

09/07/2020

Turkish high court decision over petition to convert Hagia Sophia into mosque pending amid sharp int'l reactions against latest provocation against Christianity



Only days, if not hours, remain before Turkey's Council of State releases a decision regarding a petition to reconvert the iconic Hagia Sophia back into a mosque, with Turkish media appearing confident that the ruling will overturn a landmark 1930s presidential decree that changed the monument's status into a museum.

According to Turkish journalist Mehmet Ardiç, a very high-profile supporter of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the country's Council of State has decided to overturn Kemal Ataturk's 1934 decision to transform Hagia Sophia into a what has become Turkey's most visited museum.

Ardic, who is also the president of the Union of Journalists and International Social Media in Turkey, took to his Twitter account to claim that the high court has unanimously cancelled the 1934 decision, and that a countdown has begun for its transformation into a mosque.

According to other reports the mostly pro-government Turkish media, the likeliest date for the decision's publication is tomorrow, Friday.

In a related development, the head of Greece's representation to the Council of Europe, former FM Dora Bakoyannis, has sent a letter to the president of its Parliamentary Assembly, Rik Daems, requesting that the CoE's Directorate of Legal Advice provide an opinion on the Erdogan's administration's attempt to convert the UNESCO World Heritage site into a mosque.

In a thought-provoking article in the New York Post, the president of the organization "In Defence of Christians", Toufic Baaklini, writes:

"From 1915 to 1923, the Ottoman Empire, the forerunner of modern Turkey, systematically killed more than 2 million Christians...Now, what remains of the country's Christian heritage is under attack from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The latest -assault: The Islamist strongman wants to convert the Hagia -Sophia, his nation's most recognizable landmark, from a -museum to a mosque. The move would all but complete the erasure of Turkey's Christian heritage that began with a genocide a century ago."

Similarly, the bureau chief for the New York Times in Turkey, also raised concerns over the huge historical and cultural significance of the mosaics found in the Hagia Sophia, the greatest of all cathedrals of eastern Christendom.

In a feature article entitled "Erdogan Talks of Making Hagia Sophia a Mosque Again, to International Dismay", Gall states that "...the greatest worry is what will happen to the incomparable medieval mosaics, among them depictions of Christ, the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, alongside rare portraits of imperial figures including Emperor Justinian I and Empress Zoe, one of the few women to rule in her own right."

The veteran NYT correspondent adds: " The mosaics were whitewashed for the more than five centuries during Ottoman rule — the depiction of the human form

being considered idolatry — and were uncovered and restored only after Hagia Sophia was turned into a museum in the 1930s.”

She also quotes Faruk Pekin, the founder of a travel agency that specializes in cultural tours, who led 80 night-time tours of Hagia Sophia last year.

Pekin said “...If the museum becomes a mosque, the mosaics will have to be covered during Muslim prayers somehow, including seraphs high up at the base of the dome. Tourists and non-Muslims may be restricted to certain areas.”