

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002164/25
to the Commission
Afroditi Latinopoulou (Pfe)
(29 May 2025)**

Subject: Closure of the Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai and violation of religious freedoms by the Egyptian authorities

According to recent reports, the Egyptian authorities have obtained a court ruling that provides for the suspension of the operation of the historic Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, the confiscation of its property and the removal of the monks. The Monastery in question, which was founded in the 6th century by the Emperor Justinian, is the oldest functioning Christian monastery in the world and is globally recognised as a place of significant cultural and religious heritage.

This ruling contradicts the public commitments of the Egyptian President to the Greek Government, while raising serious questions regarding the protection of religious freedom, cultural heritage and the rights of the monks who have resided there for centuries.

Given the EU's close relations with Egypt and the fundamental values that the Union upholds:

1. How does the Commission intend to react to this blatant violation of religious freedom and the property rights of the monks of the Monastery of St Catherine?
2. Does the Commission intend to raise the issue in EU-Egypt political dialogue and demand the lifting of the restrictive measures on the Monastery?
3. What actions, including financial and/or political sanctions, does the Commission intend to take to protect the Monastery's cultural heritage and prevent it from being turned into a tourist attraction, against the will of the religious community?

Submitted: 29.5.2025

**Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas on behalf of the European Commission
(10 July 2025)**

The EU and the EU Delegation in Cairo are aware of and continue to monitor the recent developments in Egypt after the Ismailia Court of Appeals issued a ruling linked to the legal status of Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai.

In a meeting called by the Arab Republic of Egypt's Foreign Ministry, the Egyptian authorities assured Member States' Ambassadors and the EU Head of Delegation in Cairo that the Egyptian government remains fully committed to preserving the monastery's religious, historical, and spiritual status, adding that the current status of the area around Saint Catherine's Monastery is untouchable. It was reaffirmed that the monks' access to the site will not be affected by the court ruling.

The EU welcomes the commitments of the governments of Greece and Egypt to work together towards safeguarding the rights of Saint Catherine's Monastery and awaits any new developments with regard to its legal status.

The EU will continue to follow the situation closely and await the result of the discussions between the Egyptian and Greek Authorities, insisting on the necessity to preserve the monastery's religious, historical, and spiritual status, in accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Heritage Convention ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Heritage convention website, Saint Catherine Monastery: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/954/>.