



**INTERNATIONAL LAW  
AND PEACE IN UKRAINE  
CONFERENCE  
17 – 18 APRIL 2026**

**MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE  
FOR COMPARATIVE PUBLIC LAW  
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW**

# International law and Peace in Ukraine

Conference, 17 – 18th April 2026

Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg

Calls for peace between Ukraine and Russia have become stronger as the armed conflict enters the fifth year. As international lawyers, we have been asking ourselves how such an agreement could come into existence.

Fundamental principles of international law are at stake. At the same time, international law should not function as a barrier against peace and inhibit Ukraine from concluding a peace agreement.

During the conference, leading experts on questions of peace treaties were convened to assess the legal ramifications and the legal content of a possible peace agreement. Participants included representatives of the Ukrainian and German Ministries of Foreign Affairs as well as academics from Ukraine, Europe, Russia, and the United States. The discussions focused on the validity of a potential peace agreement, its legal and institutional structure, and the various substantive issues such an agreement would need to address.



**Speakers:** Helmut Aust, Iryna Bogdanova, Gleb Bogush, Ingrid Brunk, Gregory Fox, Monica Hakimi, Anton Korynevych, Florian Kriener, Carolyn Moser, Sarah Nouwen, Asil Ozcelik Olcay, Roman Petrov, Wiebke Rückert, Kristýna Urbanová, Marc Weller

**Supported by:** German Federal Foreign Office

# Conference Report

by Florian Kriener, Heidelberg

The conference International Law and Peace in Ukraine (17–18 April 2026) at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (MPIL) in Heidelberg, with support from the German Federal Foreign Office, asked a deceptively simple question: what would a legally sound peace settlement for Ukraine actually require? Over two dense days, the discussion treated international law not as a set of slogans, but as a set of legal instruments: every option on paper raised hard questions about validity, constitutionality, enforcement, and the kind of post-war order a “deal” would lock in.



The opening immediately connected the debate to ongoing legal processes. **Dr Wiebke Rückert** (Federal Foreign Office) pointed to ongoing work on a Special Tribunal, compensation, and proceedings before the ICJ—reminding the room that “peace talks” do not start from zero, but unfold alongside courts and claims already in motion. In the keynote, **Dr Anton Korynevych** (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine) sharpened that point: for Ukraine, negotiation is tied to legal accountability and compensation mechanisms that are partly established and partly still being built. Rather than treating litigation and diplomacy as separate tracks, the conference returned again and again to their interaction—sometimes complementary, sometimes in tension.

## Form, Validity, and Territorial Implications of Peace Settlements



A major theme of the first day was form. Participants repeatedly asked what makes a peace agreement legally binding in practice, and what happens when consent is produced under military pressure. The conversation pushed beyond the image of one grand treaty ending a war. Instead, it explored the likelihood that the war’s legal “ending” could be a bundle of connected instruments—some detailed, some deliberately open-ended, all politically fragile. Along the way, the debate also zeroed in on annexation: should it be treated as a distinct legal wrong in its own right, rather than

merely a consequence of unlawful force? That distinction matters, because it shapes what a settlement can recognize, what it must reject, and what remains legally contestable even after guns fall silent.

Validity and enforcement then came into view. Could an agreement signed under coercive conditions remain legally flawed even if it becomes politically durable? What role, if any, could the UN Security Council play in endorsing, stabilizing, or complicating a settlement—especially in a context where institutional weakness and geopolitical pressure are not side issues, but defining conditions?

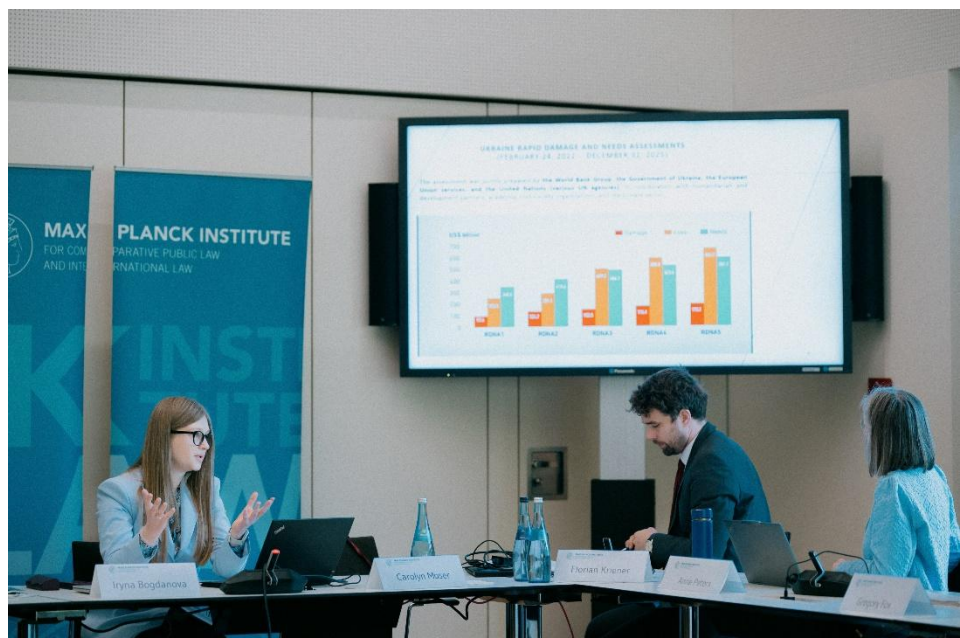


Territory—inevitably—ran through the day, but in a way that made it more than a cartographic problem. Discussion tracked changing settlement proposals, the constitutional barriers Ukraine would face internally, and the subtle instruments through which authority can be reorganized without formal recognition—such as special economic zones. The underlying question was not only “where is the line,” but “what legal techniques shift control, competence, or benefits—and with what long-term consequences?”

## Implementation Challenges: Security, Reparations, and Accountability

The second day turned from designing rules to confronting reality: even strong legal claims can be difficult to realize. Security guarantees were debated in a broader register than the familiar language of mutual defense. Participants emphasized a wider ecosystem of deterrence and protection—sanctions, military assistance, training, bilateral commitments, and defense-industrial integration—highlighting that “guarantees” often function as layered policies rather than a single clause in a treaty.

Reparations and immobilized Russian assets brought out the gap between entitlement and execution. Ukraine’s claim to reparations may be comparatively clear; the more



contested terrain lies in how to reach assets lawfully amid immunity rules, property protections, questions of reversibility, and the design of legal routes that can survive judicial scrutiny and political change. Accountability discussions carried the same duality: criminal responsibility was treated as part of peace’s conditions, not an optional add-on—yet the obstacles are immediate, from immunities to the low likelihood of arresting senior suspects and the controversies surrounding proceedings in absentia.

By the end, the conference’s most persuasive takeaway was also its most sobering: peace, in legal terms, is unlikely to be a single signature moment. It is more plausibly a chain of connected decisions—on treaty form, territorial arrangements, constitutional limits, enforcement, reparations, and accountability—made under pressure, contested in institutions of uneven strength, and judged not only by whether they stop the fighting but by the order they establish.



---

More photos of the conference: [View on Owncloud](#)