

INTERNATIONAL LAW, SECURITY AND PEACE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

The international system is undergoing a period of rising conflicts, geopolitical rivalries and growing challenges to international law. In many regions, particularly the Middle East, unresolved political disputes, military interventions and democratic deficits continue to undermine stability and peace. At the same time, the weakening of international legal norms and institutions raises fundamental questions about the future of collective security. This statement highlights these developments, with a focus on the crisis of international law, the role of dialogue in conflict resolution, such as the dialogue process between Turkey and Abdullah Öcalan, the Kurdish question as the key to peace and stability, and the importance of inclusive political solutions. It also highlights Europe's responsibility to promote a value-based security architecture grounded in democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

1. A World of Growing Conflicts and a Shaken International Order

The international order is facing a profound crisis. Armed conflicts, regional rivalries and geopolitical tensions are increasing across the globe. More than sixty armed conflicts currently shape the global security landscape. At the same time, international law is under growing pressure. Norms established after the Second World War to safeguard peace and stability are increasingly ignored, selectively applied or politically instrumentalised. The limited effectiveness of mechanisms addressing serious human rights violations, combined with weak enforcement by responsible institutions, further undermines the system.

Europe also faces a fundamental strategic challenge. At a time of growing uncertainty the continent needs – as Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, stated on 5 March 2026 – “a bold, clear and value-based vision for Europe as a whole”, one that places peace, democracy and human rights at its core.

The crisis in the international order is particularly visible in the Middle East. The escalation in Iran highlights just how fragile stability in the region is. Conflicts in Syria and Iraq persist. Turkey's interventions in the region, including military ones, are of enormous significance and raise serious questions regarding fundamental principles of international law, particularly regarding civilian protection.

Against this backdrop, a central question emerges: how can peace and democracy be strengthened in such conditions, and how can political initiatives, including the dialogue process between the Turkish state and Abdullah Öcalan and democratic self-governance in Northern Syria, be protected and further developed?

2. The Crisis of International Law: Syria, Iraq and Turkey

Current conflicts in the Middle East reveal structural weaknesses in the international system. Military interventions, drone strikes and cross-border operations are frequently conducted without a clear legal basis, eroding the authority of international law.

In Syria, more than a decade of conflict has not only weakened the state but also undermined international legal norms. Multiple regional and global actors pursue competing military and geopolitical interests, while civilians and minority communities continue to face violence and instability.

Iraq remains similarly shaped by geopolitical competition. In this context, mention must also be made of the extensive presence of the Turkish Army in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

In Turkey, democratic standards have deteriorated significantly. The criminalisation of political opposition, replacement of elected representatives with government-appointed trustees, large-scale

trials against political actors, and restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom illustrate deep democratic deficits. These developments are not solely domestic matters; they directly affect regional stability and the credibility of European human rights standards.

The failure to implement rulings of the European Court of Human Rights — especially concerning political prisoners and life sentences, is particularly alarming. When judgments of a central European human rights institution remain unenforced, the authority of the broader European legal framework is weakened.

3. The Kurdish Question as a Key to Regional Stability

A lasting peace in the Middle East is unlikely without addressing the Kurdish question. The Kurdish population, spread across several states, has faced decades of repression, political marginalisation, and armed conflict. This unresolved issue continues to influence regional stability.

At the same time, developments in Kurdish-majority regions demonstrate that alternative political models are possible. Some self-governing structures emphasise decentralisation, local democracy, gender equality and participation by diverse ethnic and religious communities.

The Democratic Self-Administration in North and East Syria has attracted international attention. Despite difficult security conditions, governance structures based on decentralisation, minority inclusion and gender equality have been developed. The institutionalised co-representation of women in political offices represents a notable innovation.

These developments warrant international engagement and dialogue. Any future political settlement for Syria should include democratic actors from northern Syria and consider political arrangements that recognise decentralised governance structures.

4. Dialogue as a Path to Peace - The Role of Abdullah Öcalan

The establishment of institutional and legal frameworks, as well as the implementation of existing legal options, is a key prerequisite for transforming the dialogue between the Turkish state and Abdullah Öcalan into a sustainable peace process.

As demonstrated by the dissolution of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in 2025 and the decision to cease armed struggle, Abdullah Öcalan's role is of central importance in this regard.

Against this backdrop, it is of crucial importance to ensure the implementation of the so-called 'right to hope' in accordance with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. The Council of Europe has the necessary leverage to achieve this. The release of Abdullah Öcalan is a crucial prerequisite for a sustainable peace settlement.

Confidence-building measures, legal reforms and inclusive political negotiations are essential components of such a process. International institutions can play an important role in facilitating dialogue, supporting human rights standards and encouraging peaceful conflict resolution.

The implementation of human rights obligations, including compliance with relevant court rulings, is particularly important. Respect for legal standards strengthens trust, reduces tensions and creates conditions for meaningful negotiations.

5. Europe's Responsibility: A Values-Based Security Architecture

Europe must redefine its role in an increasingly fragmented global order. A credible European security strategy should be grounded in democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

European institutions possess important instruments, including diplomatic engagement, monitoring mechanisms and structured political dialogue. These tools should be used more actively to support peaceful conflict resolution and democratic development.

Cooperation with civil society organisations and local democratic actors in the region is particularly important. Supporting initiatives that promote reconciliation, dialogue and institutional reform can contribute to long-term stability.

A value-based European policy must also demonstrate consistency. When fundamental rights are violated, clear political responses are necessary to preserve credibility and reinforce international norms.

6. Prospects for Peace and Stability

Current crises demonstrate that military approaches cannot create lasting stability. Sustainable peace requires inclusive political processes, functioning institutions and recognition of the rights of all population groups.

Several key areas for action emerge:

- a. Support for political dialogue between Turkey and Kurdish actors
- b. Consistent implementation of European human rights court judgments
- c. Removing the Kurdistan Workers' Party from the EU's list of terrorist organisations
- d. Recognising and integrating democratic structures in northern Syria
- e. Encouragement of democratic reforms and rule-of-law standards
- f. Inclusion of decentralised governance structures in future political settlements
- g. Strengthening women's rights, gender equality and local democracy
- h. Expanded cooperation with civil society organisations in the region

Such an approach would contribute not only to stabilising the Middle East but also to strengthening the credibility of Europe's commitment to democracy and human rights.