuse social impact of war (Mărcău et al., 2022). These findings remind us that peace is not only a geopolitical condition, but also a psychological and social one.

Beyond immediate perceptions of insecurity, subsequent empirical studies conducted in Romania indicate that the war has produced more durable transformations in everyday life and civic attitudes. Large-scale analyses reveal shifts in how citizens perceive rights, duties, and democratic participation under conditions of prolonged crisis, suggesting that external shocks can subtly recalibrate the relationship between individuals and the state (Peptan, Holt, & Mărcău, 2023). Particularly among younger generations, the conflict has been associated with declining perceptions of quality of life, future predictability, and personal security, illustrating how distant wars can erode societal well-being even outside the immediate conflict zone (Mărcău et al., 2025). These dynamics reinforce the idea that peace is inseparable from societal security: without a minimum sense of stability and continuity, democratic engagement and social cohesion become increasingly fragile.

History also suggests that no war can sustain itself indefinitely. Even intense confrontations eventually reach a point where the continuation of violence becomes politically and strategically

ISSN-P: 1844-6051 ~ ISSN-E: 2344-3677

2/2025 ***https://alss.utgjiu.ro***

irrational. As Hedley Bull argued, international order does not require the absence of conflict, but the existence of limits that prevent rivalry from escalating into generalized chaos (Bull, 1977).

The key question for the near future, therefore, is not whether peace is possible, but how it can be realistically imagined. For decades, peace was largely equated with reconciliation, reintegration, and the restoration of trust. While normatively appealing, such expectations presuppose political and symbolic conditions that are currently difficult to achieve. Ignoring this reality risks turning peace into an abstract ideal, disconnected from the constraints of the present.

A more realistic perspective accepts that peace in the near future is likely to be incomplete and restrained. It may not entail reconciliation, but rather the management of confrontation through restraint and strategic prudence. As Hans Morgenthau warned, peace cannot be sustained through abstract moralism alone, but requires a lucid assessment of interests and structural constraints (Morgenthau, 1948). In this sense, stability may emerge not from harmony, but from the recognition of limits.

Such peace rarely announces itself through grand declarations. Instead, it takes shape through gradual changes: reduced intensity of violence, stabilized lines of confrontation, and mechanisms designed to prevent miscalculation. For affected societies, these shifts are deeply meaningful. Peace does not necessarily imply political agreement, but the possibility of rebuilding routines, restoring predictability, and containing collective trauma (Galtung, 1969).

The war in Ukraine has also exposed the strategic centrality of critical infrastructure and its vulnerability to both conventional and hybrid forms of aggression. Analyses of attacks against energy, transport, and communication infrastructure demonstrate how modern warfare deliberately targets the material foundations of social life, amplifying civilian vulnerability and long-term instability (Peptan, 2022a). These developments underline the fact that peace cannot be conceived solely in military or diplomatic terms, but must also address the protection of infrastructural systems that sustain societal resilience.

At the same time, the conflict has accelerated a broader reconfiguration of the European geopolitical architecture. Assumptions regarding cooperative security and economic pacification have been replaced by renewed bloc politics, strategic decoupling, and re-militarization. This transformation reflects deeper structural changes in the regional order, as states reassess dependencies, alliances, and strategic priorities in light of prolonged confrontation (Peptan, 2022b).

Economic interdependence, long perceived as a stabilizing force, has revealed its ambivalent nature. Energy projects such as Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream 2 have transformed infrastructure into instruments of geopolitical leverage, affecting both the European Union and Ukraine (Lazăr, 2021). Classical theories of complex interdependence remind us that economic relations reduce conflict only when they are predictable and mutually beneficial; otherwise, they may intensify insecurity and strategic vulnerability (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

These external pressures have also generated internal societal effects. Research conducted in Romania points to the accentuation of polarizing attitudes, including the consolidation of Russophobic perceptions shaped by media narratives, historical memory, and perceived existential threat (Mărcău, Peptan, & Preda, 2023). Such dynamics complicate post-war prospects, suggesting that even a restrained or incomplete peace will have to contend with deeply embedded societal and symbolic fractures that extend beyond the battlefield.

Europe thus faces a particularly delicate challenge: reconciling heightened security needs with the preservation of democratic norms and social cohesion. Prolonged confrontation risks generating strategic fatigue and social polarization, both within and beyond the immediate conflict

ISSN-P: 1844-6051 ~ ISSN-E: 2344-3677

zone, with long-term consequences for political stability and institutional trust (Mărcău, 2022a; Mărcău, 2022b).

Peace, therefore, must be understood as a process rather than an event. It is constructed over time through risk management, institutional restraint, and the acceptance of limits. As George Kennan emphasized, stability is the product of long-term strategic discipline, not of rapid or illusory solutions (Kennan, 1947).

The academic community has a crucial role to play in sustaining this reflection. Beyond analyzing conflict dynamics, scholarship can contribute to identifying realistic pathways toward reducing violence and preventing its normalization. Studying peace does not mean ignoring conflict; it means refusing to accept violence as a permanent condition.

Ultimately, thinking about peace in times of war is not an exercise in naïve optimism, but an act of intellectual and human responsibility. Peace in the near future may be tense, incomplete, and unspectacular. Yet even such a peace can create space for life, reconstruction, and gradual transformation. In a world marked by rivalry and uncertainty, peace remains not only a moral aspiration, but a practical necessity and keeping it at the center of academic reflection is one of the most meaningful contributions we can make.

REFERENCES

Aron, R. (1966). Peace and war: A theory of international relations. Doubleday.

Bull, H. (1977). The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics. Macmillan.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. Journal of Peace Research, 6(3), 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (2012). Power and interdependence (4th ed.). Pearson.

Kennan, G. F. (1947). The sources of Soviet conduct. Foreign Affairs, 25(4), 566–582.

Lazăr, A. (2021). Implicațiile strategice ale gazoductelor Nord Stream 2 și TurkStream 2 asupra securității energetice a Uniunii Europene și Ucrainei. In M. Costea & S. Costea (Eds.), Diplomaţie şi actori geopolitici în epoca interdependenţei complexe (pp. 160–175). Napoca Star.

Mărcău, F. C. (2022a). War in Ukraine. A new Iron Curtain. Research and Science Today, 2(24).

Mărcău, F. C. (2022b). The war in Ukraine – Western fatigue or renunciation. Research and Science Today, 1(23).

Mărcău, F. C., Peptan, C., Gorun, H. T., Băleanu, V. D., & Gheorman, V. (2022). Analysis of the impact of the armed conflict in Ukraine on the population of Romania. Frontiers in Public Health, 10, 964576. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.964576

Mărcău, F. C., Peptan, C., & Preda, A. E. (2023). Considerations regarding the accentuation of Russophobic attitudes in Romania, in the context of the "special military operation" undertaken by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Romanian Review of Political Sciences & International Relations, 20(2).

Mărcău, F. C., Peptan, C., Iliuta, F. P., Cojoaca, M. E., Musetescu, A. M., Holt, A. G., & Gheorman, V. (2025). The impact of the Ukraine conflict on the quality of life of the young population in Romania from a societal security perspective. Healthcare, 13(2), 156. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13020156

Morgenthau, H. J. (1948). Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace. Alfred A. Knopf.

Peptan, C. (2022a). Considerations on some aggressions against critical infrastructure on the territory of Ukraine during the "special military operation" conducted by the Russian Federation. Annals of "Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu-Jiu. Engineering Series, (1).

Peptan, C. (2022b). Considerations regarding the reconfiguration of the new geopolitical architecture in the context of the crisis in Ukraine. Analele Universităţii „Constantin Brâncuşi" din Târgu Jiu – Seria Litere şi Ştiinţe Sociale, (1), 65–75.

Peptan, C., Holt, A. G., & Mărcău, F. C. (2023). Influences of recent crises in the European space on the exercise of certain rights and citizen duties in Romania: A sustainable perspective approach. Sustainability, 15(13), 10741. https://doi.org/10.3390/su151310741