

Byzantine Association of Moscow: “A battle for Hagia Sophia to become Orthodox Basilica again”



The Byzantine Association of Moscow continues to express its concerns about the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

The provocative decision to turn Hagia Sophia into a mosque may have been taken and implemented in the summer, but the Byzantine Association of Moscow continues to express its strong reaction.

The issue is discussed by experts who make up the association, such as historians, archaeologists from the Institute of Crimean Archeology, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Archdiocese.

The members of the association re-discussed the situation created by the Turkish authorities regarding the use of buildings and cultural sites, included those on the UNESCO World Heritage List, in particular the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

“It is certainly one of the greatest monuments of world culture in Turkey, but it

does not belong only to the Turks, but to all of humanity,” expatriate historian Sergei Pinchuk Galanis, who was at the conference table, told [Sputnik Hellas](#).

The attendees expressed their strong concern for the preservation of the world cultural heritage sites and the complete integrity of murals and mosaics that compose the interior decoration of this cathedral.

For his part, Galanis stressed that:

“This year the annulment of Atatürk’s decree, founder of the modern Turkish state, and the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque is something very sensitive not only for the Greeks, but also for the Russians – because this unique monument is closely linked to the history of Russian baptism.”

“Who knows what would have happened to Russia if Prince Vladimir’s ambassadors had not visited Hagia Sophia? The spiritual connection between Russia and this great Church of Constantinople was expressed in the construction of its proportions in the Russian cities during the years following the baptism,” he added.

At the same time it became clear that many religious icons in Russia have been influenced by the interior decoration of Hagia Sophia.

“Those who have not seen it (including the decoration) can guess what is hidden under the Turkish plaster in the Hagia Sophia Mosque. Of course, we should not expect the appeal of such public organizations as the Byzantine Club to lead immediately to the decision to reopen it as a museum,” he continued.

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“These demands are a drop in the ocean. But the more similar appeals there are, the more emphasis will be placed on this problem by international organizations, and the more likely they are to be heard in Turkey itself,” Galanis said.

“The political line for controlling Atatürk’s legacy and trying to build a Turkish sultanate or caliphate is indifferent. Sooner or later, Turkey’s next leadership will have to look for ways to bring the situation to a new level of international ties, including world cultural heritage,” he explained.

In addition, the meeting discussed the preservation and popularization of the Russian-Byzantine heritage and the prospects for the establishment of a Russian and International Union of Byzantine Cities.

“UNESCO was not bothered that we turned Hagia Sophia into a mosque”, says Turkish Minister

Some of them will take place in the Crimea, once a former province of the Eastern Roman Empire, and in whose territory there are many historical relics and cultural objects related to the Byzantine period.

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