

Hello again, and welcome. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Today we travel to the beautiful and mysterious city of Istanbul, Turkey. A famous building there is the center of a dispute about what it should be! No doubt you have seen the large ancient structure in photographs. If you did not know, what would you guess? Is it a church, a mosque, or a museum? We will provide details about what it was, is, and what it might become.

Then we hear from people who love music, especially live concerts. But they say the experience is being ruined more and more by something that people carry in their pockets.

The program you are listening to is called **As It Is**. It's a way for you to learn and improve your English, courtesy of the Voice of America.

A Turkish government minister's call to return the Hagia Sophia museum in Istanbul to an Islamic worship center has started a dispute. The argument is both religious and diplomatic. The Hagia Sophia was first built as a church. And the structure remains an important sign of Christianity for many Christians.

People have always argued about the Hagia Sofia. For 1,000 years, it was the most important church of Christians at the center of the Byzantine Empire. It became a mosque when Istanbul, then called Constantinople, fell to the Ottoman Turks. Then in 1931, Turkey's secular rulers turned it into a museum. Now Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc says the present museum might again be changed. He commented in November while visiting the Hagia Sofia.

He said, "There was a time when former mosques could function as museums. But there is a different Turkey now. The Hagia Sophia is sad now. But, God willing, it will soon smile again."

Professor Istar Gozaydin of Istanbul's Dogus University is an expert on religion and the state. She says elections and politics are likely to be reasons pushing such a move.

"For a pro-Islamic government it's important to have the monument be a mosque. So now are they trying to convert it back to a mosque? It's got to do with the current political climate in the country, the local elections approaching that would be a significant source for votes."

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is already campaigning. He is travelling the country, often using a mixture of religious and nationalist speech to support changing the Hagia Sofia into a mosque. Observers say changing it back will also please many nationalist voters who see it as a sign of the once powerful Ottoman Empire.

Along with millions of tourists, many Turks also visit the Hagia Solfa every year. One such Turkish young person believes strongly that it should be turned back into a mosque. He said, "We don't want to lose our culture; we want to come here for Friday prayers. I believe with our prime minister and deputy prime minister's support, it will be a mosque again."

Istanbul is home to the Orthodox Church's Ecumenical Patriarchate. And concern is growing about the recent change from museums to mosques of two small historical churches that share the Hagia Sophia's name. Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima disapproves of the possibility of turning Istanbul's Hagia Sofia into a mosque.

"They have to realize very concretely how seriously the consequences of the whole world and the international community and how it would react. Because this historical monument is visited every year by millions of people, Christians and non-Christians who realize it's the image and picture of a religion which is Christianity. "

The Greek government has already condemned even the suggestion of turning the Hagia Sofia into a mosque. But a Turkish Foreign Ministry official says Turkey does not need speeches about religious freedom.

The official said Turkey's record for respecting the holiness of religious places is very well known and needs no proof. Some observers say that the words of the dispute could predict deeper disagreement to come.

Please Put That Away and Listen to the Music

If you ever get the chance to visit the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, you can be sure that many of the tourists will be taking pictures of the beautiful and historic building. There was a time when we used mostly large cameras and rolls of film in order to save our favorite memories. But these days, you are more likely to see people using their smartphones.

They are so handy. We make phone calls, send text messages, surf the Internet, and take photos and even movies with them. Most people love them, right?

VOA's Christopher Cruise would like to introduce you to a gentleman who thinks otherwise.

Smartphones are ruining the concert-going experience. So says Andy Greene of Rolling Stone magazine. He says he realized what a problem smartphones were becoming during a concert by singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen.

"I'm in the first row of the balcony. And I look down at the orchestra and it was like looking at the stars; almost every seat was sort of lit up by a screen and people were staring at their screens. And I just wanted to scream 'Do you realize you're watching one of the greatest songwriters ever perform some of the greatest songs ever? And it's just such a rare, unique treat, it's a gift we're all here experiencing this, and you're not even watching it. You're all on your freaking cell phones!"

Andy Greene is not the only critic of smartphones. Maura Johnston writes for a blog on the Village Voice website. She listed “Six Reasons Why Your Phone Is Probably Ruining Your Concert Experience (And Everyone Else’s).” Among her reasons, she says people filming a performance are not really listening to the music. And, she says they are not taking part in the social experience of being at a show.

Many bands are also unhappy about the use of smartphones at concerts. But, they do not want to anger concert-goers by banning the activity.

Classical pianist Krystian Zimerman recently stopped a performance when he saw someone in the theater filming him on a smartphone.

However, plenty of musicians accept such filming as a way to market their shows. Mark Katz says this is especially true for new artists. He wrote a book called “Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music.”

“Someone records what was a truly amazing performance and posts it on YouTube and it starts to get attention. That could help the performer who might not have any other way of reaching out to such a broad audience.”

Even some well-established groups support smartphone use and the social media revolution as a way to earn more money. But Rolling Stone Magazine’s Andy Greene sees no value in filming a concert.

I’m Christopher Cruise. And I’m Jim Tedder in Washington on the Voice of America. This has been **As It Is**.