

TURKEY'S PLACE IN THE WEST

15-17 March 2018

Terms of Reference

Turkey is important in its own right, for many reasons; but Turkey's continued political evolution and its troubled relationship with the West are a weather vane for broader trends. At the high tide of globalisation and the expansion of multilateralism after the Cold War, it looked possible that, slowly, Turkey might become part of an expanded Europe and, possibly, a model for modern Islamic states – still Kemalist at heart for some, religious for others but also tolerant, democratic and relatively liberal in its institutions.

That prospect seems more distant now. Instead there has been widespread comment that Turkey now feels part of a broader nationalist and authoritarian reaction to the failings of the liberal world order, to multilateralism, and to what many Turks feel has been gratuitous hostility from parts of the EU. Is this accurate? One line of discussion at this conference will be to ask whether this trend has become more determining than the tension between secularism and religion.

Arguably – as Turkey has moved away from the West and as we have moved away from it – its role is more important than ever for our interests. The West needs Turkey to play a constructive role in Syria on both the fight against ISIS and in reaction to Kurdish moves, but does not want to see Turkey cooperating with Russia in the Balkans and shifting its military alliances and supply chains away from NATO. Although the politics remain difficult, Turkish and Israeli trade and business relations remain buoyant, a rare bright spot in a deeply depressing Middle East. Most of all, Turkey plays a crucial role in moderating mass migration to Europe, which, uncontrolled, could further drive the rise of the extreme right. And then there is the intriguing prospect of whether Turkey's economic relationship with the EU could be a model for post-Brexit UK.