

Turkish authorities feverishly prepare to convert Hagia Sophia into mosque, despite int'l outcry



Fast-paced preparations continue in Turkey to transform the iconic Hagia Sophia into a mosque — a shocking development that now stands as the most egregious provocation and insult yet by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan against Christianity, especially Orthodoxy, and the world's cultural heritage.

Turkish authorities, following Erdogan's snap decision hours after a Turkish high court annulled a landmark 1934 decree by Kemal Ataturk's staunchly secular government, now aim to reopen Hagia Sophia as an official mosque on July 24.

Signs reading museum, the emblematic Orthodox cathedral's status for nearly nine decades, have been removed, while tourist maps and guides for the Bosphorus metropolis — ancient and venerable Constantinople and modern-day Istanbul — are being reprinted.

Gigantic oriental rugs are being procured to cover Hagia Sophia floors, in order to allow for Muslim prayers, while curtains and a lighting system to conceal the glorious Orthodox Christian mosaics and frescoes are being installed.

The symbolism entailed in converting the Hagia Sophia into a mosque by the now unabashedly Islamist and authoritarian Erdogan was on display on Wednesday, as a populist and partisan commemoration was held outside the monument on the anniversary of a coup against the Turkish leader four years ago.

The colossal provocation by official Turkey is expected to be discussed, at least unofficially, in Brussels this week by EU leaders, with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis representing Athens.

Greece has repeatedly stated that the issue of the Hagia Sophia's status is not a bilateral matter, but one that affects all of humanity, given its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site and as a symbol of inter-faith harmony and cooperation.