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### **Athens' first-ever mosque is closely guarded**

La croix international (18.12.20) - <https://cutt.ly/LhMT7Ng> - In Greece, where Orthodox Christianity is inseparable from the state, the construction of the capital's first mosque has been met with much resistance

It cannot be seen and no sound can be heard coming from it. But in the popular Botaniko neighborhood of Athens, everyone knows it is there somewhere.

Suddenly, a stone's throw from the Church of St. Christopher, the mosque can be spotted. It stands behind a gatehouse where a policeman checks people's documents.

"Are you a believer or a journalist?" he asks.

It doesn't matter, actually. Proof of identity is required in any case.

We are in front of the first mosque ever built in Athens since the independence of the country in 1821.

It is a non-descript white building of 1,000 square meters that can accommodate 370 people.

There is no minaret, but there is a space reserved for women and a marble fountain in the middle of a cobblestone courtyard.

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### **Greek Orthodox church in Lesvos vandalized by refugees**

Greek Reporter (02.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2VTR8AL> - Images are emerging of a Greek Orthodox church in Lesvos which was destroyed by vandals. Here is one below. See more at <https://bit.ly/3cFLBDK> and video at <https://ruptly.tv/en/videos/20200303-080>





The small church of Hagios Georgios (Saint George) near the village of Moria on Lesbos was vandalized by unknown assailants on Monday.

Some local people are blaming a group of migrants who live at the nearby camp for the act. They claim that when police prevented a march by hundreds of migrants demanding to be transferred to Athens, a group of around twenty of them went to the church and took their revenge by destroying the nave and the altar.

Images also show that the assailants destroyed icons and furniture. Hagios Georgios has been vandalized several times in the recent past, local residents say. There have been no arrests for the latest attack.

The situation on Lesbos remains tense as groups of migrants, angry with the appalling living conditions in the overcrowded Moria camp, are clashing with police almost on a daily basis.

The Moria refugee camp was originally intended to hold 3,000 individuals. As recently as last June there were 5,000 people there, according to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the only major international NGO that has a presence at the camp.

In the last six months Moria has grown to be a shanty town of 19,000, with 40 percent of of its population under 18.

Approximately 13,000 of those people are living in a filthy unofficial camp comprising tarpaulin tents and makeshift huts made of pallets, in an olive grove surrounding the main site.

There is no electricity, not enough water and rivers of mud and rubbish run through the tents.

Other sources:

## First Mosque of Greece to open its doors upcoming spring

*The Greek government is overseeing the service of its first-constructed mosque since gaining independence in 1821.*



**Athene's mosque, located in the Votanikos district. Photo Credit: Deutsche Welle/ A. Tzortzinis.**

By **Wouter Ijzerman**

Morocco World News (20.02.2020) - After years of debate and empty promises, [Greece](#) is set to open the doors of its first official mosque in the coming Spring. Initially, the Greek government planned to complete the mosque by 2004, coinciding with hosting the [Olympic games](#). But with a legacy of 400-year Ottoman occupation, the construction of the mosque became a point of contention over the last two decades.

Once used as the site of a naval base, the government chose the Votanikos district for the construction of the mosque. Greek parliament reiterated the pledge in 2016, the [National Herald](#) reported. Meanwhile, the estimated 500.000 Muslims living in Greece make do with makeshift mosques in buildings, basements, and empty warehouses, as places of worship.

In the summer of 2019, the then Minister of Education and Religious Affairs oversaw the first official opening of the mosque, pending completion of security arrangements, administration, and cleaning services. “The right to religious freedom does not depend on how one ended up in our country. It’s like the right to education and health care (...) It is a non-negotiable human right,” the minister said, as reported by [The Greek Reporter](#).

## **Praise and criticism**

The construction of the mosque was met with both praise and criticism within the Muslim community. As the imam of the mosque, Sidi Mohammed Zaki expressed his gratitude to the Greek government and people: “The best person for Allah is the one who offers something to humanity. We thank the Greek people for accepting us as Greek citizens and Muslims, and I thank the Greek state for helping us set up this space.”

However, President of the Muslim Association of Greece Naim Elghandhour deplored the appearance of the mosque and sees it as an example of the inequality Muslims have to cope with in modern Greece. In March of last year, Elghandhour took his disappointment to Thema 104.6 radio, stating: [“Is this the mosque they’ve been telling us about for so many years?”](#).

Though the new mosque is funded by the state, Elghandhour sees its appearance and limited seating, fit for around 300 people as a ‘pearls for swine’-attitude from Greek society. “My children go to school, to university, live equally with Greek children. But when they go to pray, one goes to church and the other goes to an underground garage. This proves to the young Muslim that he is not an equal citizen,” the [Financial Times](#) quoted Elghadour as saying.



The inside of the mosque. Photo Credit: The Greek Reporter/ Helen Skopsis.

## **Quid Pro Quo**

With the Refugee Crisis in 2015, the arrival of refugees from Islamic countries within the Middle East has fuelled an already feverish debate on the role of Islam in Greek society. In November 2016, 15 members of nationalist groups occupied the site for the mosque, citing fears for the longevity of Greek identity, as reported by [The New York Times](#).

The construction of the mosque became the topic of international debate, when [President Erdogan of Turkey](#) offered to pay for it, back in 2013. Seeking to reinstate the historical legacy of Ottoman rule within Greece, President Erdogan has expressed the desire to reopen the Fethiye Mosque in Athens, which has been closed since 1821, the year of Greece's independence.

In the same vein, the Greek government is hoping to reopen the Orthodox Halki seminary, situated on the Halki island and has been closed by Turkey since 1971. “Look you want something from us, you want the Halki seminary. And I tell you (Greece), come, let's open the Fethiye Mosque,” Erdogan stated prior to the local elections in 2019, according to [France24](#).

But, unlike Switzerland where [the construction of minarets](#) has been outlawed by virtue of a referendum in 2009, the mosque in Athens has no minarets. On a quid pro quo basis, President Erdogan suggested earlier this week that if Greece wishes to reopen the Halki seminary, the mosque in Athens must have minarets.

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