

## Historic Monastery of Panagia Sumela reopens amid latest Erdogan govt 'spectacle'



The historic monastery of Panagia Sumela, near the Black Sea city of Trabzon, which for centuries served as the cradle of Pontian Hellenism, was finally reopened today to the public, after five years of restoration work.

The reopening ceremony was held in the presence of the relevant Turkish culture and tourism minister, the latest spectacle organized by the now unabashedly Islamist Erdogan administration involving a Greek Orthodox religious landmark and a Byzantine monument.

The ceremony comes days after a Muslim prayer at the iconic Hagia Sophia sealed the 6th century Orthodox basilica's conversion into a mosque, ending its status as Turkey's most visited museum and possibly its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

At the same time, another Hagia Sophia cathedral, this one in the ancient Black Sea metropolis of Trabzon, also reopened this week after two years of restoration — and seven years after it was also converted into a mosque by Erdogan.

The historic monastery of Panagia Sumela and the Hagia Sophia in Trabzon are among the most visited monuments in the ancient Pontus region, which

encompasses much of the southeast Black Sea coastline and its hinterland.

Meanwhile, in continuing to ignore international condemnation of the decision to convert Hagia Sophia back into a mosque, in tandem with trashing a 1934 decree issued by the government of modern Turkey's founder, Kemal Ataturk, the authoritarian Turkish president this week bragged to members of his Cabinet that Christians can continue to visit the Hagia Sophia, but only to witness how it functions as a mosque.

Erdogan also claimed that the conversion of Hagia Sophia, which means Holy Wisdom in Greek, heralds a revival of the Turkish nation and as an example of how his government exercises sovereign rights. In burnishing his now infamous reputation for regional trouble-making, Erdogan said his passion for defending what he called Turkey's rights will be exercised in the Aegean and east Mediterranean.