



**Rodos, İstanköy ve Onikiada Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği/ Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association**  
ROİSDER Head Office • 1813/4 Sokak, No.2/6, D.2 Ethem Bey Apt., Bostanlı-Karşıyaka/İzmir/Türkiye • Tel.: +0090 (232) 362 06 44•  
rodosistankoyturkleri@hotmail.com • www.rodosistankoyturkleri.org.tr

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**Name of the Organization:** Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association

**Contact Person:** Prof.Dr.Mustafa Kaymakçı(Mr)

**E-mail:** mustafa.kaymakci68@gmail.com, rodosistankoyturkleri@hotmail.com

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**Item V:** The Religious Problems of The Turks Living in Rhodes, Kos and The Dodecanese

#### **Introduction**

The World public opinion has a misconception that the presence of the Turks living in Greece is only limited to the Western Thrace. In addition to the Turkish population in the Western Thrace, about 6000 Turks live mostly in Rhodes and Kos.

However, the Greek Authorities do not accept the minority status of our Turkish community claiming that the Dodecanese were under the administration of Italy when the Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed in 1923.

Rhodes and Kos was occupied by Italy in 1912. Later on, these islands were left to Greece according to the Paris Treaty in 1947. After the Greek authorities took over the administration of the Dodecanese, they passed a new act numbered 517/1947 and declared that the Italian acts and regulations were valid as long as they did not contradict to this new act.

The Italian acts and regulations had determined the rights and responsibilities of the Islam community and the administration of foundations, described their administrative organization in detail, and organized a triple system consisting of the Turkish community, the Turkish foundations, and the Office of Mufti in which they could control each other.

However, after 1965 the Greek Authorities gradually limited the implementation of these acts, and regulations, which were also called "The Law of the Dodecanese". Therefore, our Turkish fellowmen

living on these islands have negatively been influenced by the Greek policies. In other words, they are deprived most of their basic human rights to which they are entitled to as much as the other Greek citizens.

The problems of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos were discussed in the meetings of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2012 and in the beginning of 2013 and the resolutions were sent to the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council (PACE). In this respect, a report titled "The situation of the Greek citizens of Turkish descent in Rhodes and Kos" prepared by Swiss Deputy, Andrea Gross, the member of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, was accepted by the Assembly on March, 9th, 2012.

In this report the following expectations of the Turks are stressed; To protect the Turkish identity of our fellowmen living in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese, To join the administration of the Turkish foundations on the islands, To run the Office of Mufti freely, To teach and learn Turkish and Islam Religion at schools, To open the closed mosques to the Muslim Turkish worshippers, To regain the Greek citizenship (For the Turks called the Citizens of the Dodecanese, who were deprived of citizenship)

Our presentation is prepared to stress the religious problems of the Turks living on these islands. However, we will also stress other related problems to discuss the issue in detail. These problems can be listed as follows; The problem of citizenship, The right to learn Turkish, The policy of hatred and oppression against Turks, The problem of foundations, The difficulties in protecting the cultural heritage inherited from the Ottoman Turks, The religious problems.

### **The Problem of Citizenship**

In 1947, following the Second World War, Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese were left to Greece. Since then, a great number of the Turks living on these islands for hundreds of years have been forced to immigrate to Turkey as a result of assimilation policies and they have been deprived of most of their basic human rights. Even, they are not allowed to buy real estate and start their own businesses.

The Turks, who had to leave Rhodes and Kos after 1950, were forced to sign a document writing that they would not return their homes. The remaining Turks in Rhodes and Kos couldn't leave the islands for a long period for fear that they would be deprived of the Greek citizenship. These Turkish people had to go to the Foreigners Department of the Greek Consulate to obtain a return visa to Greece. They were allowed to leave the island for only 30 days. Also, the Turks, who were defined as the Citizens of the Dodecanese could leave their islands with a passport valid for five years. If they did not return their islands in five years, they were deprived of the Greek citizenship. Thousands of Turks who demanded to lengthen the validity period of their passports were refused and their

passports were taken back and they were informed that they lost their citizenship. Furthermore, the Turks who still had the Greek Citizenship were not given new identity cards by informing them their registration documents were lost when they applied to the Municipality of Rhodes.

### **The Right of Learning Turkish**

The Turkish children were taught Turkish until 1972 ,when the name of one of the remaining Turkish schools teaching Turkish, the Süleymaniye Madrasah, was changed to the Thirteenth City Primary School. Since then there have been no Turkish and Islam Religion lessons for the Turkish children in Rhodes,Kos and the Dodecanese. Today the Turkish children, who attend the Greek schools can speak a little Turkish. Also, Turkish people are discriminated against when they seek jobs in the public sector.

### **Turkish Cultural Heritage Inherited from The Ottoman Turks**

Our Turkish community are not allowed to repair and restore the historical buildings and monuments and most of the repair and restoration work made by the Greek authorities do not go beyond eye-wash and it only serves to deceive the public-opinion. Instead, they are deliberately left to the destruction of time. An example of this policy is the famous Süleymaniye Madrasah in Rhodes, which was built in 1878 to give the primary, secondary, and high school education to the Turkish children. The Greek Government under the pretext of uncovering the old St. John Church under the Süleymaniye Madrasah closed the Madrasah and started to dig its foundation. In fact, the Süleymaniye Madrasah belongs to Evkaf (The Turkish Moslim Foundation.) However, the ownership of the Madrasah was given to the Ministry of Culture by inventing a legal pretext.

The mosques in Rhodes are closed under the pretext of restoration,too. Today, only the İbrahim Paşa Mosque is open. When Turkey demanded the Greek Government to open the Süleymaniye Mosque to the Moslim Turks in Rhodes, the Greek authorities claimed that the Mosque could not be opened as it was regarded and labelled as a piece of world historical heritage by UNESCO. The restoration process took decades and most of the Ottoman designs and relics were replaced with the Byzantium ones. Recently, the restoration process has been completed and Süleymaniye Mosque was opened to the Turks on the Holy Sacrifice Day. However, the local authorities informed that the Mosque would be a museum. Similarly, Ali Hilmi Paşa Mosque was restored by the Municipality of Rhodes to be used as Cyprus House. Also, the Mufti's House in Murat Reis Külliyesi ( a complex of religious buildings) was left to the destruction of time and the local authorities began to build a conservatory building in front of Murat Reis Külliyesi.

In short, the architectural heritage inherited by the Ottoman Turks was plundered. The Greek authorities carry out some minor repair and restoration work just to deceive the public opinion.

### **The Problem of Foundations**

After the invasion of Rhodes, Italy planned to administer the real estate of Evkaf by means of a commission. After Greece took over the islands from Italy in 1947, the Greek Government passed an act numbered 517/1917. According to that act, on condition that they were legal, the acts and regulations which were in force at that time would be valid until they were replaced by new ones. Meanwhile, the Greek Government started a policy of oppression and destruction to serve their assimilation policy. Firstly, they promoted a government representative to inspect and control the administration of Turkish Moslim foundations.

After the death of the President of the Turkish community, Sadettin Nasuhoğlu, in 1965 some valuable works of art and the real estate of the Turkish community and the Turkish foundations,

were illegally taken from the Turkish Minority by forcing them to sell or donate them to the Greek people or organizations.

According to a regulation, which was called Katalipsis, it was announced that the property and the real estate, which would not be registered to the Cadastre Office in ten years, would be given to the Treasury Office. By using this regulation as a legal pretext, the property and the real estate which belonged to the Turks have been plundered and the problem of foundations has not been solved so far.

Today, the real estate tax- rate, which the Turkish foundations in Rhodes and Kos have to pay is 0,6 %. In other words, this rate is equal to the tax rate, which business organizations have to pay. This is another example of how discriminative the Greek authorities are against the Turks. Furthermore, the Greek Governments make the administration of the Turkish foundations increase their expenditure so that they can force the foundations to sell their properties and real estate. In that way, the Turkish foundations are financially weakened. Unfortunately, the Greek Governments achieve this by promoting some treacherous Turks to the administration of the Turkish foundations.

### **The Policy of Hatred and Oppression**

Unfortunately, our Turkish community are vulnerable to a policy of hatred and oppression in Rhodes and Kos. As we know, several Turks were arrested and tortured and one of them was killed during the Cyprus War. Today, it seems that this policy is relatively alleviated. However, the Greek authorities still use the same policy by using the local press in Rhodes and Kos to attack the Turks. For example, the newspapers alleged that the Cultural Association of the Moslims of Rhodes, which was founded in 2000, was the secret agent of the Turkish Government in Ankara. Another example of this policy is that; The Kabapınar Women's Cem House ( Holy Place) was pulled down by the Municipality of Kos to build a park instead. Also, the walls of Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Paşa Mosque and Lonca Mosque in Kos were painted using spray-paints. On the 23rd of December, 2010 some unidentified people attacked the building of the Cultural Association of the Moslims of Rhodes and they threw some pieces of clothing soaked in oil to the doormat in front of the entrance and started a fire. Some windows of the building were broken by the flames.

To sum up, one must admit that the presence of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos traces back to 1483, before the conquest of the islands by the Ottoman Turks. Yet, the Turks on the islands are accepted only as Moslim Greek citizens, which was a term invented by the Greek Governments. Unfortunately, Greece still insists on the assimilation policy and the Turks are increasingly faced with religious, economic, educational problems day by day.

In order to solve the problems of the Turks in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese, we demand that Greek authorities respect the basic human rights, which our Turkish fellowmen are entitled to as much as other nations.

### **The Religious Rights**

The religious rights of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos have been vulnerable to interventions. First, the Italian administration abolished the Office of Kadı (The Religious Judge) with a regulation and accepted the Office of Mufti as the only religious representative of the Turkish community on the islands. First, they appointed Sami Bey, and then, Hafız İbrahim Ethem Nabioğlu to the Office of Mufti in Rhodes.

Until, 1937 the Italian Administration allowed the Turkish children to attend Turkish and Religion lessons. However, in 1937 and 1938 because of the strict and oppressive fascist policies of the Italian Administration, the madrasahs (schools) were closed. Instead, education in Italian was started in eight Turkish schools. Also, Turkish children were given Turkish and Religion Lessons only twice a week.

The lessons of religion were given by educated muezzins and hodjas such as Dana Zade Hüseyin Hodja, Bastiyalı Hafız Mehmet, Yozgatlı Hafız Mustafa, İhsan Kayserili Hodja from the Kandilli village.

Also, the religion lessons were given in some private madrasahs in Rhodes. Among these madrasahs are the Hurmalı Mescidi Madrasah, the Demirli Mosque Madrasah, the Enderun Mosque Madrasah, the Madrasah in the inner castle, the Çayır Village Mosque Madrasah, and the Medrese-i Süleymaniye School. Following the destruction of the Süleymaniye Madrasah in the earth quake and fire in 1895, the religious education was given in the Fethi Paşa Rustiye School ( the secondary school) until the Süleymaniye Madrasah was rebuilt in 1900. The Turkish children were given religious education until the school year 1944/45.

When Mufti Hafız İbrahim Ethem prayed for the defeat of the Italian forces fighting against Ethiopia, he was dismissed from the Office of Mufti. The Italian administration appointed Şeyh Süleyman Kaşlıoğlu to the Office of Mufti. The new Mufti, who followed an obedient policy, kept his position both under the administration of Italy and Greece. After his death in 1972, nobody was elected to the Office of Mufti. After the death of Mufti İhsan Kayserili, who represented the Rhodes Moslim Turks as the Imam of Rhodes in protocols, nobody was elected to the Office of Mufti.

After the invasion of the islands by the British Army, Turkish and Religion lessons were given to the Turkish Children again.

After 1947, the Greek administration forced the hodjas whose salaries were paid by Evkafi Mektebiye (school foundation) to become government officers and started education in Greek in Turkish Schools.

In 1972 the Greek Authorities closed all Turkish Schools on the islands and forbade Turkish Education and religious lessons. The Turkish teachers in these schools, namely, Kemal Kaymakçı, Şinasi Siladova, Hüsnüye Arnitaimami, Mehmet Rauf Kalaycıoğlu and İhsan Kayserili were forced to retire. Some of these teachers attempted to give private lessons to the Turkish children in their homes. However, they couldn't continue to give lessons because of increasing threat and oppression by the Greek Authorities.

Today, the Turks who attend the public schools in Greece, are exempted from Religion lessons. However, they are prevented from learning their own religion, Islam.

The elected Müfti in Western Thrace sent several religious officers to work in the İbrahim Paşa Mosque especially in the months of Holy Ramadan until 2012. In this way, the Turkish Community could come together and protect their religious and national identities. However, the Hodja performing his duty in this mosque was dismissed. Then, the Turkish community was not allowed to invite hodjas from the Western Thrace and Turkey even in the months of Ramadan.

Hasan Karaali Hodja, who is performing his duty in the İbrahim Paşa Mosque, was not appointed by the elected Müfti of The Turkish Community in Western Thrace. He is only an officer appointed by the Greek Administration. The Turks in Rhodes do not have respect for this Müfti. They firmly believe that Hasan Karaali Hodja can not represent the Turkish Community as he only serves the interests Evkaf İdaresi (Evkaf Foundation), which was also governed by the Greek authorities.

Therefore, 4 or 5 very old Turks among 4200 Moslim Turks go to worship in the İbrahim Paşa Mosque on Fridays.

The rest of the Moslims who worship on Fridays in İbrahim Paşa Mosque are Moslims from Benglades and Pakistan.

In short, the Greek Governments deny the national identity of our Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos but accept only their religious identity as Moslim Greek Citizens. Yet, there is a paradox in the present policy of the Greek Governments. Though they define the Turks in Rhodes and Kos as Moslim Greek citizens, they do not allow them to learn their own religion, Islam.

As for the Mosques, the present situation is discouraging. The only mosque open to Moslim Turkish worshippers, The İbrahim Paşa Mosque, is open at noon and on Fridays. Also, the mosque is not big enough compared to the number of the Moslim Turkish worshippers.

Süleymaniye Mosque, which was closed in 1978, and presently used as a museum, has only been open to the Moslim worshippers on Ramadan and Holy Sacrifice days since 2010. In Kos, only the Germe Mosque is open to the Moslim worshippers. The Defterdar İbrahim Paşa Mosque, which is in the center of Kos, is open to the Moslim Turkish worshippers only on Fridays under the supervision of the imam appointed by the Greek authorities.

The Greek Authorities restored the Ali Hilmi Paşa Mosque and changed it to the Cyprus House. They restored the mesjid of war grave as a health center and the mesjid in the Katavya Village to be used as a cafeteria. They also changed the school in the Gani Ahmet Region to a block of apartments. Furthermore, the Greek authorities are planning to pull down the mosque in Salakoz. They are also planning to change the Office of the Müfti in Murat Reis Külliyesi to a conservatory building. There are several other examples to be added to our list.