

Hagia Sophia

*And Preservation Of The
Religious Sites In Turkey*



AK PARTY

AK Party Foreign Affairs



Hagia Sophia

As one of the most important monuments of the history to have survived today, Hagia Sophia has a very special place in the world art with the magnificence of its construction, architectural style, size and functionality.

Hagia Sophia is the largest church built by the Eastern Roman Empire in Istanbul and was built three times in the same place. Today's Hagia Sophia was built by Emperor Justinianos to two important architects of the time, Anthemios from Tralles (Aydın) and Isidoros from Miletos (Balat). Besides these two chief architects, hundreds of architects worked in the construction according to the written records of history. Each one of these architects had hundreds of workers. However, many changes and additions were made by the Ottoman Empire throughout the history.

The building, originally built as a church, was converted into a mosque when Fatih Sultan Mehmet, the seventh sultan of the Ottoman Empire conquered Istanbul on May 29, 1453. Immediately after the conquest, the building was strengthened and protected in the best way, and continued its existence as a mosque with the additions of the Ottoman Period. Hagia Sophia is a part of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation be which was established by the Sultan himself in 1462. It has been used as very important protocol mosque for centuries since it is close proximity of Topkapı Palace.

According to the Turkish Law on foundations, a property (hayrat) should primarily be used in pursuant of function it was written in its founding document (Waqfiye).

However, Hagia Sophia Mosque; was declared as a “Museum” with the Council of Ministers Decision dated 24.11.1934 and numbered 2/1589 and served as a “Memorial Museum” affiliated to the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums of Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey.

With the presidential decree that has been issued following the council of state’s decision dated July 10, 2020, to annul the regulation of the Council of Ministers dated 1934, which transformed Hagia Sophia from a mosque to as a museum, the it has been ensured that Hagia Sophia was opened to worship again as a mosque.

18 heritage sites have been inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List from Turkey

Historical Areas of Istanbul, including Hagia Sophia, were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985. Hagia Sophia; is protected and managed to cover the universal value, originality and integrity conditions in accordance with the World Heritage Convention¹. Turkey has been actively contributing to UNESCO World Heritage Center and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage since 1983. Istanbul was included in UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985 with its 4 areas and Hagia Sophia is part of the Historic Areas of Istanbul.

1The World Heritage Convention of 1972

This Convention which was found to be suitable for our participation by Law No. 2658 dated 14.04.1982 was approved by the Decision of Council of Ministers dated 23.05.1982 and numbered 8/4788 and was published in the Official Gazette dated 14.02.1983 and numbered 17959.

The Convention created a protection system which has a binding nature worldwide for the protection of world heritage properties in order to provide protection for them by acknowledging that they are a part of the common heritage of mankind.

Candidate properties are granted this status by the decision of the World Heritage Committee after a series of procedures which begins with the application of member states which adopted the Convention to UNESCO and which is finalised with the evaluation of the applications by the experts of International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

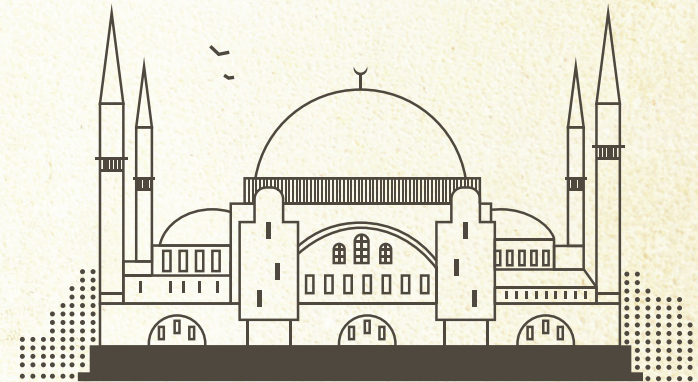




Status of the Hagia Sophia

Turkey, and in particular Istanbul, is a cradle to many civilizations and culture. The Turkish government takes the preservation of this heritage very seriously. One indication of this is the significant number of functioning churches and synagogues, which are given support to remain open, despite dwindling congregations.

Hagia Sophia is a central building in the Istanbul skyline, and one that sums up the journey of Istanbul. There was a great demand from the people of Turkey that this historic building regain its identity as a mosque. Indeed, Hagia Sophia functioned as a mosque for 500 years, from the day that this city became Istanbul. Hagia Sophia is with its unique character Istanbul's most prominent symbol and one of the most important structures in all of world architecture. Therefore, we cannot ignore its special status and place for Muslims in Turkey. Although critics claim that Turkey converted Hagia Sophia from a church into a Mosque, this is not true, since Hagia Sophia served as a church for Centuries, has been reopened in its original way.



Just like the example of France's iconic Notre Dame Cathedral and Sacre-Coeur Basilica, world famous churches which are open to both tourists and worshippers, being opened as a mosque does not detract in any way from Hagia Sofia's position as a museum. All mosques throughout Turkey are open to the public. Adjacent to Hagia Sofia is the Blue Mosque, which successfully manages to be a functioning for everyone and with its wide-open doors to locals and foreigners, Muslims and non-Muslims like all other mosques in Turkey. Hagia Sofia will follow on this pattern.

The government of Turkey took silent revolutionary steps to protect the freedom of religion and belief, which is guaranteed by Turkish constitution and laws, for all Turkish citizens without any discrimination. In this context, Turkey protects meticulously all cultural properties that Turkey owns without any distinction, including Hagia Sophia, within the framework of the tradition of tolerance stemming from Turkish culture and history.

Turkey has been delicately cherishing the historical, cultural and spiritual value of Hagia Sophia since the conquest of Istanbul. The Hagia Sophia is the property of Turkey, like all Turkey's cultural assets located on Turkish land. Every kind of power disposition regarding Hagia Sophia is also an issue concerning Turkey's internal affairs within Turkey's sovereignty rights.

Legal Status of the Hagia Sophia

Under the international law the principle of sovereign equality of states prevails. According to the said principle, each state being recognized as sovereign and equal, has absolute sovereignty over its country.

According to Article 2(1) of Charter of the UN, the constitutive instrument of the United Nations, of which Turkey is one of the founding members, the organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all member states and each state shall recognize sovereignty of other states. The most tangible form of the sovereign equality principle in international law is the prohibition of intervention into domestic matters of a state. Thereafter, member states are obliged to refrain from any attitude or behaviour that may be prejudicial to the sovereignty of one another. The very same situation applies to the UN and it is clearly expressed in Article 2(7) of Charter of the UN that nothing contained in the Charter shall authorize the UN to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. Nevertheless, a state may, in part or in full, remove a matter from its own jurisdiction by providing it with an international character through the instrumentality of an international treaty and may authorize other states and international organizations to deal with that matter. In such a case the limits of non-intervention in domestic matters are confined to the will of the state. Violation of the said principle may occur only when the foreseen limits are exceeded.

Turkey changed the status of Hagia Sophia by converting it into a museum from a mosque through an administrative decision with the Cabinet Decree dated 24 October 1934 issued within its domestic law based on its authority of sovereignty. Neither at the time when the change of status was made nor throughout the time until today, is there any information or document as to Turkey's sharing of its authority of sovereignty to identify the legal status of Hagia Sophia with another international legal personality. It has been known that Hagia Sophia was brought to the agenda and discussed during Paris Conference after World War I, during the Treaty of Sevres or even at the Lausanne Conference when Istanbul and issue of minorities were being negotiated. However, neither in the Treaty of Lausanne nor in any other international instrument is there any provision concerning Hagia Sophia.

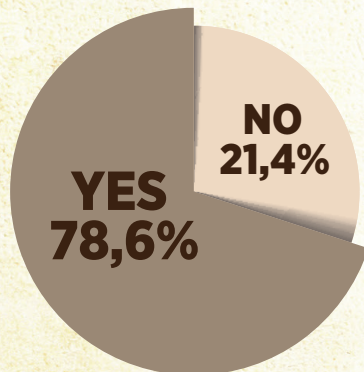
Another point which needs to be underlined is the fact that Hagia Sophia is included in the World Cultural Heritage list, being one of the most genuine examples of cultural properties which should be protected. Cultural and natural properties included in the World Heritage List which was created by the World Heritage Committee established pursuant to the Convention are subject to a special protection regime. In fact, Articles 4 and 5 of the Convention which are under the title of "National Protection and International Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage" govern the liabilities of state parties to protect the properties which are situated on their territories and in the World Heritage List. When evaluated within the scope of the Convention, conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque does not violate any liabilities undertaken by Turkey under the Convention including the provisions in question, and most prominently, the liabilities of protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of cultural properties. Furthermore, this does not mean that it will lose its features which form the basis of its inclusion in the List. In addition, there will be no damage to or risk of elimination or destruction of the fundamental features of the building if any kind of projects of building survey, restitution and restoration are carried out in accordance with the standards and principles of protecting cultural heritage. Taking into account the Convention, it is concluded that any claim stating that any change in the status of the building violates the liabilities under the Convention is ill-founded. It is further seen that there is no need for the permission of the World Heritage Committee to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Besides, it should be noted that Article 6 of the Convention stipulates that the state parties shall fully respect the sovereignty of the states on whose territory the cultural and natural heritage is situated.

Similarly, the question whether it will violate the freedom of conscience and religion governed under Article 18 of UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which our country is a party, arises if Hagia Sophia's current status of museum is converted into the status of mosque. At this point, it is considered that the conversion of the status of museum into its former status should be evaluated as the execution of the requirements of the freedom of conscience and religion. In other words, it is considered, from the aspect of human rights law, that opening a building that served as a mosque for an extremely long time such as 500 years to worship in line with the demands and expectations of people who belong to that religion will further strengthen the freedom of conscience and religion.

Survey at Hagia Sophia

The survey, conducted by Areda Survey and took place between 27-30 June 2018 through face to face interviews with six thousand respondents, representing Turkey's population aged 18 and above.

“Should Hagia Sophia be converted into a mosque and open to worship?”



Facts About The Hagia Sophia Mosque

<p>X Hagia Sophia has been converted to a mosque from a church</p>	<p>✓ Hagia Sophia has been converted to a mosque not from a church but from a museum.</p>
<p>X The historical texture of the building will be damaged</p>	<p>The features of Hagia Sophia will continue to be preserved and protected under UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage as well as under our national legislation.</p> <p>✓ Walls of the Hagia Sophia are covered with Christian art including a mosaic of Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus in the main hall. The presence of these paintings will not be any hindrance to prayers and will be open to regular visitors, whoever wants to go and see those mosaics. There will be no damage to these mosaics, depictions, the historical texture, and architecture of the building.</p>
<p>X This decision will inevitably fuel the mistrust, promote renewed division between religious communities and undermine our efforts at dialog and cooperation.</p>	<p>✓ The Turkish people pride themselves on celebrating Turkey's multi religious history and traditions. One indication of this is the significant number of functioning churches and synagogues, which are given support to remain open, despite dwindling congregations.</p>
<p>X Turkish authorities should conduct a dialogue before making a decision that could harm the universal value of this space.</p>	<p>✓ The use of Hagia Sophia is a matter of national sovereignty. The status of Hagia Sophia and the practices to be made relating to it are Turkey's domestic issues. The reversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque is actually all about respecting a legal decision.</p>

Preservation Of The Religious Sites In Turkey

As the members of a deep-rooted civilization which views differences as a richness and which is built upon mutual respect and affection, AK Party deems it of utmost importance that all Turkish citizens can freely practice their religions, cultures and traditions regardless of their faith, denomination and ethnicity.

Since the AK Party came to power in 2002, some important aspects of religious minority rights have definitely improved under the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's leadership. Between 2003 and 2014, more than a thousand "unidentified" non-Muslim properties, which were either confiscated by the state in the past or unused by non-Muslims for different reasons, have been reinstated to minority community foundations.



The Directorate-General of Foundations has been gaining momentum with new projects to conserve and maintain Turkey's diverse cultural heritage. Akdamar Church, which dates back over a thousand years, was restored with great care. Sumela Monastery in Altindere Valley in Trabzon and Iron Church in Istanbul's Balat was reopened for worship following the restoration works. The possession issue of immovable properties that belong to Syrians, including churches and monasteries, was resolved and their title deeds were handed over to the Syriac community.

Mar Petyun Chaldean Church and the Middle East's largest Armenian church Surp Giragos Church, both damaged in attacks by the PKK terrorists in Diyarbakır's Sur, are currently under restoration. The Directorate-General of Foundations completed the restoration and renovation of the Great Synagogue in the border city of Edirne.

Turkey has also rewritten its regulations concerning foundations or waqfs in the old Ottoman language, enacting the new law of foundations in 2007 as part of EU harmonization policies, paving the way for improving minority rights.

Turkey is a country that offers worship facilities to its citizens of every religion, every belief, and every spirit. There are nearly 435 churches and synagogues that are currently open to worship in Turkey. Ministry of Culture and Tourism has located and recorded 166 religious buildings consisting of 153 churches, 8 monasteries and 5 chapels in İstanbul, and 1642 religious buildings consisting of 1178 churches, 166 chapels, 103 monasteries and 29 basilicas in Anatolia as cultural heritage. Out of these, 210 cultural heritage are registered in the Treasury of Turkish Republic. Restoration of 33, and projects of 4 of these churches have been completed until today. Restoration is being continued in 8 churches, whereas projects are being prepared for 5 churches.

Turkey has contributed to the restoration of over 5 thousand monuments across a vast geography stretching from the Balkans to Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe with Turkey's know-how and experience in restoration efforts.

Iron Church (St. Stephan Church), located in the Balat district of Istanbul



The Iron Church, built in 1898, is one of its kind in the world with its iron skeleton. It not only serves the Bulgarian community as a house of prayer but also contributes to Istanbul's beauty and richness.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister Boyko Borisov of Bulgaria and Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church Neophyte attended the re-opening ceremony of the newly-restored Iron Church (St. Stephan Church), located in the Balat district of Istanbul on 7 January 2018.

Mor Efrem (St. Ephrem), located in the Bakirkoy district of Istanbul



With President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in attendance, the Syriac Orthodox community broke ground in 2019 on the St. Ephrem (Mor Efrem) in Yesilkoy neighborhood in Bakirkoy, an area close to Istanbul Ataturk Airport, the first newly constructed church since the country became a republic in 1923.

Sümela Monastery, located in the Maçka district of the Black Sea province of Trabzon

Sumela Monastery (Meryem Ana - Virgin Mary) was founded in the 4th century AD as the dream of two monks named Barnabas and Sophronios, who came from Athens and built a small church in Trabzon. The monastery added to the UNESCO World Heritage List and has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List since 2000.

Due to the risk of falling rocks in the monastery carved into the Pontic Mountains over 1,600 years ago, the site was closed down to visitors in September 2015.

The first phase of environmental planning was conducted on the surrounding rocks, with one part of the monastery, including its yard, which cost around 11 million Turkish Liras, opened to visits in May 2019.

After completing the second phase of restoration, 65 percent of the monastery was opened on July 28, 2020, in a ceremony attended by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and by Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy on-site. Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew expressed his gratitude to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for his support and interest in the restoration of the Sumela Monastery.



The Sümela Monastery has been visited by around 45,000 local and international tourists since being reopened to worship on July 28 2020. In the third phase for the remaining 35 percent of the monastery's renovation is supposed to end by July 1, 2021. The cost of the second and the third phases is estimated to be around 44 million Turkish Liras. After the end of the renovation, authorities will apply to the UNESCO to put the Sumela Monastery in the World Heritage List.



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reopened restored Sümela Monastery in 27 July 2020. Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew thanked President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the restoration of Sumela Monastery and its reopening to visit.



Aghtamar Church, located in the Aghtamar Island within the borders of Gevaş District of Eastern Anatolia province of Van

Aghtamar Church was built by architect Manuel in 915-921 A.D. in Van and was originally built as a palace church, but it was later transformed into a monastery church. The church was restored under the leadership of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the period of 2005-2007, as a step towards the promotion of the relations between the Armenians of Turkey and Armenia.

The restoration of Aghtamar Church was completed on 30 March 2006, but the opening of the building as a monumental museum with the participation of Turkish and Armenian delegations was on 29 March, 2007.

Turkish Catholic Church of Antioch, located in the Antakya district of the Mediterranean province of Hatay

Hatay is a city of peace, brotherhood and tolerance, which has hosted many civilizations with its rich cultural heritage. The first church in the world, Church of St. Peter, and the first mosque of Anatolia, Habib-i Neccar Mosque, are located in Antakya, the center of the province.

Turkey has continued to contribute to the world heritage by restoring İskenderun the Assyrian Church, İskenderun Greek Catholics Church and Yayladağı Greek Orthodox Church.





*Virgin Mary Church
is located in the
Midyat distret of the
Southeastern Anatolia
province of Mardin*

Mardin is a city where different religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism; and people belonging to various ethnic groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Chechnians and Turks have lived in an environment of piece, fraternity and social harmony. As a cultural crossroad where 7 different languages, 7 religions and 7 cultures lived in 7000 years, Mardin has been the cradle of many civilizations and has hosted various ethnic groups and people.



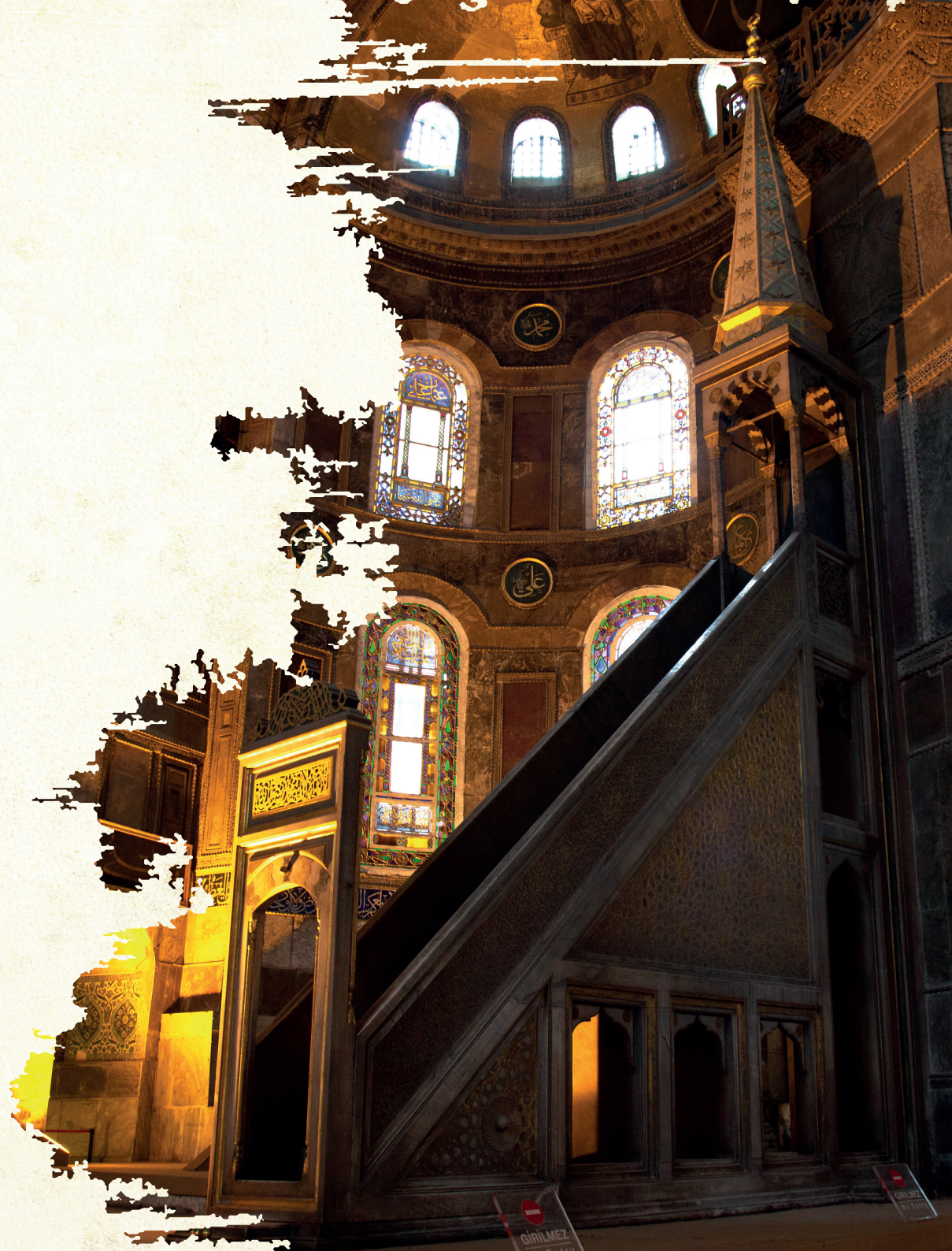
Conclusion

The Turkish people pride themselves on celebrating Turkey's multi religious history and traditions. Turning the Hagia Sophia into a mosque means restoring its status as a place of prayer. This by no means negates its historical heritage. The Christian identity of the Hagia Sophia has lasted for centuries and will never be compromised. It is present in every corner of this historical monument. The Hagia Sophia holds so much significance for Turkey's more than 80 million Muslims and we look forward to being able to pray regularly in one of our most treasured historical sites. After the Council of State annulled a 1934 decree that converted Hagia Sophia into a museum and put restrictions on prayers being performed at the site will give Muslims around the world the opportunity for worship in a building that holds so much history and meaning. The Hagia Sophia's doors will remain open to visitors from all around the world. People of all religious denominations are welcome and encouraged to visit it, in the same way they are welcome to visit our other mosques. The restoration of Hagia Sophia's status as a mosque won't undermine its status as a world heritage site. To view the use of other world heritage sites, including the Notre Dame and the Cologne Cathedral, by the Christian community as normal, whilst objecting to Muslims worshipping at the Hagia Sophia, which serves as a mosque for centuries, amounts to nothing more than Islamophobia.

Hagia Sophia's status is not an international matter but a matter of national sovereignty for Turkey. Hagia Sophia, like all cultural assets on our lands, is the property of Turkey.

The features of Hagia Sophia, a significant historical and cultural heritage site dating back to the sixth century AD, will continue to be preserved and protected, and will remain open to the public in the same manner the Blue Mosque is open to visitors and tourists of all denominations and faiths.

Today, along with the mosques across Turkey, there are also thousands of historical places of worship of all faiths. Churches and synagogues operate anywhere where there is a community. There are currently 435 churches and synagogues open for worship in Turkey. Moreover, the Turkish Government has been gaining momentum with new projects to conserve and maintain Turkey's diverse cultural heritage. Since 2003, the Directorate General of Foundations has allocated funds for the restoration of a number of churches and synagogues. Akdamar Church, which dates back over a thousand years, was restored with great care. Sumela Monastery in Altindere Valley in Trabzon and Iron Church in Istanbul's Balat was reopened for worship following the restoration works.





AK PARTY

AK Party Foreign Affairs

f akpartyenglish t akpartyenglish @ akpartyeng

Address: Söğütözü Caddesi No:6 Çankaya/ANKARA

Contact: +90(0312) 204 50 00 (Pbx) +90(0312) 204 50 44

https://www.akparti.org.tr disiliskiler@akparti.org.tr