

# Presentation of the Opening of the Hagia Sophia Mosque in the Printed Media of Islamic Countries

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## Abstract

Countries that want to improve their power and prestige need to implement cultural diplomacy strategies effectively and efficiently along with traditional foreign policy arguments. In this article the news discourse about an event in countries having the same religion will be examined and the importance of cultural diplomacy will be emphasized. While Hagia Sophia was a place of worship for the Christian Orthodox faith, it was converted into a mosque on May 30, 1453 then a museum in 1934, and a mosque again in 2020. News about the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque in the printed media, which are the samples of the Islamic countries in the population of the research, were categorized according to the subject headings in line with the purpose of the research and transferred to the Maxqda 2018 program, then later analyzed and interpreted with the content analysis method. It has been observed that there is a correlation between the intensity of negative evaluations in the public opinion of Islamic countries and the sharp deterioration in Turkey-Arab world relations. Findings of the analysis of the news have been evaluated in terms of political communication strategies.

**Key Words:** Political Communication, Hagia Sophia Mosque, Communication, Public Diplomacy, International Communication.

## Öz

Güç ve itibarlarını geliştirmek isteyen ülkeler, geleneksel dış politika argümanları yanında kültürel diplomasi stratejilerini de etkili uygulamalıdır. Makalede aynı dine mensup ülkelerde bir eyleme yönelik haberlerin söylemleri incelenecek olup kültürel diplomasinin önemi de vurgulanacaktır. Ayasofya, Hristiyan Ortodoks inancının ibadet yeri iken 30 Mayıs 1453'te camiye çevrilmiş, daha sonra 1934 yılında müzeye, 2020 yılında tekrar camiye dönüştürülmüştür. Araştırmanın evreninde yer alan İslam ülkelerinin örneklemi olan yazılı basınlarında, Ayasofya'nın tekrar camiye dönüştürülmesi ile ilgili gazete haberleri araştırmanın amacı doğrultusunda konu başlıklarına göre kategorize edilerek Maxqda 2018 programına aktarılmış ve içerik analizi yöntemi ile incelenip yorumlanmıştır. İslam kamuoyundaki olumsuz değerlendirmelerin yoğunluğu ile Türkiye-Arap dünyası ilişkilerindeki keskin bozulma arasında bağlantı olduğu görülmüştür. Haberlerin analizlerinden çıkan bulgular siyasal iletişim stratejileri açısından değerlendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyasal İletişim, Ayasofya Camii, İletişim, Kamu Diplomasisi, Uluslararası İletişim.

## Introduction

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, substantial volume of literature has focused on the media's critical role in observing the legislative, executive and judicial actions of the state or government, and has characterized the media as the fourth power controlling and guiding today's societies (Eizenstat 2004, p.15). The media has already become an instrument for shaping and transforming society with its power.

Arab and Turkish societies developed an attitude that was not considered positive towards each other during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. The efforts of colonial governments like as Britain and France in Arab communities have had a significant role in the creation of this attitude. The majority of the citizens of the states in the article's research population are Arabs and Persians in Iran.

The fourth power, media, is used to disseminate psychological and sociological information and ideas, as well as to influence society's perception. Newspapers, television, radio, and cinema are among the most effective mass media for long-term public diplomacy, which is built on long-term communication and relationships in altering unfavorable and unjust judgements in the target countries and establishing positive understanding between nations. Data derived from newspaper news, which is one of these tools, will be examined.

According to Oskay (2015, p.15) "Communications is defined as communicating of attitudes, judgements, thoughts and emotions that are taken place in a community or community life that is composed of people who inform each other about the changes in objects, events and facts in their environment, transfer their knowledge about them, originate from similar life experiences in the face of the same phenomena, objects, problems, have similar feelings and express them to each other. Communication sciences "investigate, observe, categorize and interpret the discussions, information, news broadcasts, sharing and exchange phenomena that contribute to the idea of living together. Communication studies have studied the following phenomena in particular: technical instruments and tools, and their uses,

symbolic and functional practices, languages, rules and regulations, circulation of knowledge and information, polemics, policies and strategies" (Perriault, 2016, p.9).

News that may pull societies into conflict with their own states and expose countries with more negative news to public pressure on the global platform is also an area of interest for communication studies in international politics, where the interests of states and societies are protected (Ocak, 2019, p.1465).

News discourses embody the phenomena observed by communication sciences, such as the circulation of knowledge and information, as well as languages, polemics, and politics. The newspaper reports about the reopening of the Hagia Sophia Mosque are from our research area's written press, which includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, and Oman, as well as Egypt and Jordan, which are also known as Gulf Countries. The fact that the written press of 9 countries, including Egypt and Jordan, which have key places in the Islamic world, as well as 7 countries, with the exception of Iraq, which has a Persian Gulf coast, are the topic of the study, is considered as a limitation in the study.

A country's ability to represent itself properly and intelligibly to domestic and foreign audiences, in tandem with the policies it pursues, is strategically vital. Other countries' perceptions of you are frequently different from what actually occurs. As a result, views of global public opinion within the context of international communication must be measured. Therefore, it will be investigated how the inauguration of the Hagia Sophia Mosque is seen in the print media of chosen nations with a significant role in the Islamic world, and if the truth is suppressed.

News is the information. That is what we learned. It is what we do not know before reading, hearing or watching. It is the transmission of events to people who are unaware. It is gathering of information about an event, situation or phenomenon. It is a report of an event (Altun, 2007, p.5). Discourses in news pieces help us comprehend the power/power relations regarding the structures in which they take place. Every

regime underpins ideology (Öztürk, 2015, p.75). The discourses of the countries based on different ideologies and regimes in the news texts are also different. News discourses are not distinct from the prevailing discourses of society to which they belong. It encompasses all of the society's prevailing discourses as well as the society's beliefs and values. The goal of the news analyses performed for these discourses is to elucidate the unseen meanings of the language in the news pieces.

States pay attention to the public opinions of other countries, the United Nations (UN), regional pacts, etc. while establishing and implementing their foreign policies. In what discourses they reported news on the conversion of Hagia Sophia from museum to mosque is crucial to know how the public opinion of Islamic nations and the countries of other religions, which is part of the world public opinion, see and understand the inauguration of Hagia Sophia. It will be seen with this study if the public diplomacy activities that should be carried out within the scope of the understanding effort prior to the understanding effort are sufficient and effective for Turkey.

Public diplomacy, which is also recognized as a new political communication strategy, may appear like a government act, yet it is ultimately an important way of communication. It is a type of communication activity that may be done even for specific subjects within the effort to exchange information with other societies.

Public diplomacy, according to Riggins (1998:4), is a government's endeavor to openly establish foreign public opinion and disseminate accurate information structured to achieve national goals, interests and objectives. It is widely acknowledged that Turkey has not been able to express itself well to the rest of the world, more specifically to the Islamic world, as in the Cyprus or Armenian issues. The lack of influence and efficacy in public diplomacy reveals itself in foreign policy, notably in the Turkic Republics and Islamic countries, particularly in the recent periods when membership negotiations are being carried out as a candidate to the EU. Certainly, the current situation is not just due to a lack of influence and efficiency in public diplomacy. After all, it is well-

known that international relations are based on mutual interest.

The policy pursued has been important in public diplomacy. On the one hand, policy refers to the process of reconciling different segments of society and power relations on a common ground; on the other hand communication (political communication) refers to the process of reconciliation on the basis of agreement through creating common symbols and conducting interpretations and discussions on them. Practices are conducted through policy while policy is conducted through communication. According to Harold Laswell, policy and communication processes are tightly interdependent (Oktay, 2002, p.7). Public diplomacy, as a new strategy of political communication aimed at having a positive impact on the public opinion of the target countries by following public relations methods, can allow these countries to establish a relationship with their public that military cannot achieve, but it can be said that the opening of the Hagia Sophia Mosque has not been used effectively for Turkey.

Muslims encounters religious challenges that differ sufficiently from one another to have an impact on their socio-economic development based on the geography they live in the world, as well as face socio-economic problems that overshadow their religious life individually or as a community (Kalaycı, & Aytakin, 2016, p.53). Despite the fact that the Islamic countries in the research area are geographically close to each other, they have various sects, ethnic structures and socio-economic problems. This variance, together with cultural differences and policies has resulted in varied approaches of countries to this research topic.

As Gadimov (2012, p.219) points out, while the media propagandizes for the state, it actually solely takes on the official viewpoint and standpoint, disregards opposing or alternative viewpoints, and never engages in investigation beyond the official statement. Since, it is very simple and affordable to convey the official view. Investigating whether the official view is correct incurs extra expenses. When the media conveys a subject, they may look at the subject from a different perspective and disregard the subject

they should see. In terms of international communication, it is also important to determine how the issue of reopening a mosque that has been converted into a museum into use as a mosque is handled in the media in tandem with the policies of the countries and their distance and closeness to Turkey.

## Method

Newspaper reports related to the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque in the print press, which are the samples of the Islamic countries in the population of the research, will be categorized based on the topics headings in line with the purpose of the research, transferred to the Maxqda 2018 program and analyzed and interpreted using the content analysis method. Content analysis is an analytical method. Analysis, which implies breaking down a whole into its components, is employed as a way of comprehending and thinking by different fields of science (Türer, 1991:321).

Findings obtained from the news analysis will be examined in terms of political communication strategies. Furthermore, it will be demonstrated how the prevailing ideologies in the countries in the population of the study are reflected in the news of the newspapers in tandem with the policies of those countries.

## Findings

Hagia Sophia museum, which was used as a mosque from 1453 until 1934, began to be utilized as a mosque again after 86 years by the decree of the Council of State, the highest administrative court in the administrative jurisdiction of the Republic of Turkey.

The news that satisfied our need to be informed in our daily and social life has a significant role in our lives. News;

- On the one hand, it is regarded as a phenomenon that “transmits what is in the truth” with a liberal pluralist approach, also known as the mainstream, on the other hand,

- It is examined via critical approach that perceives as an “ideological discourse”.

In our research, we took on critical approach from these two methods, which are commonly used in news research. In a critical approach, news appears as either a distorted knowledge of the event or as a reconstruction of reality (Dursun, 2007, p.109). The liberal pluralist mainstream approach believes that mass communication and news are quantifiable and observable and it attempts to reveal the impact of news on individuals and societies. The critical approach, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between power centers, media and society. As a result, unlike the mainstream, it argues that, in tandem with the ownership structure of the media, economic and political forces influence the discourse and content in the media, and that the mass media are ideological instruments. Therefore, it is explicitly specified that countries report on the issue of working with their ideologies in a critical approach. In Stuart Hall's words, the media's ideological influence stems from its capacity to “describe” the situation. From a critical standpoint, the media's descriptions of the situation are characterized by the word “construction of ideology.” According to Stuart Hall, the media's ideological power is derived from “the capacity to describe the situation (Shoemaker and Reese, 1997, p.103)”.

Language and discourse, according to Van Dijk (1999, p.42), who studies the link between the notions of discourse and ideology, are among the social practices most influenced by ideology. Language and discourse also have an impact on how we acquire, learn, and change ideologies. The majority of the discourse we use, especially when speaking as a member of a group, consists of ideologically based ideas.

When the discursive structures of news texts are investigated, they reveal themselves to be closed texts with distinct characteristics. Different discourses leaked into the news result in more dominant discourses coming to the fore in the organization of the news and the text closing around these discourses (İnal, 1995, p.116).

Our research field includes the Islamic countries located in Ceziretularap, also known as Al-Cezire, with the full name Shibhu Cezireti'l-Arab (Arabian Peninsula) abbreviated, along with Iran and Egypt. These are Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Sultanate of Oman. Six countries in the Arabian Peninsula (excluding Jordan) are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and are ruled by a monarchy. While Iran has been ruled by a unique republican administration under the name of the Islamic Republic since 1979, Egypt is the only one among others which is governed by the republican administration. As Islamic countries, the way they deal with such a specific issue in their media is important and arouses public curiosity. All the countries in our research area are also members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which consists of 57 member states.

### **News Reports about the Opening of the Hagia Sophia Mosque:**

#### **EGYPT PRESS**

In the news dated 10 July 2020;

Liberal-tendency Al Youm Al Sabie Newspaper with a daily circulation of 5.000 carried the news as "Erdogan trades with Hagia Sophia", "Reading Turkey's attitudes - Mu'taz Billah Abdelfettah",

The Egyptian Gazette, which is pro-regime and is published daily with a circulation of 3,000, carried the news as "Greece condemns Turkey's decision to convert Hagia Sophia into mosque".

On July 11, 2020, it is noteworthy that the Egyptian press more focused more on this subject.

"Erdogan's decision to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque. European Union: The decision is heartbreaking. UNESCO condemns",

After headlined in The Egyptian Gazette as "UNESCO warns Turkey against the conversion of Hagia Sophia mosque; "How does the President of Turkey utilize religion to consolidate his dictatorship?" ... news has been released.

According to statement made by Global Fatwa Index (GFI) of the Egyptian Mufti<sup>1</sup> and the General Secretariat of Fatwa Institutions and Commissions in the World, Erdoğan's decision to convert the Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque confirms the validity of what the Index stated in its report last March (2020), the Index report stated that Erdoğan used the mosque as a political card to recapture his lost popularity which he is dependent and he aimed to draw voter's attention from the economic problems caused by the devaluation of the Turkish Lira and his failure to cope with the corona virus crisis, in order to achieve political gains from them and to use them for his religious interests.

Following the publication of Erdogan's plans in its previous report, the Fatwa Index was exposed to a severe attack with the orders of the Turkish boss by terrorist pro-ikhvans (society of the Muslim brothers) through social media platforms and satellite channels. Their goal was to divert attention away from the report alleging that Erdogan used the weapon of religion and fatwa to expand his regional influence, under the guise of resurrecting the caliphate that had previously been buried in Turkish territory by Ataturk, in an attempt to revive the Ottoman trend, or what Arab scholars called "neo-Ottomanism."

The Fatwa Index stressed that the decision to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque was taken nationally and politically under the guise of religion. This decision is not so different from the conversion of Hagia Sophia from a mosque to a museum or converting ancient Cordoba Mosque into a church. All of these are actions that serve politics, not religious ones, and the call to prayer in Hagia Sophia is nothing more than a trick of using religious rites for political purposes.

The Fatwa Index states that by putting on the Hagia Sophia issue under a religious cover, Erdogan and his party hope to win over Turkey's conservative electoral bloc through the ballot boxes, while also trying to create large Muslim masses abroad and justify their dubious expansionist actions in Libya, Syria, Iraq and other countries in order to build the image of the "Great

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<sup>1</sup> Global Fatwa Index, which is affiliated with the Daru'l Ifta Fiqh Council, Egypt's top official institution of Islamic law.

Savior" by attempting to restore the Caliphate in people's minds. Furthermore, the Fatwa Index reminded that this decision, which was taken purposely to Europe which gave the honor of joining the union to smaller countries but not to Turkey, is taken in response to a series of confusions at home and abroad of a regime that overwhelmed its people economically and politically and lost domestic and foreign support.

The Fatwa Index noted that portraying the matter as an Islamic issue or a new conquest is a falsehood, because religious realities order us to approach the beliefs of others in good faith, to respect their holiness and places of worship, and all these are the teachings and principles of Islam. Caliph Omar bin Khattab declined to pray in the church as he feared that the Muslims would convert it into a mosque after him. This is also how Amr bin As acted when he arrived Egypt. Erdogan's lost dream of leadership, on the other hand, drives him to employ all means necessary to attain his goal.

The Index stated that a decision to close the brothels spread all over Turkey is more useful to Muslims than converting the museum into a mosque. Similarly, the decision to stop the influx of mercenaries killing Muslims in Libya is more beneficial than converting the museum into a mosque. The decision not to loot the wealth of the peoples and not to starve the Muslims is more line with God than converting a museum into a mosque. A constitutional definition of Islamic state rather than secularism is preferable than converting a museum into a mosque.

The Fatwa Index stated that Erdogan's actions put the world situation (Crusader and Islamic) in danger back to idea of two opposing camps, while Far-Right movements of the West, at the same time led fundamentalist terrorist groups to fight on an issue for which God has not sent clear evidence, thereby reducing the likelihood of human brotherhood and rapprochement, but encouraging supporters of each side to use hate discourses.

*Why has Hagia Sophia been converted into a mosque now?*

The Global Fatwa Index stated that the issue of converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque was raised prior to the elections ten years ago, but it has

remained a tool and propaganda weapon in the hands of various politicians in the Turkish regime's campaigns to politicize religion or use religious policy slogans, particularly to attract religious voters.

After all the wilting leaves of his old tree had fallen and now he had nothing left to deceive his supporters, converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque became an electoral weapon in Erdoğan's hands. Erdogan and his soldiers brought this up again whenever they needed the people's support.

## IRAN PRESS

In the news published on 10-12 July 2020,

- "The Hagia Sophia Problem; Erdogan's decision to convert Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque sparked international reaction." (with reference to Iran, Al-Cezire and AFP)

The titles "Turkish Council of State approved the decision to transform Hagia Sophia into a Mosque: Erdogan's Trump" (Etemad).

- In the article titled Hagia Sophia cannot save Erdogan." (Etemad, Article, Author Turec Atabeki), the author mentioned the history of Hagia Sophia from its construction to its present, its conversion from a church to a mosque and a museum during the Republic, and he described the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a museum as a symbol of the heritage of the Republic and the multicultural structure of İstanbul, and considered the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque as a continuation of the policies of the Ak Party and the President to separate from the Republican discourse in line with the neo-Ottomanism to adhere to the tradition of the Ottoman Empire.

The author argued that President Erdogan and other Turkish authorities' rejection of neo-Ottomanism policies, were purely tactical, and that it was understood that Turkey's recent regional policies, more specifically its attitude towards Northern Iraq and Northern Syria, acted entirely in the direction of reviving the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, the Turkish and Turcoman militia units dispatched to Northern Syria were named after Ottoman sultans such as Abdülhamit, Fatih, Sultan Süleyman, Beyazıt and the like, and that the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque was

done with the purpose of temporarily rallying and persuading conservatives, including the Islamist capitalist faction that formed in the 20 years that passed during the difficult days of the AK Party, behind its leader, but because of long-term economic problems, such symbolic initiatives could not save “Erdoğan” from the problems he faced. At the end of the article, he noted that the US and Greece are at the top of the groups opposing to the resolution, that this initiative would not have significant impact on US-Turkey relations and would lead to increased tension between them, but the situation in the Orthodox world, especially in Greece, is different and could affect the relations between Turkey and these countries.

In another article titled “The History of Hagia Sophia from the Cathedral to the Great Mosque: The story of 1500 years of religious conflict” (Etemad- Hagia Sophia History), the history of Hagia Sophia was explained in detail and the following points were added at the end:

“Hagia Sophia is regarded as a symbol of religious tolerance and the ability of people from various religions and sects to live together until today. However, we must wait to find out what can happen to this historical building after Erdoğan’s recent decision to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque.”

The news titled “World reacts to reconverting Hagia Sophia into a mosque” (Tehran Times) also includes the reactions of Church Leaders, UNESCO, EU, Greek Cypriot Administration, USA, Greece, RF, HAMAS and TRNC, regarding the opening of Hagia Sophia to worship.

On the other hand, according to Anadolu Agency (AA) news dated 13 July 2021, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mousavi; Speaking to about the decision to open Hagia Sophia as a mosque, he said, “We are happy with the decision to open Hagia Sophia, which was welcomed by the people of Turkey and Muslims.”

Regarding the reactions from some countries to this decision, Mousavi remarked that, “The decision regarding the situation of Hagia Sophia is an internal matter of Turkey. This is a matter to be considered within the context of Turkey’s national sovereignty.”

## KUWAIT PRESS

In the press dated 12 July 2020, following news reports are included;

Turkey’s court annulled a 1934 Cabinet decree that had ordered Istanbul’s Hagia Sofia to have become a museum, allowing it to be a mosque again (KUNA).

The following statements were briefly recorded in the news: “Erdoğan turned iconic museum into mosque to widen support: Converting Istanbul’s Byzantine-era cathedral Hagia Sophia back into a mosque will allow Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to expand his Islamic and nationalist base and divide the opposition, experts count. But the move will heighten tensions between the West and Turkey’s veteran leader Erdoğan, who has been grappling with an economic crisis and regional conflicts in several nearby countries, they say (Kuwait Times).”

Also, in the press

- Amidst international condemnation, Erdoğan challenges and changes the status of Hagia Sofia. (Al Travel)

-- Erdoğan appeases his voters with the news titled “Hagia Sophia mosque” (Al Qabas) has been published.

## BAHRAIN PRESS

In the press dated 10-12 July 2020; the following news reports are included;

-Erdoğan rejects criticism about the conversion of Hagia Sophia (The Daily Tribune)

- Erdoğan: The first prayer was held in Hagia Sophia on July 24 (Al Ayam) Erdoğan: Holding the first prayer in Hagia Sophia on 24 July (Al Ayam)

-Hagia Sophia to be reopened for worship, UNESCO warns (The Daily Tribune)

- A Turkish court opens the way for the conversion of the Hagia Sophia to a mosque and Erdoğan announces it is open to Muslims for prayer (Al Ayam)

-Constant international condemnation of Erdoğan’s controversial decision on Hagia Sophia (Akhbar Al Khaleej)

- Erdogan transforms Hagia Sophia into a mosque and opens it to Muslims for prayer (Akhbar Al Khaleej)

- World Council of Churches: Transforming Hagia Sophia into a mosque gives rise to grief and resentment (Al Ayam).

### PRESS IN SAUDI ARABIA (SA)

Two conflicting statements reveal Erdoğan's intention according to an editorial in the newspaper dated 10-12 July 2020 titled "*Sultan who exploits religion, lies and contradictions syndrome-Hagia Sophia (Okaz)*".

"The first statement intended to deceive the Arabs with the words linking "Hagia Sophia" and "Masjid al-Aqsa". The mosque will be open to Muslims, non-Muslims, Turks and everyone else according to the English statement. The ill Ottoman leader tries to save his collapsed popularity and failed policies in Turkey and abroad through this contradiction.

Deputy Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a member of HDP, reacted sharply to the decision to convert the Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque and telling Erdoğan, "You cannot cover up evil with this decision."

An attempt to engage the public and divert attention from the economic crisis:

An opinion survey revealed that the majority of Turkish people associate Erdoğan's Hagia Sophia decision with deteriorating economic conditions in Turkey. While others think it's a game, the ruling party hopes it will go into effect before the snap elections. It is evident that the President of Turkey is attempting to gain the support of conservative voters in Turkey with his speeches and attempts to revive the Ottoman Empire.

"What were you thinking when you made the decision on Hagia Sophia Church? In another editorial entitled "

President Erdogan signed the decree to convert Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque. This has become a global issue, and Erdogan and his party have exploited it politically, giving Erdogan strong incentives to annex West Bank territory, including Al-Aqsa Mosque, while ignoring Muslim interests in the world.

I'd like to underline a few aspects about this decision

- 1- Islam outlaws harming, cutting down trees, killing animals and destroying homes and dwellings so that the Islamic message we give to the world stays humanitarian and in line with Allah's law.
- 2- Because Hagia Sophia is full of tombs and graves of Ottoman sultans, it is not permitted to pray in its mosque.
- 3- Converting Hagia Sophia, even as a reaction to the conversion of the Cordoba Mosque into a cathedral, may be against the law. Mosques should not be subjected to political exploitation and electoral ambitions as in Turkey.
- 4- This action will increase hostility between Christians and Muslims in the long run.

Official voice of the SA regime by Wafaa Al Rasheed on July 13, 2020 in Okaz published article is recorded below:

#### "Hagia Sophia and Erdogan's Stupidity

The timing of the announcement that the Hagia Sophia Museum would be converted into a mosque is stupid and provocative to the civilized world. The purposes of converting into a mosque are obvious and unjust. We also noticed differences and contradictions between the Turkish President's Arabic pronouncements, such as "Hagia Sophia, the return of Muslims and Ottoman civilization" and his English statements. We have detected the difference and manipulation of information directed to Arabs and the West! But why just now? Now, because the decision is a purely political tool to recover its popularity in Turkey after the economic downturn, the deterioration of security, the collapse of the lira and foreign diplomatic failure in Syria, Iraq and Libya! Erdogan certainly will now take advantage of the condemnation of countries and organizations to portray himself the leader and defender of the Islamic world. The most significant question is that what advantage it would offer to Muslims around the world if Hagia Sophia was converted a mosque? Would Erdogan accept if Jews converted the Dome of the Rock into a temple?



“Erdogan’s illusions: Hagia Sophia is neither Mecca nor Medina” is said in the commentary signed by Mohammed Al Saaed, which was also published in the Okaz newspaper on 13 July 2020.

## JORDAN PRESS

While there aren’t many pieces of news in the Jordanian press on the Hagia Sophia’s conversion to a mosque, the news titled “Erdogan rebuffs criticism over Hagia Sophia conversion to mosque” (AFP-Jordan Times) in the written press on July 11, 2020 was found noteworthy.

## QATAR PRESS

In the Qatari press, which was observed to adopt a politically supportive attitude towards Turkey, following piece of news are published;

- “Hagia Sophia will be open to everyone: President (The Peninsula, 10 July 2020).

In a statement on Friday, the Turkish President said that after Turkey completes all the preparations, it will open Hagia Sophia to worship on July 24 at Friday prayers.

-Hagia Sophia in Istanbul was declared a mosque after the decision of the Turkish court. (Gulf Times 11 July 2020).

- Erdogan: Hagia Sophia to be reopened for Muslim worship (Asharq Al Awsat, 11 July 2020).

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated on Friday that Hagia Sophia, one of the architectural wonders of the world, will be reopened for Muslim worship, sparking anger in the Christian community and neighboring Greece.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) PRESS

In the news titled “Turkey’s reopening of Hagia Sophia as Mosque ‘Emboldens Extremists’” published on 12 July 2020 in The National, the unofficial English language organ of Abu Dhabi:

*“Cultural landmarks should neither be misused nor changed,” said a UAE minister, following Turkey’s move to revoke Hagia Sophia’s decades-old museum status and reopen it as a mosque.*

*The resolution by Turkey’s highest administrative court on Friday was greeted with worry by US, French,*

*Russian and Greek officials, as well as Christian church leaders.*

*The UNESCO World Heritage site was built in the 6th century as a cathedral of the Greek Orthodox Church by the Byzantine emperor Justinian before it was converted into a mosque under the Ottoman Empire nine centuries later.*

*It was declared a museum in 1934 after the establishment of the secular modern Turkish Republic in 1923 and is one of the most visited monuments in Turkey.*

*...The Minister underlined the importance of UNESCO’s statement emphasizing that Hagia Sophia is a part of Istanbul’s rich history.*

*“Designated by UNESCO as a heritage museum. It is an architectural marvel and a unique witness to the interaction between Asia and Europe over the centuries. It is a symbol of dialogue,” he said.*

*UNESCO said that countries hosting cultural heritage sites should not alter them in a way that would undermine their extraordinary universal value.*

*The UAE is a member of the board of directors of UNESCO.*

In the news dated 13 July 2020;

- EU: Ankara is moving away from European values (Al Khaleej)

- Erdogan decided to change the status of Hagia Sophia (Al Ittihad)

- The World Council of Churches “feared” that the status of Hagia Sophia would change (The National)

- USA disappointed by Turkey’s decision to change the status of Hagia Sophia (The National)

- Erdogan: The first call to prayer in Hagia Sophia will be read on July 24 (Gulf News).

## OMAN PRESS

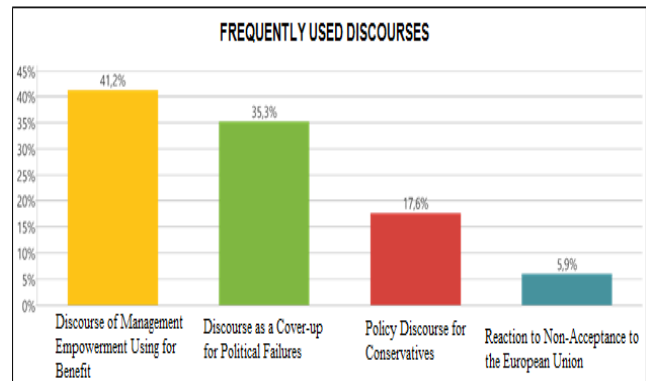
The Grand Mufti of Oman, Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad Al Khalili, put out a statement on 12 July 2020 on his official twitter address, saying “I congratulated the Islamic world, especially Mr. President and the Turkish nation, on the reopening of Hagia Sophia as a mosque, he said that the brave step taken for this mosque, which was a symbol for Muslims from Fatih Sultan Mehmet to the last Ottoman sultans, was appreciated.

The above news has been analyzed with the MAXQDA 2018 program. As part of the qualitative research, codes were developed before the data and then similar codes were gathered under the same theme. It has been found that the news generated in accordance with the codes transferred to the Maxqda 2018 program are gathered under 4 different discourses. Accordingly, the frequently used discourses in the news and their numbers are given in the table as follows:

**Table 1. The Frequently Used Discourses In The News And Their Numbers**

<b>1 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</b>	
1.1 Positive Reactions to Worship Opening	1
1.2 Discourse on the Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction	3
1.3 Conservative Policy Discourse	1
<b>2 QATAR</b>	
2.1 Breaking News	1
<b>3 JORDAN</b>	
3.1 Discourse on the Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction	1
<b>4 SA</b>	
4.1 Discourse on the Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction	1
4.2 The contrast of Islamic practices in Turkey	2
4.3 Policy Discourse for Conservatives	2
4.4 Discourse as a Cover-up for Political Failures	6
4.5 Economic Discourse	1
4.6 Discourse to Cause Political Conflict	3
4.7 Discourse on the Use of Religion and Fatwa for Benefit	4
<b>5 SAUDI ARABIA</b>	
5.1 Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction Discourse	4
<b>6 KUWAIT</b>	
6.1 Management Empowerment Discourse of Use for Benefit	1
6.2 Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction Discourse	1
6.3 Discourse of Causing Political Conflict	1
6.4 Policy Discourse for Conservatives	1
<b>7 IRAN</b>	
7.1 Positive Reactions to Opening to Worship	4
7.2 Uncertainty of Hagia Sophia's Future	1
7.3 Religious Conflict/Discourse of Conflict	1
7.4 Discourse to Cause Political Conflict	1
7.5 Policy Discourse for Conservatives	1
7.6 Discourse of Leadership to Bring Back the Caliphate	2
7.7 Management Empowerment Discourse of Use for Interest	2
7.8 Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction Discourse	3
<b>8 EGYPT</b>	
8.1 Economic Discourse	1
8.2 Speech of Condemnation	2
8.2.1 Discourse of being under attack from social media and visual media	1
8.3 Warning-Ultimatum-Reaction Discourse	1
8.4 Management Empowerment Discourse of Use for Interest	7
8.4.1 Discourse of Decision Taken in Reaction to Non-Acceptance to the European Union	1
8.4.2 Policy Discourse for Conservatives	3
8.5 Discourse as a Cover-up for Political Failures	1
8.6 Discourse on the Use of Religion and Fatwa for Benefit	5
8.6.1 Discourse of Leadership to Bring Back the Caliphate	1
8.7 Quoting the Lives of Islamic Leaders	1
8.8 Contrast of Islamic practices in Turkey	2
8.9 Discourse to Cause Political Conflict	1
<b>9 OMAN</b>	
9.1 Positive Reactions to Opening to Worship	1

When we graph the table, the ratio of the different discourses created can be seen more clearly:



**Graphic 1. Frequently Used Discourses According to Media News**

## Conclusion and Evaluation

It is not how a country perceives itself that matters in the international arena, but how other countries perceive it. As a result, the outcomes obtained will be valuable data for the executive actors. The issue of the conversion of Hagia Sophia which literally means "Holy Wisdom" (Thevenot, 1978: 59), into a mosque, and its subsequent reopening, has been widely evaluated and criticized as following arguments mostly in Christian countries, more specifically in Orthodox countries; Turkey's "Islamization/religiousness", "Blow to laic/secular understanding" and "Returning to neo-Ottomanism".

It was noted in the study that negative reactions were observed in the media of non-Muslim countries, located adjacent to Turkey, as well as the negative reactions in the media of non-Muslim countries. As a result of the analysis, the following ratio and form were found in the research of news discourses from nine different Islamic countries; 41.2% Management empowerment, discourse of use for profit, 35.3% Discourse as a means of covering up political failures, 17.6%, Policy discourse for the conservative, 5.9% The discourse of the decision taken in response to not being admitted to the European Union.

One of the concepts on which the battle to generate meaning can be seen in the context of the presentation of the Hagia Sophia Mosque

inauguration is "Religion and Fatwa Usage. Many Islamic countries in the subject of studies, particularly Egypt, have employed the concept of politicizing religion via fatwas. This research also revealed the use of ideology within the framework of religion in terms of journalism practices. In this regard, it has been noticed that the news in the discourses formed in Islamic countries in the context of journalism practices also affects international communication as a side of the power struggle.

With the expansion of communication technologies along with globalization, it is no longer possible to consider international relations as solely interstate affairs. Other than states, today non-state players have begun to play an active part in the international system. It is now possible to say that achieving absolute success with hard power has become difficult, if not impossible. As a result, it should not be overlooked to engage in public diplomacy, which is a powerful tool for influencing local and international public opinion and having a favorable effect, particularly on global public opinion. The events that have developed in the world show that public diplomacy has risen to prominence among foreign policy instruments. Developed powerful states that use public diplomacy are making efforts to create a positive perception in global public opinion by engaging cultural diplomacy activities in line with their goals.

There is also an association between the intensity of negative evaluations in the Islamic public in the subject of study and the severe deterioration in the relations between Turkey and the Arab world. It has been determined that positive evaluations have been made in Qatar and Oman, where the relations are better. It is understood that many structures, particularly the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), of which Turkey is a member, were not used effectively in such an important action for the Islamic world. It can be said that the cultural diplomacy activities, which are one of the tools of public diplomacy and carried out with the goal of conveying the cultural values of Turkey to the societies in other countries and gaining

appreciation, have not yielded enough positive results in this respect.

As a result of the above-mentioned findings, it was concluded that Turkey was unable to conduct sufficiently effective public diplomacy on the subject of the study. It is seen that the reopening of the Hagia Sophia Mosque, which should have been embraced ideologically by the Islamic world, has been converted into a public diplomacy campaign against Turkey for political objectives.

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