



ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΒΟΥΛΗ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΤΙΠΡΟΣΩΠΩΝ



ΠΑΝΙΚΟΣ ΑΕΩΝΙΔΟΥ
Κοινοβουλευτικός Εκπρόσωπος ΔΗΚΟ

Presentation of the Volume,
“Hagia Sophia: the churches of the Wisdom of God around the
world”
Brussels, February 2024

Your Reverence,
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,

We are particularly pleased for this opportunity to present today, in Brussels, the Volume entitled “Hagia Sophia: The churches of the Wisdom of God around the world”, which is a publication of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (I.A.O.). Today's event is of particular importance as it takes place in the "heart" of Europe, where the Headquarters of the European Union and the European Parliament are located, the "Temple" - allow me to say - of the European Democracy.

Humankind, for centuries now, has ranked monuments on a global scale. As of the second century B.C. until 1750 A.D., the humanity was referring to the seven "Wonders of the World" as unique world monuments. Currently, we are referring to the UNESCO World Heritage List, for unique monuments, such as the Parthenon, the Colosseum, Hagia Sophia and many more.

Hagia Sophia has the uniqueness of a monument-symbol, a monumental-reference of a living religious tradition of millions of believers of Christianity and Orthodoxy. After all, that is what we aim to emphasize and remind with the publication of this Volume.



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Hagia Sophia was a church for 916 years, before it was converted into a mosque for 481 years. In 1934, it was secularized as a museum, functioning in this capacity for 96 years, however, in 2020, it was converted into a mosque once again. During those 481 years, while Hagia Sophia was a mosque, many churches were erected all over the world and especially in Europe, in honour of the Holy Wisdom of God.

In this modern era of civilization, especially following the Second World War consequences, which brought about the biblical destruction of numerous monuments, Humanity has established rules of behaviour towards the concept of the "Other", the different, as concepts or persons that it respects, protects and highlights. "Otherness" is what modern science calls this tendency.

The Muslim tradition and the Islamic way of living are highly-respected in every civilized country. This religion has its own esteemed beliefs, its own respected way of life, its own revered monuments.

In this framework, we are addressing the provocative decision of Mr. Erdogan to alter the status of the museum into a mosque, which was, indeed, a transformation with its own not-so-peaceful symbolisms.



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The mandated clergyman, inside the church, on a raised level, religiously dressed, holding a weapon of war, with a sword. And with the President himself declaring that this was the happiest day of his life. And what day is that, the day when Christianity was defeated by Islam. And all/ this series of events, not only in the historic Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, but also in the other five Churches of Hagia Sophia located in the Turkish territory, as well as the church of Hagia Sophia located in the occupied area of the Republic of Cyprus.

It's inconceivable, in 2024, to view the History of Humanity with such terms. To live together with historical remnants, which undermine mutual understanding and acceptance of the Other. Thus, we are surprised by such overwhelming approach, which we denounce.

A second point I wish to emphasize is our concern over the fate of the (Hagia Sophia) Monument. In similar cases, throughout the civilized world, the competent archaeological authorities are entrusted with the mandate of overseeing and determining the use of monuments. Organizations tasked with the protection of monuments, point out that it is unacceptable to allow this unregulated entry of thousands of citizens, including religious pilgrims, to this significant Monument, without supervision by its security guards.

It is unacceptable to perform religious ceremonies in the absence of protection and control by the supervising archaeological authority.



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Even prominent figures have sounded the alarm, such as the Turkish historian and academic İlber Ortaylı, with the following statement in the prestigious Hurriyet newspaper: “The Hagia Sophia is not a road through which everyone can pass lightly, as the underground buildings, and the constructions to ensure the flow of water, waste, humidity but also the ventilation system are not so resistant to the presence of so many visitors and need to be repaired, cleaned and restored urgently. It is a continuous process that concerns the building itself”.

Himself, along with other Turkish academics and archaeologists, they often intensely express their concern for the damages caused to the monument by the mass influx of tourists.

This Volume, which you will soon get, is a thorough study, the fruit of collaboration between the I.A.O. and the University of Athens, a collective volume of essays of a multinational group of scientists and academics on the 37 historic iconic churches dedicated to the Wisdom of God, from the shores of Britain to the depths of China. This beautiful volume - which has been translated into 14 languages - includes information on the historical background, the characteristics of functional constructions and architecture, the radiation, as well as the rich photographic material of the said Churches.



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With these words, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the esteemed professor emeritus of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts of Belgium, Mr. Lambros Kouloubaritsis, for the honour of being a speaker at today's event.

We also express our heartfelt appreciation to the Ambiorix Orthodox Center and personally to the President of the "ARGO – Hellenic Network in Belgium", Mr. Spyros Pappas, for the co-organisation of today's high-level event. Not least, I wish to thank you all for your honouring presence.