



Tech-Enabled Peace, Ending Wars, and Winning the Peace
Report on the Bologna Peacebuilding Forum 2026 Sessions

Executive Summary

On 6–7 May 2026, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa (SDI) participated in the *8th Bologna Peacebuilding Forum*, where it hosted and moderated the session *Ending Wars: Challenges and Dilemmas from Ukraine to Syria*. Across the two days, discussions addressed the changing landscape of peacebuilding, including the role of AI and digital technologies, shrinking civic space, shifting donor priorities, weakened multilateralism, and the long-term conditions required to build sustainable peace.

A central theme was that peace cannot be treated as a technical outcome or a single political event. Whether discussing digital tools, reconstruction, mediation, accountability, civil society mobilisation, or women-led peacebuilding, speakers stressed that sustainable peace requires political vision, justice, inclusion, social trust, and local ownership.

SDI's session made a particular contribution by placing Ukraine and Syria in conversation. Although fundamentally different, both contexts raised urgent questions about sovereignty, legitimacy, accountability, political inclusion, and the role of external actors. The discussion challenged simplified ideas of what it means to “end” a war, underlining that peace requires more than stability or reconstruction; it must be built through rights-based governance, social trust, and political orders that recognise people as citizens with agency and dignity.

Across the forum, one message was clear: sustainable peace is not declared once violence stops. It is built, protected, contested, and renewed over time.

Day 1 Digital Peacebuilding and the Future of Foreign Policy

The first day opened with the seminar *Tech-Enabled Peace: Digital Strategies for Transformed Foreign Policy*, which examined the growing role of artificial intelligence and digital tools in foreign policy, conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding. Speakers discussed applications such as conflict forecasting, early warning, social media analysis, stakeholder mapping, digital deliberation, and AI-supported mediation tools.

While participants recognised the potential of these tools, the discussion strongly cautioned against “tech solutionism”. AI and digital technologies can help process information, identify risks, broaden participation, and support decision-making, but they cannot replace political judgement, local expertise, trust-building, or the work of addressing root causes. The question is not simply whether peacebuilders should use AI, but what kind of technology is being used, who designs it, whose interests it serves, and whether it is aligned with peacebuilding values.



Tech-Enabled Peace, Ending Wars, and Winning the Peace
Report on the Bologna Peacebuilding Forum 2026 Sessions

Day 2 Ending Wars and Building Sustainable Peace

The second day began with a working breakfast on peacebuilding trends and opportunities in a time of shrinking space for civil society organisations working for peace. The conversation provided an informal space for practitioners, researchers, civil society actors, and institutional representatives to reflect on the pressures facing the field.

Participants noted that peacebuilding is increasingly affected by funding cuts, shrinking civic space, rising securitisation, and growing demands to demonstrate measurable impact. Several interventions pointed to a shift in donor language away from “peacebuilding” and towards terms such as prevention, resilience, social cohesion, security, stability, and democratic defence.

The discussion also explored the weakening of multilateral institutions and international legal frameworks, as well as the growing influence of geopolitical interests in responses to conflict. Participants stressed the need to engage new actors, including Gulf states, China, India, regional organisations, foundations, and private sector actors, while remaining grounded in core principles such as justice, inclusion, human rights, and accountability.

The SDI convened its aforementioned main session on 7 May under the title *Ending Wars: Challenges and Dilemmas from Ukraine to Syria*. The panel brought together perspectives from Ukraine, Syria, Sweden, and Europe to examine what it means to end war in contexts marked by ongoing violence, fragile transition, political uncertainty, and external engagement.

The session featured Vyacheslav “Slava” Likhachev, expert with the *Centre for Civil Liberties* in Kyiv; Sawsan Abou Zainedin, Senior MENA Advisor at the *Institute for Integrated Transitions* and former head of the Syrian civil society platform *Madaniya*; Helena Sancho, First Secretary at the Embassy of Sweden in Ukraine; and Schams El Ghoneimi, former MENA political advisor at the European Parliament.

The discussion explored what “ending war” means in the very different contexts of Ukraine and Syria. In relation to Ukraine, speakers stressed that the country is not yet in a phase where ending the war can be discussed as an imminent reality. The immediate priority remains survival, sovereignty, military resilience, sustained international support, and continued pressure on Russia. This raised a difficult tension for peacebuilding: in some contexts, resisting aggression may be the necessary condition for any future peace.

On Syria, the discussion highlighted that the fall of the Assad regime represented a historic turning point but did not automatically create a post-conflict reality. Syria still lacks an agreed political vision, an inclusive social contract, and credible guarantees for all



Tech-Enabled Peace, Ending Wars, and Winning the Peace
Report on the Bologna Peacebuilding Forum 2026 Sessions

communities. Ending war, therefore, cannot mean only reducing violence; it requires a political order grounded in inclusion, recognition, protection, and accountability.

The discussion also underlined the importance of linking immediate recovery with longer-term transformation. In Ukraine, support for reconstruction, public services, energy systems, local governance, and institutional reform was presented as part of both wartime resilience and preparation for a future aligned with European standards. Local authorities, civil society organisations, public service providers, and ordinary citizens were also highlighted as central to sustaining resilience and trust.

In the Syrian context, participants warned that recovery and reconstruction risk becoming pathways to international legitimacy if pursued without meaningful political inclusion, accountability, and institutional reform. Economic recovery is urgently needed, but if Syrians are treated only as recipients of services rather than as political subjects with rights and aspirations, the dynamics that fuelled the conflict may be reproduced.

A European policy perspective also pointed to the contrast between the scale and unity of support for Ukraine and the more fragmented approach to Syria. While some European actors remain committed to democracy, human rights, gender equality, minority rights, and accountability, others increasingly view Syria through the lens of migration and refugee return. This has contributed to a cautious and contradictory European approach, while inconsistent application of international law weakens Europe's credibility.

Justice and accountability emerged as a central cross-cutting theme. Participants stressed that accountability cannot simply be postponed until after war ends. Impunity does not only concern the past; it actively shapes the future. Failing to address past and ongoing abuses risks enabling renewed cycles of violence in Syria, Ukraine, and beyond. The audience discussion raised questions about civil society influence on EU decision-making, accountability, the inclusion of former civil society actors in Syria's transitional government, and the economic costs of war.

The session closed with a strong reminder that ending war requires more than stopping violence. In Ukraine, it requires sovereignty, survival, and justice. In Syria, it requires inclusion, accountability, and a legitimate political order. In both contexts, international engagement must be guided by local realities, human rights, social trust, and the long-term conditions for sustainable peace.



Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa

Tech-Enabled Peace, Ending Wars, and Winning the Peace *Report on the Bologna Peacebuilding Forum 2026 Sessions*

Concluding Reflection:

Overall, the *Bologna Peacebuilding Forum* underlined that sustainable peace requires more than agreements, technical tools, or short-term stabilisation. Across discussions on AI, civic space, Ukraine, Syria, and the wider peacebuilding field, participants repeatedly returned to the need for political vision, accountability, inclusion, local ownership, and social trust. SDI's session reinforced this message by showing that while Ukraine and Syria face fundamentally different realities, both demonstrate that ending war is not a single moment, but a long and contested process shaped by justice, legitimacy, human rights, and the ability of societies to build political orders that recognise people as citizens with agency and dignity.