

Condemnation pours in over latest conversion of iconic Byzantine-era basilica by Turkey's Islamist president



This month's decision by Islamist Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to convert the Chora Church into a mosque is an act of intolerance and symbolic violence, the President of the Hellenic Republic, Katerina Sakellariopoulou, stressed.

In a post on Facebook on Friday, Sakellariopoulou spoke of an act that blatantly violated the UNESCO conventions but also offended the religious symbolism of the monument, which was doomed to obscurity.

From another part of the world, US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Samuel Brownback on Thursday called on Turkey to protect what he called the rich multicultural and religious history of Chora Church.

Brownback made a post on Twitter, in which he said that, as in the case of Hagia Sophia, the Chora Church was "...an architectural masterpiece, part of the Historic Areas of Istanbul UNESCO World Heritage Site... We urge the Government of Turkey to ensure the site's rich multicultural and religious history and its extraordinary mosaics and frescos -created to reflect the wonder and glory of God- will be preserved and that it remains accessible to all."

In a related development, Turkish authorities this week issued an announcement stipulating that, from now on, women entering the Hagia Sophia, the greatest of all basilicas of eastern Christendom, must wear a veil – as per the Ottoman Muslim custom for women in a mosque.