

Int'l reactions continue in face of Erdogan threats to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque



Reactions and international pressure continued on Tuesday against the Erdogan administration's threats to reconvert the iconic Hagia Sophia back into a so-called "imperial mosque".

Orthodoxy, in its entirety, has been joined by national leaders and institutions, who called on the increasingly authoritarian Turkish president to respect the history and symbolism of the UNESCO World Heritage site, which for nearly a millennium was the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the epicenter of eastern Christendom.

At the same time, the pro-government press in Turkey, which now essentially dominates the media sector in the predominately Muslim country, as critical outlets and journalists have been silenced, unleashed attacks against the Archbishop of

Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos.

The Primate of the Church of Greece was quoted this week as referring to “political games” by neighboring Turkey, in lamenting the repeated threats to convert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

The greatest of all Orthodox basilicas was transformed into a mosque after the Ottomans sacked Constantinople in 1453. It was converted into a museum by the strictly secular Turkish republic under Kemal Ataturk in the 1930s. In fact, today it is Turkey’s most visited museum and a pre-eminent UNESCO World Heritage monument.

Joining the crescendo of international reactions against any change in the Hagia Sophia’s status, lawmakers in Russia’s state Duma on Tuesday approved a resolution towards the Turkish national assembly regarding the monument.

The resolution calls for all necessary measures to be taken to avoid the consequences that will arise in case the Hagia Sophia is converted into a mosque, while stressing that Turkish lawmakers should not accept any change in its status.

The first deputy chairman of the Duma, Konstantin Zatulin, moreover, referred to an attempt by Turkish authorities to return that country to the Middle Ages.

He said “...we hope that Russian-Turkish relations will not be damaged due to an insatiable effort in the 21st century aimed at usurping Christian heritage dating to the sixth century.”