

Russian Couple Detained in Istanbul for Reading Bible in Hagia Sofia

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The Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, Turkey, **Adli Wahid (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

A Russian couple faces deportation from Turkey after they were detained for reading a bible inside Istanbul's historic Hagia Sophia, a sixth-century church that was reconverted to a mosque several years ago.

The couple, identified as Viktoria and Igor, were escorted out of the Hagia Sophia on Monday and charged with inciting hatred or hostility among the population, Ostorozhno Novosti [reported](#) on Tuesday.

By Wednesday, Turkish law enforcement authorities had [moved the couple](#) to a detention facility to await deportation.

The state-run TASS news agency [confirmed](#) the arrests through anonymous Turkish police sources.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [told](#) Ostorozhno Novosti that its consulate in Istanbul had

contacted the couple's attorney.

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Originally built as a cathedral in the Christian Byzantine Empire, the Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In 1934, it was designated as a museum amid secularizing reforms.

However, in 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan revoked that museum status and reopened the UNESCO site as a mosque for Muslim worship.

Russia's Orthodox Church condemned the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque as a "threat to the whole of Christian civilization."

Today, the Hagia Sophia's upper gallery is still utilized as a museum area. According to Ostorozhno Novosti, this is where Turkish security personnel caught Igor reading the Bible.

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