

PROTEST RESOLUTION ON HAGIA SOPHIA

OF THE EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR BYZANTINE AND POSTBYZANTINE MONUMENTS

Hagia Sophia in Istanbul is a cultural monument of ecumenical character, listed in Unesco's World Heritage List since 1985. It was constructed to function as a Christian church for more than 900 years, until the 15th c. when it was converted into a mosque under the historical conditions of the era.

Built by the emperor Justinian, inaugurated in 537 it was and still remains a milestone in world architectural history. The art of Hagia Sophia has been produced by the workshops of the byzantine capital, reflecting its ideals and aesthetic principles. These ideals spread throughout the medieval world deeply influencing the art both East and the West.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, acknowledging Hagia Sophia's ecumenical character determined its conversion into a Museum, accessible by all her visitors, besides religion or nationality by a decree issued in 1934. Under this status, it functioned for the last 86 years, and remained accessible to millions of visitors of different religions, admiring its architecture and art, turning Hagia Sophia into a symbol reflecting the values of the Christian World.

The conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, will result in, among others, depriving its visitors' free daily circulation and will require the concealment of its exquisite mosaics. These are compromises of the humanitarian values of our era, based on mutual respect and understanding between religions and cultures and avoiding any act that ignites religious tensions and endangers cultural goods.

The European Centre for Byzantine and Postbyzantine Monuments expresses its strong protest against the decision to convert the most important historic monument of Turkey— symbol of Byzantine culture-, into a functioning mosque and invites all byzantinologists to contribute by all means in raising public awareness against this absolutely unjustified action.