

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001530/24
to the Commission
Yannis Maniatis (S&D)
(20 August 2024)**

Subject: Failure of Turkish authorities to give written permission to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to celebrate the Feast of the Dormition on 15 August at the historic Panagia Soumela Monastery

In June 2010 the Turkish Government gave written permission to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to celebrate the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos on 15 August at the historic Monastery of Panagia Soumela, one of the most important monuments of Pontic Hellenism. Permission to celebrate the liturgy on 15 August was given every year until 2016 when the monastery closed for restoration work and then remained closed due to the COVID-19 measures. In 2023 the Turkish authorities granted their permission as late as 12 August and this year permission was granted for the liturgy to be celebrated on 23 August.

It is worth recalling that in 2022 the Turkish authorities turned this historic monument into a nightclub, allowing a DJ to play electronic music, in a bid to ‘promote Panagia Soumela as a tourism attraction’.

In view of this can the Commission answer the following:

1. Is this kind of behaviour, which restricts citizens’ freedom of religious expression, compatible with Türkiye’s EU candidate country status?
2. What actions does it intend to take to defend religious freedom in Türkiye and to protect cultural heritage sites?

Submitted: 20.8.2024

**Answer given by Ms Kos on behalf of the European Commission
(17 March 2025)**

Freedom of religion, tolerance and respect for fundamental rights are core values of the EU and, as such, a crucial element of the EU accession process. Türkiye as a candidate country needs to adhere to those values as well.

The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is monitored under Chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) of the annual country report on Türkiye ⁽¹⁾.

While the last report from 2024 notes that freedom of worship is generally respected in Türkiye, it also underlines that the situation of freedom of thought, conscience and religion needs to be improved.

In particular, the Venice Commission’s recommendations ⁽²⁾ on the legal status of non-Muslim religions and the right of the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate to use the title ‘Ecumenical’ have yet to be implemented.

The EU is committed to the preservation of cultural heritage in Türkiye. The Sümela Monastery is inscribed in the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s tentative World Heritage list ⁽³⁾.

Once inscribed as a World Heritage site, Türkiye has the obligation to ensure that the outstanding universal value of the inscribed site on its territory is not impacted.

The Commission will continue reporting on the rights of non-Muslim religious communities. It takes note of the mutual agreement between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Turkish authorities on the celebration of the Feast of the Dormition on 23 August 2024.

⁽¹⁾ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8010c4db-6ef8-4c85-aa06-814408921c89_en?filename=T%C3%BCrkiye%20Report%202024.pdf, p. 31.

⁽²⁾ <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD%282010%29005-e>

⁽³⁾ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/?action=listtentative&state=tr&order=states>