Metropolitan Hilarion calls transformation of Hagia Sophia into mosque ‘a slap in the face of the entire Christianity’

The transformation of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque is ‘a slap in the face of the world Christianity’, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations DECR), stated to TASS Russian state news agency.

‘The internal political situation in Turkey and the factors that have prompted the Turkish leaders to make such a decision can be given different assessments. But the spiritual and cultural heritage of the whole world should not become a hostage to a current political situation. It is too bad that a political expediency has come out on top of the respect for other religious traditions. The transformation of Hagia Sophia into a mosque is the Turkish leaders’ slap in the face of the Orthodox Church and the whole world Christianity’, His Eminence said to the agency.

Earlier, Turkey’s Council of State repealed the Turkish Government resolution to assign Hagia Sophia in Istanbul the status of museum. It was reported on Friday by the CNN Turk news channel. The Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan signed a decree that allows Muslims to pray at Hagia Sophia which now has the status of mosque.

Metropolitan Hilarion noted that such a decision of the Turkish state leadership cannot but causes disappointment. ‘Hagia Sophia was built as a church dedicated to Jesus Christ, and we, Orthodox Christians, cannot see it in a different way. Since 1934 to this day, Hagia Sophia has had the status of museum, which gave both Christians and Muslims and people of other religions an opportunity to come to it without difficulty <…> For Orthodox Christians Hagia Sophia is the same as for Catholics is the St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. This church is a symbol and one of the greatest Christian shrines’, he added stressing that Christians cannot and will not see it otherwise.

DECR Communication Service

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