

Erdogan, Turkey's Islamists finalize insult to Christianity with conversion of Hagia Sophia into mosque



Christianity, and especially Orthodoxy, observed a day of anguish today, as the insulting and sacrilegious conversion of the Hagia Sophia - the greatest of all Orthodox basilicas - into a mosque, was formally sealed with a Muslim prayer.

The conversion and the widely broadcast prayer service were orchestrated, promoted and exploited by autocratic Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his unabashedly Islamist government - the latest provocation by official Ankara since a failed coup against the Turkish leader in July 2016.

Church bells throughout much of Greece rang in mourning, while somber services were held in cathedrals and monasteries, with clerics and worshippers chanting the sublime Byzantine-era Ypermacho Stratigo hymn, in supplication to the Virgin Mary

as the Defender General of the faithful.

What transpired today with the first Muslim prayer at the Hagia Sophia in nearly nine decades, in tandem with works to conceal all traces of Christianity in the 6th century patriarchal cathedral, essentially mark the end of its status as Turkey's most visited museum and as a renowned UNESCO World Heritage site.

Turkey's Islamists now call the monument the "great mosque of Ayasofya", transferring its administration from the culture ministry and archaeologists, to the religious affairs directorate.

Erdogan, top ministers sitted on basilica's floor atop thick turquoise rugs

In a bid to shore up his conservative grass roots supporters amid an economic downturn and his government's poor showing in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, Erdogan and his top ministers were prominently seated atop heavy turquoise rugs at the front of the prayer service on Friday.

Turkish pro-government and state-controlled media beamed the image to several predominately Sunni Muslim countries.

Earlier, television footage showed a crowd of mostly middle-aged men running through the streets of the Bosphorus metropolis and towards a police blockade, in a bid to break through and reach a preferred place outside the Hagia Sophia - images that more resembled a rowdy political rally instead of a religious prayer service.

Direct international condemnation, however, continued to pour in from Western capitals.



Erdogan recites holy Quran at Hagia Sophia iust before the first Friday

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Erdogan recites holy Quran at Hagia Sophia just before the first Friday prayers in the ancient building in 86 years pic.twitter.com/FjvnKwtWbH

— Ragıp Soylu (@ragipsoylu) [July 24, 2020](#)

İlk Cuma <https://t.co/KwS57wYgJ5>

— Ayasofyayı Kebir Camii Şerifi (@ayasofyacamii) [July 24, 2020](#)

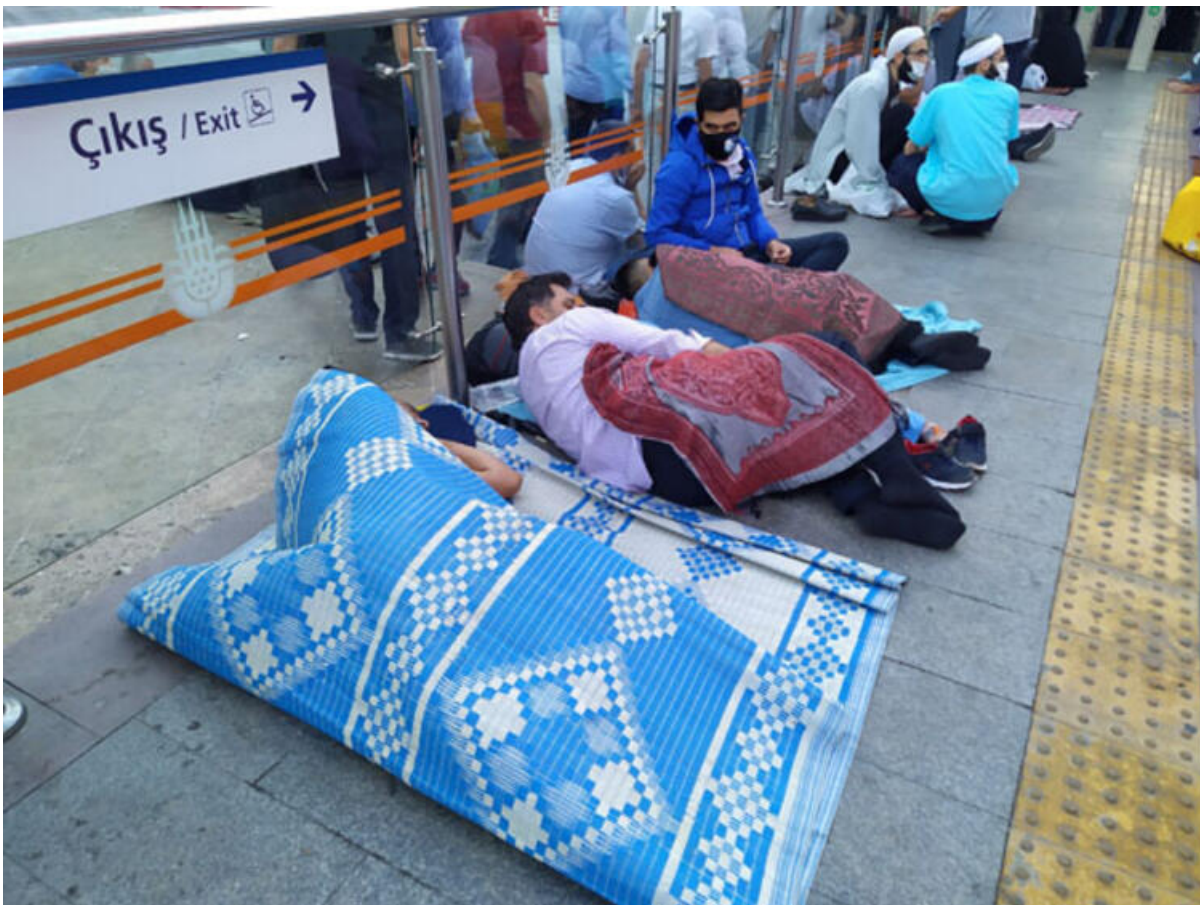
[#Canlı](#): [#AyasofyaCamii](#), bugün kılınacak cuma namazı ile ibadete açılıyor. Türkiye'nin dört bir tarafından İstanbul'a gelen vatandaşlar, güvenlik noktalarından geçerek Sultanahmet Meydanı'na girmeye başladı <https://t.co/QK9bDM2Qlc>

— AA Canlı (@AACanlı) [July 24, 2020](#)









Trump: 'Strong dissatisfaction' with Turkish decision; meeting with Elpidophoros

US President Donald Trump expressed his "strong dissatisfaction" with the insulting decision to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

His statement came during a brief meeting at the White House between Trump and the Archbishop of America, His Eminence Elpidophoros, who had arrived for scheduled meeting with US Vice President Mike Pence.

According to reports, Trump expressed concern over the issue of protection of human rights, and especially religious freedoms of minorities in Turkey.

The US president was quoted as saying that he “...would proceed immediately with the necessary interventions.”

During the meeting, the Archbishop of America raised several key issues concerning the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, emphasizing the importance and the need for the reopening of the Theological School of Halki.

In a message after the meeting, the US Vice-President tweeted that “...America will stand firm with the Greek Orthodox Church in the call for Hagia Sophia to remain accessible as a source of inspiration and reflection for every person of every faith.”





Mike Pence ✓
@Mike_Pence



As I told Archbishop [@Elpidophoros](#) today, America will stand firm with the Greek Orthodox Church in the call for Hagia Sophia to remain accessible as a source of inspiration and reflection for every person of every faith.



1:11 AM · Jul 24, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

Macron denounces Turkish provocations in FB message written in Greek

On the other side of the Atlantic, French President Emmanuel Macron posted a highly symbolic statement on FB, in Greek, no less, expressing his solidarity with the island republic of Cyprus and Greece, and in denunciation of the Erdogan regime's saber-rattling and aggression in the eastern Mediterranean.

Among others, he stated “...Once again, I want to express France’s full solidarity with Cyprus and Greece against Turkey’s violation of their sovereign rights...We must not accept threats to the sea area of an EU member state,” he said.

Brotherhood of St. Catherine Monastery on Mt. Sinai: Grief over yet another desecration of ‘our Great Cathedral of Holy Wisdom, the pride of our people’

From the Sinai Peninsula, the elders of the St. Catherine’s Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai issued an announcement bitterly lamenting the conversion, reminding that the ancient monastery is a fraternal contemporary of the Hagia Sophia, both ordered built by the Emperor Justinian.

The statement noted that the monastery’s brotherhood feels pain and grief over yet another desecration of “...our sister-church, our Great Cathedral of Holy Wisdom, the pride of our people.”



Back in Athens, the country’s culture Minister Lina Mendoni, this week discussed cooperation with the visiting United Arab Emirates Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, Noura Al Kaabi.

During the meeting, Mendoni expressed Athens’ appreciation for the position taken by the UAE against the conversion of the Hagia Sophia, to which the UAE minister replied: “...as members of UNESCO we are obliged to do whatever we can so as not

to undermine the organization's principles."