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HALKI HOSPITAL TURNED INTO ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL CENTER WHILE ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL REMAINS CLOSED



A hospital on the Turkish island of Halki has been handed over to the Diyanet, the State Directorate of Religious Affairs, to be converted into an Islamic educational center. At the same time, the Orthodox theological school on the island has been closed by order of the state since 1971.

The Turkish government initially announced its plans to create an Islamic center on the island in August 2018.

The 660-bed capacity Heybeliada Sanatorium was created in 1924 by orders of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to treat tuberculosis. It operated until 2005, when it was closed down by the Turkish Ministry of Health due to the difficult of access to the hospital on the island and the dramatically reduced number of patients.

The transfer of the building to the Religious Directorate became known when a deputy from the opposition Republic People's Party officially inquired into the status of the hospital and learned that it had already been handed over, reports

duvarenglish.com with reference to Turkish media.

The inquiring Deputy, Umut Oran, slammed the move, calling out the state for throwing money around for such ventures while the state faces the coronavirus pandemic and an economic crisis.

A Change.org petition has been launched calling for the hospital to be converted into a tuberculosis museum and quarantine center. It currently has more than 66,600 signatures.

The move to build an Islamic center on the same island where the state refuses to reopen an Orthodox school is sure to only increase tensions, especially in the wake of the reconversion of the iconic Agia Sophia Cathedral and the Chora church into mosques.

The Patriarchate of Constantinople's theological school on the island was founded in 1844 with the permission of Sultan Abdulmejid I and operated until 1971 when the Turkish authorities decided to close it. Rumors about the seminary's reopening have been circulating since 2010, and the building was recently renovated.

Erdogan has previously offered to reopen the seminary in exchange for the building of a mosque in Thessaloniki.

The fate of the school continues to be a main concern for Patriarch Bartholomew and the entire Patriarchate of Constantinople.

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