



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **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.

[12 February 2017]

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

GE.17-02441(E)



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## **Turks in Rhodes and Kos request re-opening of Turkish schools**

There are more than 6 000 Turks living in the islands of Rhodes (Rodos) and Kos (İstanköy) in the Aegean Sea, next to the Turks in the region of Thrace in mainland Greece. The Turks have become one of the constituent communities in the islands over a 400-year-period. However, since 1912 they have faced so many tragedies such as invasions, wars and assimilations that crushed them. Finally, Greece, which was handed over the islands in 1947, claimed that the Turkish community in the Dodecanese is not granted the status of “minority” on grounds that the islands were under Italian rule when the Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed in 1923.

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) observed that the Turks living in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese have many problems including on citizenship, learning and education in their mother tongue, the practice of their religion, the protection of cultural legacy inherited from the Ottoman Empire, the management of its foundations and an environment of hatred.

Assimilation is the main problem for the Turks living in Rhodes and Kos. It is observed that the Greek government used different methods for assimilation, such as the closure of the Turkish schools that provided bilingual education until 1972.

There were very well-qualified primary, secondary and high schools in Rhodes and Kos during the Ottoman period. The Turks who were educated in those schools assumed important functions during the Ottoman period and during the establishment years of the Republic of Turkey.

After Rhodes and Kos were invaded by the Italians in 1912, community schools providing education in Turkish were closed down. But it was known that, after Rhodes and Kos were seized by the British Empire, 10 Turkish Schools were re-opened again. In 1945-1946 there was an organization under the name of Turkish Schools Union.

After Greece was handed over the islands in 1947, the Greek government gradually reduced financial support to the Turkish schools. Due to financial difficulties, the government declared that there would be no support for Turkish schools after 1947.

Until 1972, education and training in Turkish was provided in the schools in Rhodes and Kos. During this period certain classes, particularly on history and geography, were given by Greek teachers. On the other hand, physics, chemistry and mathematics were given in Turkish language.

However, in 1972, the name of the Suleymaniye Madrasah in Rhodes, was changed as Rhodes 13. City Elementary School and consequently education in Turkish was forbidden. The same situation happened in the island of Kos. Turkish teachers that were teaching in the community schools were forced to retire.

Nowadays the children who are taking education in state schools are able to speak Turkish at the basic level, because they were not able to learn their mother language in schools.

Closing schools that were providing education and training in Turkish put the Turks in the islands in a difficult situation. The Turks who had the financial capabilities send their children to Turkey in order to provide them with learning their mother tongue and having religious education. With consideration of all the developments, it seems that Greece has established a cultural superiority over the Turkish community in the islands, who would like to preserve their own Turkish cultural identity. Furthermore, 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 consequence from the exclusion of the Turkish language from education in Rhodes and Kos, is the decreased educational level of the Turks. The decreased education level has affected their achievements 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.

It was observed that the average education of the islander Turks is 5 years according to the conducted study "On the Near History of Rhodes and Kos Turkism" for the people aged 57-92. On the other hand, the average year of education level of the island Turks in Turkey is 6.6 years.

In the survey, it is seen that the number of Turkish islanders who are attending secondary, high schools and higher education is not high. These percentages are 1.4%, 5% and 8.0% for middle, high school and higher education respectively. However, almost all of the islanders who have a chance of schooling over 5 years are very few, except for the second generation who studied in Turkey.

The highest rate of higher education among the residents of Rhodes and Kos is in Istanbul with 40%. The situation can be explained by the settlement of wealthy islanders in Istanbul. Izmir follows Istanbul with 19, 4%.

In recent years, it has been observed that the schooling years of the Turks remaining in the islands has increased. However, the lack of education in their native language of Turkish has gradually emerged as an accelerating factor in assimilation.

Many of the Turkish islanders who did not want to be subject to assimilation, migrated to Turkey from Rhodes and Kos. Other factors which resulted in migration include the lack of acceptance of their cultural identities and the creation of an environment of violence and hatred.

Attempts to destroy the Turkish cultural identity may eventually lead the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos to forget their own past. Knowing the past is significantly important for the protection and preservation of the Turkish cultural identity in the islands.

In response to the fact that the Turkish schools are closed in Rhodes and Kos, the government of the Republic of Turkey has reopened the Greek primary, secondary and high schools in the island of Gökçeada (Imbros), a district of Çanakkale, after the minority schools were closed down in Bozcaada (Tenedos) in 1964.

As FUEN, we welcome the opening of schools for Turkish citizens of Greek origin living in Bozcaada and Gökçeada, and we see them as appropriate acts in terms of fulfilling a human right.

In this context, the Turks of Rhodes and Kos want from the Greek authorities;

to reopen the closed schools, which provide education on the basis of bilingualism, at least at the level of primary education. In this context to turn Süleymaniye Madrasa, which is an important educational symbol for the Turks of Rhodes and Kos into an institution, which provides education in the same way as before,

to attempt to provide for Turkish children the opportunity to learn their native language wholesomely,

to end all ethnic discrimination in school programs and in lessons such as especially History and Geography with reopening of the schools,

to prevent approaches in school programs in Greek Schools, which fuel the hostility against Turks,

to remove the obstacles for the Turks of Islands to receive religious education,

to repeal the laws and end the pressures that prevent the acceptance of Turkish identities and their organization by cultural identities,

In short, we request for the Turks of Rhodes and Kos; in addition to the rights set forth by the International Covenants, the cultural rights granted by the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations and as per article 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 24 and 25 of the Constitution of Greece to be granted.

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