

Good evening, and welcome.

I am honoured to facilitate this important discussion on the 100th anniversary of Turkey's secularism.

As Turkey commemorates the establishment of the Republic in 1923, this is an opportunity to reflect on the nation's progress.

Our panellists will highlight issues related to democracy, diplomacy, and security that have persisted over the past century.

The tensions between secularism and religion have influenced these challenges.

During periods of turmoil, debates emerged over Turkey's national identity, at times reverting to a narrow nationalism. Undoubtedly, religion has been profoundly influential as well.

The current AK Party government derives much of its ideology from the country's Islamic roots.

This elicits concerns over Turkey's ability to balance its religious traditions with contemporary secular principles.

Critics argue the AKP has shifted towards an authoritarianism that caters to the majority, suppressing dissenting voices.

Supporters highlight economic gains under Erdogan's leadership.

Where does the truth lie?

In assessing this centenary, three issues come to the fore: *identity, diversity, and authoritarianism*.

Critics accuse the AKP of invoking the Islamic legacy while also repressing opposition.

There are worries that increasing nationalism may compromise unity.

Historically, debates over headscarves have sparked cultural clashes.

Some see Turkey as divided between traditional and emerging ruling classes and between longing for the past and progressing to the future.

Controversies linger over the boundaries delineating Turkish identity.

While the rising religious middle class gained economic mobility, disparities persisted, fostering resentment over privileged groups prioritising their own interests.

Newly empowered rural provinces elicit both hope and animosity.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish conflict remains divisive, with escalating violence entrenching opposing viewpoints.

The vision of a Turkey embracing pluralistic identities evades realisation.

Turkey currently maintains a delicate balance amid constant change.

Its strategic significance compels negotiating tensions between global powers.

Concerns also persist over authoritarian tendencies.

Navigating the contrasts between Islam, democracy, and modernity will remain central in the coming century.

Turkey's geography is strategically vital, influencing diplomatic and security policies.

Current Middle East volatility is pressing, as are unpredictable alliance dynamics with key partners like the US, EU, and Russia.

Domestically, clashes with Kurdish insurgents grind on.

What strategies can effectively manage regional instability?

Historically, Turkey connected diverse civilizations, epitomised by rich multiculturalism.

However, there are worries that rising nationalism may now compromise unity.

What conditions are required for Turkey to transform into a society embracing diversity and equality?

I look forward to the panellists' perspectives on these pressing questions.

How Turkey addresses issues of identity and pluralism in an increasingly interconnected world will shape its trajectory.

Can it achieve harmony between tradition and transformation, local and global perspectives?

This discussion will shed light as Turkey embarks on its second century.

I invite the panellists to share their initial thoughts.