



Religious holiday celebrated

The annual religious holiday of the Dormition of Virgin Mary was celebrated on Sunday throughout the country. President of the Republic Karolos Papoulias traveled to the Ionian island of Lefkada and attended a mass at the Church of the Dormition of Virgin Mary in the Vassiliki township.

Prime Minister George Papandreou attended a church service at Ekatontapyliani Church on the Cyclades island of Paros, which was officiated by Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos.

After the liturgy, the premier stressed importance

of the holiday in the Eastern Orthodox faith.

"We are witnesses to a very difficult year for Greece, our country, which however, with a collective effort and sacrifice has made the first steps. We succeeded in our first targets to overcome the crisis," Papandreou said, adding: "not only will we succeed in overcoming the crisis but we will turn it into hope; an opportunity to reform our country in order to turn it into a prosperous and strong Greece."

Papandreou also referred to the church service at the historic Panaghia Soumela monastery in Trabzon, Turkey, noting that it is a very important and historic event for Greeks hailing from the Pontus region of the southeastern Black Sea, and for all Greeks, an event which highlights a spirit of cooper-

ation and peace between the Greek and the Turkish people".

Meanwhile, main opposition New Democracy (ND) leader Antonis Samaras attended a liturgy at the monastery of Eloni, near the Leonidio district in the eastern Peloponnese.

Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) leader George Karatzaferis attended a mass at the Panaghia Soumela monastery -- named in honour of the Trabzon site -- in Vermio, northern Greece.

Finally, government vice president Theodoros Pangalos represented the government at the celebration that took place on the island of Tinos at the Church of Dormition of Virgin Mary.

Source ANA-MPA

Turkey lifts ban to allow mass at monastery

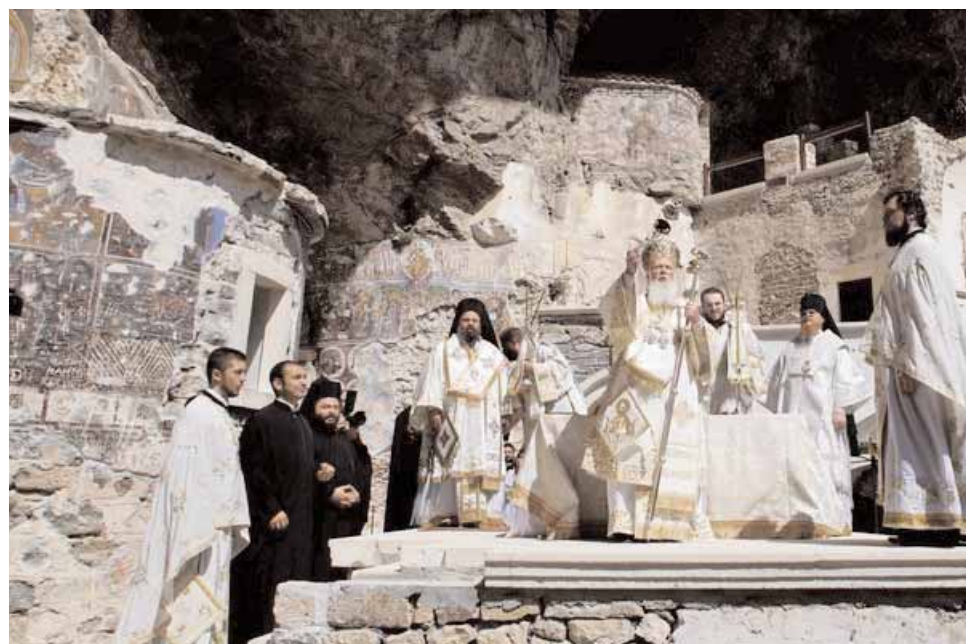
Five hundred Greek orthodox Christians celebrated mass in the beautiful 1,600-year-old Sumela monastery in north-eastern Turkey, ending an 88-year ban on religious services at the site.

Conducted by Greek Orthodox Patriarch Dimitri Bartholomew I, the mass attracted orthodox Christians from Greece, Russia, Georgia, the US and Turkey to the monastery that sits on a ledge high in a cliff inland from the Turkish Black Sea port of Trabzon.

The mass was conducted with the blessing of Turkey's ministry of culture, which has funded an extensive restoration of the monastery that until a decade ago was in an advanced state of dereliction.

The event, which was televised live around the world, occurred in contrast to attempts made last year to hold an orthodox mass at the site that were halted by ministry officials intent on upholding a ban on religious services at the monastery.

That ban was imposed in 1923 after the monastery was designated as a museum, following its abandonment by the local Pontic Greek population, which had moved to Greece as part of population swap that also saw Greek



Bartholomew I (center), the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, conducts a service at the Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, northeastern Turkey, on Sunday. Orthodox Christians held a rare service at an ancient monastery in Turkey after the government allowed worship there once a year in a gradual loosening of restrictions on religious expression. (Associated Press)

Muslims move to Turkey.

Bad publicity from last year's events convinced the Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to ease restrictions on religious services at historic churches with the aim of both improving relations with Turkey's neighbours and giving a much-needed boost to Turkey's bid for European Union membership.

The lifting of the ban will also see the celebration of mass at the Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross on the island of Akhtamar, in Lake Van in eastern Turkey, on September 19 -- the first time a religious service has been held in the church since 1915.

While hotel owners in Trabzon, the nearest city to Sumela, were reported as being happy with the business the

mass has brought, two locals were reported as having been arrested for issuing warnings via the social networking site Facebook that they planned to disrupt the service.

Although neither has been named, one was reported as being an official in the local branch of Turkey's Nationalist Action party, a far-right political party that often conducts demonstrations outside the headquarters of the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul.

Article from the Financial Times
By David O'Byrne

A few words about Sumela Monastery

Sumela is a monastic complex built into the rock cliffs of the Altdmder Valley. Its construction began in 385 AD; and continued until the 19th century. Barnabas, a monk from Athens and his nephew Sophronios built the section which comprised the first two rooms of the monastery in rocks. The Byzantine Emperor Justinian (AD 527-568) ordered the enlargement of the monastery. The monastery was looted and burnt by the Byzantines in AD 650. However the Comnenids restored and enlarged the monastery. The monastery with its 72 rooms and a rich library, lived its most flourishing time during the period of Alexios III 8 Michael I.