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Leader of Muslim group in Greece expresses 'bitterness' over new mosque



The leader of a group representing Muslims in Greece, Egyptian Naim El Gantour, on Saturday expressed what he called “bitterness” over a mosque being built in Votanikos district in central Athens, calling the building a “big kiosk”.

The Muslim place of worship, constructed with state funding, as repeated Greek governments have declined financing from predominately Muslim countries, will not feature a minaret or loudspeakers. Two separate halls will be allocated for prayer, a main one for men, able to accommodate 300, and another for women, able to accommodate 50.

The mosque is expected to be ready in some two weeks, and will be the first official Muslim place of worship in the Athens area since the Greek War of Independence (1821-29), when dour and oppressive Ottoman Turk rule ended after four centuries.

The vast majority of Muslims now in the greater Athens area hail from other non-Western states - with a significant portion having entered the predominately Christian Orthodox country in an irregular/undocumented manner. Subsequent

legalization initiatives by the Greek state have provided temporary residences permits to many.

Three positions for imams (Muslim clerics) have been proclaimed, with the chief imam to represent the Sunni denomination, the largest in Islam, with the other two adhering to the Shia and Alevi denominations, respectively.