

Moscow Says Turkey's Hagia Sophia Move an 'Internal Affair'

By [AFP](#)

July 13, 2020



The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul is to reopen this month for Muslim worship as a mosque after almost nine decades as a museum. **Ozan Kose/ AFP**

Russia said Monday that Turkey's decision to turn the iconic Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque was the country's own business.

Turkey's move followed a court decision last week revoking the museum status of the UNESCO World Heritage site, and has triggered a global outcry.

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"We proceed from the fact that this is a Turkish internal affair in which neither us nor others should interfere," Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Vershinin told reporters.

He stressed however the importance of Hagia Sophia for "world culture and civilization,"

Russian news agencies reported.

The Hagia Sophia was constructed as a cathedral during the Byzantine Empire but converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

It is to reopen this month for Muslim worship as a mosque after almost nine decades as a museum.

Vershinin's statement came after the Russian Orthodox Church expressed dismay at Turkey's decision.

"The concern of millions of Christians were not heard," Church spokesman Vladimir Legoida said on Friday.

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