

Int'l fall-out continues unabated over shocking Erdogan decision to convert iconic Hagia Sophia into a mosque



Reverberations and reactions continued around the world at the beginning of the week over the shocking decision by the Erdogan administration in Turkey to convert the iconic Hagia Sophia back into a mosque.

In a daily press briefing on Monday morning, Greek government spokesman Stelios Petsas noted that “...since last Friday, the entire civilised world, Europe and the West in general, Christians all over the world and, of course, Greece, are faced with the provocation and insult from Turkey and Turkish President Tayyip Recep Erdogan, due to the Hagia Sophia’s conversion into a mosque.”

The spokesman referred to a historic mistake, one that requires the international community’s response.

He added “...the issue is not Greek-Turkish, but global in nature; we are constantly highlighting this dimension, both before and after Mr. Erdogan’s decision.”

Moreover, Petsas said Athens will request from the European Union to prepare a list of substantive measures in case Ankara continues to violate international law and Greece’s sovereign rights, saying the entire spectrum of EU-Turkey relations will be

raised by Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias at today's meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, including the sensitive issue of the Hagia Sophia.

The outrageous decision by Erdogan on Friday afternoon came just hours after Turkey's highest administrative court annulled a landmark 1934 decision by Kemal Ataturk's government to change the status of the Hagia Sophia, from a mosque into a museum.

Milder, tolerant adaptation of Erdogan message in English; religiously intolerant original kept in Arabic version

Erdogan's original message in Turkish, in fact, caused a firestorm of criticism in Israel, given that the authoritarian and Islamist-leaning Turkish leadership vowed to "...liberate the al-Aqsa mosque", as he said, from Israel after resurrecting – his word — Hagia Sophia as a mosque.

The Turkish president's office used milder and inclusive language in its English translation of the message, only to include its more extremist and emotive phrases in the Arabic version.

In a detailed report, the Jerusalem Post highlighted the language used on the Turkish presidency's website, which, translating the original Turkish into Arabic, denotes that the resurrection of Hagia Sophia heralds the liberation of the al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

The exact translation of the message reads "...The resurrection of Hagia Sophia is the footsteps of the will of Muslims across the world to come... the resurrection of Hagia Sophia is the re-ignition of the fire of hope of Muslims and all oppressed, wronged, downtrodden and exploited."

The original message says that converting the Hagia Sophia into a mosque is part of the "...return of freedom to al-Aqsa," essentially meaning that Israel should be ejected from control of Jerusalem's Old City, where al-Aqsa is located.

The Israeli newspaper reminds that official Turkey is now the world's biggest persecutor of journalists, often jailing those who disagree with the regime as terrorists, and an invader of several neighboring countries.

Cumhurriyet: Ruling ignores contemporary Turkey's democratic system; treasonous to history

What's left of the opposition press in Turkey also scrutinized the decision, which has been roundly denounced by the international community and religious leaders.

An article by mass daily Cumhurriyet stresses that democratic laws in taking the decision were ignored, while detailing opposing views by Turkish historians, legal experts and theologians, all of which said the Council of State's ruling was illegal and "...treasonous to history".

Legal experts quoted by the newspaper said the high court decision was based on Ottoman law regarding religious institutions during the time of Mehmed the Conqueror in the 15th century, something that completely ignores modern Turkey's democratic legal system and case law.

İmamoğlu

In a more politically-minded reaction, the current mayor of the Bosphorus metropolis, ancient Constantinople, or Istanbul in Turkish, Ekrem İmamoğlu, was quoted by Cumhuriyet as directly challenging the benefit that Turkey could have from such a decision.

İmamoğlu then wondered what had changed in a year in Erdogan's initial position.

He also said the fallout for Turkey will be great, with the controversial decision to be judged by the Turkish people in the future. "...Our nation retains common sense and will judge this decision."

Nevertheless, in beginning his comments, İmamoğlu said he does not reject the Hagia Sophia's identity as a mosque, saying the cathedral has been a mosque in his mind and conscience since 1453.

