

Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC)

**Forum on Minority Issues, Item 5
Sixth session - Geneva 26 - 27 November 2013**

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The Reconversion of Museums once being Churches to Mosques is not promoting the Interreligious Cooperation and Mutual Understanding

The reconversion of museums once being churches to mosques is not promoting the interreligious cooperation and mutual understanding. Indeed, during the last years there has been a practice by state authorities in the Republic of Turkey to reconvert museums into mosques, monuments which were originally build as churches during the Byzantine period and then converted to mosques during the Ottoman era. These monuments, being of high architectural and historical value, are considered to belong to world cultural heritage and are reference monuments of the civilization that created. Furthermore, these acts are also contradictory to the scientific principles of monument preservation, as the conversions need significant structural interventions to the monuments and this is against their preservation for the next generations. Besides, these monuments are still primordial in Christian faith.

For example, the two historic churches of Saint-Sophia in Iznik (8th century Nicaea) and Saint-Sophia in Trabzon (13th century), despite their meticulous restorations with the care of prominent Universities and of the Republic of Turkey, were recently convert to mosques and signs of Christian faith covered.

Moreover, a couple a weeks ago, the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Bülent Arinç called the conversion of Saint-Sophia of Istanbul to mosque. Turkish Airlines, a state majority company, published in August 2013, in its magazine "Skylife", a key note article entitled "Saint-Sophia: Mosque of Sultans" advocating also the conversion of the Saint-Sophia from museum to mosque, despite the fact that this famous monument is a museum since 1934.

Also very recently, the largest Monastery of Byzantine era Stoudion, later known as Imrahor mosque, is announced to be reconverted to mosque being museum the last 50 years. Stoudion monastery was the place where all the ancient Greek texts were saved by reproducing, throughout the 4th to 15th centuries and passed to next generations.

We consider that these acts of reconversions do not ease at all interreligious dialog and cooperation in this particular period which is needed to stop the inter-communal clashes in many countries and in particular in eastern Mediterranean region. We believe these acts of reconversions are also reviving past contradictions between religions which are entirely unnecessary at present circumstances. Therefore, we call the Government of Turkey to reconsider the above policy of reconversions of Byzantine era monuments to mosques for the reasons we stated above.