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Erdogan: '…there will be no Constantinople again'



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued a pre-election crescendo of nationalist and Islamist-tinged campaign speeches this week, as his ruling AKP party is reportedly faring worse than expected in opinion polls for Turkey's two biggest municipalities – and ahead of local elections at the end of March.

Following a recent interview on state television, in which he favored restoring the Hagia Sophia Cathedral back into a mosque – from its current status as a museum – the increasingly authoritarian Erdogan told supporters on Tuesday in the Black Sea city of Trabzon that the Turkish name for Constantinople, today's Istanbul, should be known as "Islambul", or "abundant Islam".

He said "Istanbul" is the corrupted version of "eis tin Polin", Greek for "to the city". Continuing, amid the applause by party supporters, he warned that "…there will be no Constantinople again".

The Turkish president's inflammatory comments, mostly aimed at his AKP party's "rank and file" supporters, come roughly a month and a half after a visit by the

Greek prime minister to Turkey, where Erdogan at the time ruled out changing the Hagia Sophia’s status.

The Cathedral was the most important church in Christendom for nearly a millennium until 1453, when after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople it was turned into a mosque.

Greek media on Wednesday cited UNESCO sources as saying that changing the Hagia Sophia’s World Heritage Site status would require approval by the Paris-based organization.

In statements to the Orthodoxia news agency, an UNESCO source reminded that Turkey is a member of the international organization, and, as such, must implement its decisions.

In a particularly biting dispatch from Turkey, Süddeutsche Zeitung this week noted that Erdogan’s ruling party has, up until now, promised its supporters earthly goods, whereas it’s now offering places in heaven, in exchange for votes in municipal elections.