State Duma issues an appeal concerning a possible decision of Turkey's authorities to change museum status of Hagia Sophia

On 7th July 2020, the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation issued an appeal to the deputies of the Grand National Assembly (Parliament) of Turkey with regard to a possible decision of the country's authorities to change the museum status of Hagia Sophia. The day before, on 6th July, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia made a statement on the situation concerning Hagia Sophia.

As the Duma's appeal states, the Russian citizens take this issue to heart. "The museum status, which the church complex received in 1935 by the decision of the first President of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, enabled to ensure access to the church for as many people as possible, to show personal respect for the spiritual heritage and cultural traditions of our ancestors," the Russian deputies emphasised.

Built in the 6th century, Hagia Sophia is a great Christian shrine, an outstanding monument of Byzantine architecture, a world masterpiece, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the most visited sights of Istanbul by Russian tourists.

Deputies of the State Duma noted with deep appreciation friendly nature of Russia-Turkey relations, which are of particular importance to the peoples of the two countries "at this difficult time of escalating geopolitical and other conflicts aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic," and expressed their conviction that "all possible steps should be taken to prevent the damage that could be caused by a hasty change in the status of the world famous museum."

They also "urged their colleagues from the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to comprehensively review the situation and when taking a decision on the status of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, to demonstrate wisdom and not revise the decision of the founder of the Republic of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who transferred the cathedral into a museum in 1935, and that had made Hagia Sophia a symbol of peace and interreligious harmony for many years."

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