

**Question for written answer P-007751/2013
to the Commission
Rule 117
Marietta Giannakou (PPE)**

Subject: Conversion of the historic church of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond into a mosque

As part of measures to realise the long-cherished political objective of strengthening the Islamic element in Turkey, the historic church of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond has now been converted into a mosque: last week Muslim collective prayers took place in this Christian church for the first time in 52 years.

It is worth pointing out that the church of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond, which is eight hundred years old, is one of the most significant historical monuments of Christianity in the Black Sea region. It occupies a prominent place both among the monuments of the Pontus and among Byzantine monuments more generally and has unique architectural features, paintings, mosaics and sculptural decoration.

The church of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond functioned until recently as a museum. However, after a decision by the Supreme Court at the end of 2012, the ownership status of this Byzantine church was changed: this has affected its use as a museum.

It should also be recalled that the historic church of Hagia Sophia in Bithynia had previously been converted into a mosque, thereby raising concern that a systematic effort was being made by the Turkish authorities to alter the historical and religious character of Byzantine monuments in Turkey.

In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. Is it aware of this development and, if so, how does it view it?
2. As part of the accession process, does it intend to raise this matter with the Turkish authorities and what kind of follow-up measures will it take to ensure the protection of the cultural heritage of the Byzantine period in Turkey?
3. Given that these trends could in future cause friction with all the Christian countries of the region, does it intend to take steps to prevent similar decisions and also to restore the historical and religious character of those monuments which have already undergone major changes recently?