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Written statement* submitted by the Federal Union of European Nationalities, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Turks in Rhodes and Kos request respect for their cultural identities from Greece

There are more than 6,000 Turks mainly in Dodecanese, Rhodes and Kos in the Aegean Sea. Greece does not recognize any minority rights of the Turkish minority in Rhodes and Kos on the ground that the islands were under the rule of Italy at the time the Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed, which determined the status and the rights of the Turkish Muslim minority in Western Thrace in 1923. Greece does not recognize the ethnic identity of the Turkish population in the islands and name them as “Greek Muslims”.

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) would like to raise awareness about the concerns of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos.

The problems of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos are as follows:

- The assimilation on the Turks in Rhodes and Kos was intensified after Italy ceded the islands to Greece in 1947. Greek authorities identify the Turks in Rhodes and Kos as “Muslim” population and do not register associations including in their name the words “Turk” or “Minority”. This is seen as an intervention in the rights of the Turkish minority to the freedom of assembly and association.
- The rights of the Turkish minority in Rhodes and Kos to learn their native language was abrogated with the closure of the schools providing bilingual education in 1972. Turkish children, taking education in the state schools, do not have the chance to develop their Turkish language skills. Closing schools that were providing education and training in Turkish put the Turks in the Islands in a difficult situation. It has been observed that the “Turkish language”, which is the main tool of communication and self-expression of the Turks in the islands and a transition tool for education and religion, is endangered due to the cultural purification policy applied by the relevant authorities in Greece.
- Another remarkable result arising from the exclusion of Turkish language from education in Rhodes and Kos, is the decreased educational level of the Turks. The decreased education level has affected their achievement in top-professions as well as the intellectual level of the Turks. In Rhodes and Kos, there are no Turks who are doctors and engineers. It is known that no duty has been assigned to the Turks in official institutions in Rhodes and Kos.

The Turkish children in the state school system in Rhodes and Kos have no access to the right of religious education, although they are exempted from Christian religious lessons. The Greek government identify the Turks living in Rhodes and Kos as “Muslim”, not “Turkish”. The paradox is that the Turks in Rhodes and Kos, identified as “Greek Muslims” are restricted in the use of their right to practice their religion with traditions, and that the right to elect their own religious leaders has been terminated.

- Since 1967, Greek authorities have assigned persons to the waqfs¹ in order to supervise the administration of the community and its foundations. Furthermore, many foundation estates have been granted or sold below their real value by the foundation administrators appointed by Greek authorities, although it is legally forbidden to sell the foundation estates. The Turks in Rhodes and Kos are banned to participate in the bids of selling the foundation estates. On the other hand, the Greek government is forcing the Office of Waqfs to sell its fields and property by charging expenses constantly, and thus weakening the Office of Waqfs. Greek governments promote this practice by appointing unqualified persons, who misappropriate the Waqf assets, to the boards of the Waqfs.
- Ottoman architecture in Rhodes and Kos has not been protected and used in accordance with its purpose of construction. The Murat Reis Mosque and Complex; and the Mufti Office and Suleymaniye Madrasah are two negative examples. The Murat Reis Mosque and Complex were closed in 1972 for praying, and the Mufti Office is about to

¹ A Waqf is a Muslim foundation, established for religious or charitable purposes.

collapse due to negligence. The graveyard was demolished and gravestones were plundered. If no due care is exercised, the Murat Reis Mosque and Complex and the Mufti Office will collapse.

The Süleymaniye Madrasah in Rhodes belongs to the Office of Waqfs established by the Turks in Rhodes, however, the Ministry of Culture seized it. At some time a demolition order was issued because it was thought that the old St John Church was lying under the Süleymaniye Madrasah. The Greek Government started to dig up its foundations and closed down the building. Thanks to the efforts of the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association on a national and international level, the demolition of the Madrasah was suspended. The Süleymaniye Madrasah, which belongs to the Turkish Muslim foundation, will be used by the Aegean University and renovation has started.

However,, the restoration and excavation is done incorrectly and reconstructed differently from the original structure. For instance, the ornaments of the Süleymaniye Mosque (the patterns to decorate a work) were amended, and the light yellow, which is the color of Byzantium, was made dominant instead of the green color, which is the primeval color of Islam. The pattern of olive branches was placed to crown gates and many significant points. Turkish scripts were removed from many areas. Some of them were scratched, some of them were demolished.

- The situation of Muslim graveyards is heartbreaking. The gravestones of the Turks and the Muslims around the castle of Rhodes were moved to Gani Ahmet Graveyard by the Italian governor in 1925. However, it cannot be said that this graveyard is well preserved. It includes many things that are not appropriate in Islam. For instance, ten or fifteen pieces of old-Turkish scripted gravestones were assembled on a grave with cement so that they were not lost. This created a strange type of Muslim graves. Muslim gravestones are in the Museum in Rhodes, in the gardens of the mosques, in Gani Ahmed Graveyard and in the graveyards of some villages.

To sum up, if the required arrangements are not made, the Turkish identity in Rhodes and Kos is in the danger of extinction in the 21st century, and this is a crime against humanity in the middle of Europe.

As a member of the European Union, Greece should fulfill its responsibilities related to human rights stipulated in the Greek Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and other relevant human right conventions.

The Turkish minority in Rhodes and Kos urges Greece to:

- accept the Turkish identity of the Muslim population in Rhodes and Kos and abolish any laws which prevent any minority organization which aims to preserve its cultural identity and traditions.
- provide Turkish children with the right of learning Turkish language in primary school level at least on the basis of bilingual education
- recognize the right to religious education for the Turks in Rhodes and Kos.
- protect cultural monuments and historical artifacts inherited from the Ottoman Empire, and do renovation and maintenance works.
- enable members of the boards of the foundations (Waqfs) in Rhodes and Kos to be elected by the Turks in Rhodes and Kos freely.
- return the estates nationalized by the Greek government and use them in accordance with its original construction, e.g. convert the Süleymaniye Madrasah to an institution providing education in Turkish language on the basis of bilingual education.
- prevent vandalism against the Turkish-Muslim graves and the gravestones of the Murat Reis Complex