

Greek PM says Athens, Cairo 'close to a deal' for Saint Catherine's Monastery



Greece and Egypt are “close to signing an agreement” that would resolve a deepening crisis at the historic Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Sunday.

Relations between Athens and Cairo have soured after an Egyptian court ruled last May that the 6th century site – the world’s oldest continuously used Christian monastery – lies on state land. The ruling says that the monastery was only “entitled to use” the land it sits on and the archaeological religious sites which dot its surroundings.

Meanwhile, the ruling escalated tensions between Archbishop Damianos and a group of monks who accuse him of mismanagement and seek his removal.

"We are close to signing an agreement, in which the signature of the new abbot is also necessary, which will ensure the Greek Orthodox character of the monastery," Mitsotakis told journalists at the 89th Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF).

He said and that there is a de-escalation of the tensions to which Archbishop Damianos has contributed. The Archbishop announced he is beginning the process to choose his successor. The announcement came after messages from both Athens and the Ecumenical Patriarchate indicated their support for him was not unconditional.

The 6th century St Catherine's Monastery, run by the Greek Orthodox Church, is also there – and seemingly its monks will stay on now that Egyptian authorities, under Greek pressure, have denied wanting to close it.

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