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‘I would like to see the Theological School of Halki open,’ Turkish education minister says



Turkish Education Minister, Yusuf Tekin stated on Monday that he would like to see the Greek Orthodox Theological School of Halki open.

However Mr. Tekin clarified that the final decision will be taken by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

“The decisions made in this aspect of foreign policy will be decisions taken by them and we will implement them,” he said. “Personally, I would like to see the Halki Theological School open,” he added.

According to Tekin, Erdogan asked the education ministry to conduct research on the process of reopening the school.

“I would like to present my proposals by commenting on this: ultimately it is not me, the education minister, who will decide whether it will open or not, but the foreign minister, our president, and the relevant committees who will make that decision and we are obligated to implement it,” Tekin said.

Tekin’s comments come after a report on the matter by Karar daily newspaper on Monday.

In a surprising development, the Turkish newspaper Karar reports that the Turkish government is making strides toward reopening the Theological School of Halki, which has been closed since 1971.

Turkish Minister of Education, Yusuf Tekin, is spearheading the initiative. According to Karar, Tekin recently visited the School, met with officials, and consulted former ministers who had previously worked on this issue. The reopening is being considered as part of the “second wave of reforms” that the Turkish government is preparing to implement following the local elections on March 31. However, the specifics of these reforms remain unclear.



On May 29, Tekin, accompanied by a delegation, visited the School and met with officials from the Patriarchate. Emphasising the historical significance of the building, Tekin suggested that restoration works should preserve the original architecture. He also visited the school library, which houses 80,000 volumes.

“Closed for more than 50 years, the request for the reopening of the School has been raised from time to time, and a new initiative has been launched,” Karar reports. The government is preparing a comprehensive study on the reopening. Under the coordination of the Minister of National Education, Yusuf Tekin, both legal and political steps taken to date are being reviewed. Tekin is also holding

several meetings to discuss the matter further.

The issue gained renewed attention during the recent Mitsotakis-Erdogan meeting in Ankara three weeks ago. On 13 May 2024, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis discussed the reopening of the Theological School with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan. According to Karar, Mitsotakis urged Erdogan to take measures to reopen the School.

In an interview with the Greek newspaper Kathimerini the day before the visit, Erdogan stated, “We are working to open the Theological School of Halki. We expect the same constructive approach from our neighbour regarding the problems faced by the Turkish minority in Greece in the field of education.”

This development marks a significant step forward in addressing a long-standing issue and reflects the potential for improved relations between Turkey and Greece.

Referring to the historical background cited by Turkey in relation to the closure of the Theological School, the Minister of Education said: “We are talking about an institution that trained priests for the minorities of certain religions who lived in the Ottoman geography after 1844. Undoubtedly, the issue has different political dimensions in the Christian world, especially after the process of Perestroika, Glasnost, we realize this.

“There is a procedure that is followed in Turkey, we have before us article 40 of Lausanne and according to our Constitution, international conventions are above legal regulations.

“And in the decision of the Constitutional Court, there is no text directly related to the closure of the Halki Theological School, there are only some interpretations that refer to the Institutions of Higher Education that existed at that time, so that part was closed based on an interpretation or based on the political situation of the time”.

Yusuf Tekin also referred to the visit he made, last week, on May 29: “We, by order of the president, went to analyse what can be done on a legal basis and we had a very productive meeting with the authorities there.”

In conclusion, the Turkish Minister of Education clarified that work is being done regarding the possibility of operating the Theological School of Halki and which actions should be taken based on the decision to be taken by those who manage foreign policy and President Erdogan. Specifically, he said: “At the moment, there is an open lyceum, that is, a secondary education institution, that operates legally

there. There are no students, yet it is open.

“As we said, we are doing our work regarding its possibility to function as a Theological School, but ultimately the decision will be made by those who manage our foreign policy and the Turkish President.

“We have determined the steps to be taken depending on the decision that will be made there.”

“Now we will act according to the decision that will be made.”

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