

## The Entry of the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands Under the Greek Control and the Greeks' Treatment of the Turks Living on the Islands

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### Abstract

Rhodes and Dodecanese conquered in 1522 by the Ottoman Empire has been under Turkish domination up to the first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Italy occupied them in 1912 during the Tripolitanian War. At the same year, other islands in the Aegean Sea have been occupied by Greece during the Balkan Wars. Italian domination continued up to 1947 in Rhodes and Dodecanese. Both places were passed on to Greece with the 14<sup>th</sup> article of Paris Treaty signed in 1947 providing that both would have been purified from soldiers. According to unofficial data, more than 9.000 Turks are living in Rhodes and Kos, nowadays. Yet, various policies are executed by Greece in order to assimilate those Turks living in those islands. The migration of Turks from the islands towards Türkiye was accelerated after 1950s because of the ban of entrepreneurship and land property. Turks who were forced to leave Dodecanese had to sign documents declaring that they will have not returned to Rhodes. The pressures on the Turks in Rhodes and Kos were hardened due to the junta government in Greece in 1967 and the impact of happenings in Cyprus. After the Peace operation of Türkiye in 1974, the number of migrants from the islands reached the peak. The schools teaching Turkish language in Rhodes and Kos were closed in 1972, and Turks even could not use their right of religious education. Even though it has to be one of the prominent duties of Greece as a member of EU to protect and enhance the theme of Turkish cultural identity not only in Western Thrace, but also in Rhodes and Kos, nevertheless, Turks living in those islands cannot identify themselves as Turk to those whom they do not know; instead they have to identify themselves as Greek Muslims.

**Keywords:** Rhodes, Dodecanese, Greece, Assimilation, Turks.

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## Rodos ve Oniki Ada'nın Yunan Hakimiyetine Giriş ve Yunanistan'ın Adalarda Yaşayan Türklere Yönelik Uygulamaları

### Öz

1522 yılında Osmanlı Devleti tarafından fethedilen Rodos ve Oniki Ada, 20. yüzyılın ilk çeyreğine kadar Türk hakimiyeti altında kaldı. İtalya, Trablusgarp Savaşı sırasında 1912'de Rodos ve Oniki Ada'yı işgal etti. Aynı yıl Balkan Savaşları sırasında da Ege Denizi'ndeki diğer adalar Yunanistan tarafından işgal edildi. Rodos ve Oniki Ada'daki İtalyan hakimiyeti 1947 yılına kadar devam etti. 1947'de imzalanan Paris Antlaşması'nın 14. Maddesi ile Rodos ve Oniki Ada, askerden arındırılmaları şartıyla Yunanistan'a devredildi. Günümüzde Rodos ve İstanköy'de resmi olmayan kayıtlara göre sayıları 9.000'i geçen Türk nüfus yaşamaktadır. Ancak Yunanistan tarafından bu adalarda yaşayan Türklerin asimilasyonunu gerçekleştirmek üzere çeşitli politikalar uygulanmaktadır. İş kurma ve taşınmaz mal satın almaya izni verilmemesinden dolayı 1950'den sonra Türklerin adalardan Türkiye'ye yönelik göç hareketi hızlanmıştır. Oniki Ada'dan ayrılmak zorunda kalan Türklere Rodos'a tekrar dönmeyeceklerine dair belge imzalatılmış; 1967 yılında Yunanistan'da cuntanın yönetime gelmesiyle, Kıbrıs'ta yaşanan gelişmelerin de etkisiyle, Rodos ve İstanköy'de yaşayan Türkler üzerinde baskılar artmıştır. 1974 yılında Türkiye'nin Kıbrıs Barış Hareketi'nden sonra adalardan göç edenlerin sayısı en yüksek düzeye ulaşmıştır. Rodos ve İstanköy'de Türkçe eğitim veren okullar 1972 yılından itibaren kapatılmış, dinî eğitim haklarını dahi kullanamaz hale gelmişlerdir. Batı Trakya'da olduğu gibi Rodos ve İstanköy'de de Türk kültürel kimliğinin korunması ve geliştirilmesi konusunun Avrupa Birliği üyesi olan Yunanistan'ın önde gelen görevlerinden biri olması gerekirken, bu adalarda yaşamakta olan Türkler, tanımadıkları kişilere Türk olduklarını ifade edememekte, Yunan Müslümanı olduklarını söylemek zorunda kalmaktadırlar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rodos, Oniki Ada, Yunanistan, Asimilasyon, Türkler.

### **The Aegean Islands before the Turkish Control**

The Aegean Islands which have been inhabited since the ancient times in history have changed hands many times over time. The Aegean Islands, which entered into the control of Achaeans and Dorians between the years of 2000 and 1200 B.C. due to the Migration Period, of Persians in the 5th century B.C. and of Alexander the Great who started the eastern expedition in 334 B.C., were later captured by the Roman Empire, the Genoese, Arabs and the Byzantines. The Aegean Islands exchanged hands in the Byzantine Period between the Byzantium Empire and the Italian states, especially they were controlled by the Genoese. While this struggle was going on, the Knights of St. Jean, who migrated to Cyprus after the recapturing of Acre by the Muslims, sought a better home for themselves and chose the Rhodes Island for this purpose. The Knights, who obtained the support of Pope Clementus V (1305-1314) and the French King Philippe le Bel, landed on the island at the end of 1309 and also captured the Dodecanese Islands around the Rhodes Island. Afterwards, the St. Jean Knights were known as the Knights of Rhodes.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Entry of the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands under the Turkish Control**

The Ottomans started to sail in the Aegean Sea only during the period of Sultan Yıldırım Bayezid. Therefore, the conquest of the islands started after the conquest of İstanbul. During the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmet, vast majority of those islands were conquered starting from the Boğazönü islands. The first one of those were Imroz, Samothraki, and Thassos Islands (1456). The Limnos (1456), Lesbos (1462) and Samos (1479) Islands were also conquered. And the conquest of the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands was performed by Kanuni Sultan Süleyman. On June 14, 1522, the Turkish fleet, which sieged the Kos Island, landed on the Rhodes Island on June 24 and after a 6-month siege, the Knights had to hand over the Island after an agreement that Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam the Gran Maestro signed on the date of December 21, 1522. While the period of the Knights, which lasted for 213 years, came to an end, other Dodecanese Islands were also taken under the Turkish control along with Rhodes Island. The Karpatos and Kassos Islands were captured by the Ottomans in September

1 Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Oniki Ada'nın Dünü ve Bugünü*, Genelkurmay Basım Evi, Ankara, 1996, pp. 38-43.

of 1538 when Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha was the Chief Admiral. Among the Aegean Islands the last conquered island was the Chios Island (1566). Thusly, the conquest of the Aegean Islands was completed by the Ottoman fleet which achieved a certain amount of power at the time.<sup>2</sup>

While those Aegean Islands were under the Ottoman sovereignty undisputedly until the 1820s, this sovereignty became a subject matter of debate for the first time in a serious manner during the Greek Rebellion. After the independence of Greece, the Western and Southwestern Islands remained within the Greek boundaries and the Eastern and Northern Islands were under the Ottoman sovereignty. However, this balance was actually upset first in the Turkish - Italian War of 1911 and 1912 and later in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. First, Italia, then Greece landed on the Aegean Islands which were under the sovereignty of the Ottoman State.

### **The Aegean Islands during the Turco-Italian War**

Italy, which forged its national unity in a late fashion and did not want to remain behind the attempts of the great European states to achieve colonies, casted its eyes on Tripoli which was the Ottoman soil in North Africa. Italy, whose military preparations became apparent since the second week of September of 1911, sent an ultimatum to the Ottoman Grand Vizier Hakkı Pasha through its ambassador in İstanbul on September 28, 1911 and asked the Ottoman State to give an order to the local authorities of Tripoli for not resisting the Italian troops; and upon the rejection of this unacceptable ultimatum, Italy sent its troops to Tripoli and entered into the war against the Ottoman State. The Italian army and fleet that Italy sent to Tripoli was much superior when compared to the Ottoman army and fleet in terms of numbers and power. However, Italy was only able to capture some places on the coast despite the fact that it had been months since the beginning of the war, Italy was unable to penetrate further into the land. Upon this, Italy attempted to force the Ottoman State to leave Tripoli and Benghazi to Italy by spreading the war in different fronts. For this purpose, the Italian fleet, which bombarded some of the Ottoman coasts along the Red Sea and sank some Ottoman warships there, bombarded the Port of Beirut on February 24, 1912 and later attacked the Dardanelles on April 18, 1912.

2 Necdet Hayta, *1911'den Günümüze Ege Adaları Sorunu*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara 2020, pp. 7-8; İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 1983, pp. 32-41.

Italy, which was unable to achieve what it wanted out of those attacks, this time set its sights on the Aegean Islands, and obtained the permission of great powers in this matter. With its attempt, Italy was also planning *to prevent military shipments that were made to Tripoli and Benghazi through the sea, obtain a foothold to penetrate into Anatolia in the future and eliminate impatience that took place among the Italian public due to the delay of the expected success in Tripoli.*

The Italian fleet moved to invade the islands. The first island among the group of Dodecanese Islands was Stampalia which was invaded on April 28. After the invasion of Stampalia, the Italians landed their troops on the Rhodes Island on May 4, and the invasion of Karki, Sarya, Kassos, Agios Georgios, Tilos, Leros, Patmos, Kalimnos, Lipsos and Simi Islands came afterwards. The last invaded island was Kos Island which was invaded on May 20.

The Italian invasions did not provide the expected outcomes for Italy. Because the Ottoman State announced that those invasions would not change their opinion that they had expressed earlier regarding Tripoli and Benghazi. In fact, in an interview that he gave to the İstanbul correspondent of *Le Matin* newspaper, the War Minister Şevket Pasha stated that *even if the Italians invaded all of the islands in the Sea of Islands, they would not approve the annexation of Tripoli and Benghazi to Italy.*

In the consequence of the attempts that were made due to the stalemate of the situation, the peace negotiations started in the city of Lausanne of Switzerland. During those dates the developments that took place in the Balkans forced the Ottoman State to eliminate this problem immediately and consequently, the representatives in Ouchy signed a peace treaty and three protocols that constituted a secret treaty and its appendices between the dates of 15 and 18 October 1912. The 2nd Article of this Treaty was directly about the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands. Accordingly:

Following the signature of the Treaty, the Ottoman Government undertakes to withdraw its officers and soldiers from Tripoli and Benghazi and the Italian Government undertakes to withdraw its officers and soldiers from the islands that it has invaded in the Sea of Islands. The actual withdrawal of the mentioned islands by the Italian officers, soldiers, and the administrative personnel will be performed after the Ottoman officers, soldiers and the administrative personnel

withdraws from Tripoli and Benghazi.

However, a secret treaty was made with Italy due to the consideration that Greece might invade the mentioned islands during the Balkan War that started at the same time. According to the message written to the War Ministry by Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha:

In accordance to the Treaty, following our vacation of Tripoli and Benghazi, Italy would vacate the islands that it has invaded. As it is possible that those islands with their substantive people and which are deprived of a defense force may be invaded by the Greeks, the Ottoman State and the Italian State has reached an agreement until a peace treaty is made with the Greek Government so that the islands remain under the invasion of Italians. There is no need to take further precautions.

By this treaty the Rhodes and Dodecanese Islands were temporarily left to the Italian invasion.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Aegean Islands during the Balkan War**

The Ottoman State was not false regarding its concerns. Out of the Balkan states, Serbia and Bulgaria signed an alliance treaty on March 13 following negotiations that started in October of 1911 and continued until the beginning of spring of 1912. Thusly, in the fall of 1912, the Balkan states convened against the Ottoman State in Sofia by establishing a complex net of alliances and various treaties. The military conflicts were initiated on October 8, 1912 with Montenegro's announcement of war against the Ottoman State. Two weeks after this announcement, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia also entered into war against the Ottoman State.

In this war, the Ottoman State was unable to become successful and lost a significant portion of the Balkan lands that had been under its rule for hundreds of years. At the same time almost all of the significant islands in the Aegean Sea except those that were left to the temporary Italian invasion were invaded by Greece. The Ottoman State which encountered a difficult situation requested a ceasefire. The negotiations started in the St. James Palace in London on December 16, 1912. In the meantime, there

3 Necdet Hayta, "Rodos İle 12 Ada'nın İtalyanlar Tarafından İşgali ve İşgalden Sonra Adaların Durumu (1912-1918)", *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi (OTAM)*, Vol. 5, Ankara 1994, pp. 131-137.

was another conference which was arranged to meet in London, and that was the “Conference of Ambassadors” held under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister, including the ambassadors of 5 great powers (France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) in London. The Conference of Ambassadors convened on December 17, 1912. According to Grey, the purpose of the Conference was *not to find out the best solution in any matter, but to maintain peace among the great powers.*

In the consequence of great efforts of Grey, the British Foreign Minister, the attending ambassadors signed the text of the Treaty on May 30, 1913. According to the 5th Article of this Treaty, *the decision regarding the Aegean Islands* would be left to the great powers. The great powers notified their decision to Greece on February 13, 1914, and to the Ottoman State on February 14. According to this decision, the great powers left *the Gökçeada, Bozcaada and Meis Islands to Türkiye, and other islands that were under the Greek invasion to Greece.* In this decision, no provision was included regarding the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands due to the efforts of Italy which wanted the islands to remain under its own rule.

The Aegean Islands became a subject matter of bargaining from time to time during the First World War, even the Italian control over the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands was recognized by the 8th Article of the Treaty of London signed between Great Britain, France, Russia and Italy on the date of April 26, 1915 against Italy’s entrance into the war besides Great Britain, France and Russia.

After the war, the Treaty of Sevres which was signed on the date of August 10, 1920 shared those islands among Italy and Greece. While the 122nd Article of the Treaty left the Rhodes, the Dodecanese and Meis Islands, which were under Italian control, to Italy, and the 84th Article of the Treaty left all other Aegean Islands including Gökçeada and Bozcaada which were left to the Ottomans earlier by the decision of the great powers to Greece. However, after this Treaty, which was not put into effect, the subject matter regarding the islands seriously became one of the topics of agenda for Türkiye in the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>4</sup>

4 For more information see: Necdet Hayta, *Balkan Savaşlarının Diplomatik Boyutu ve Londra Büyükelçiler Konferansı (17 Aralık 1912 11 Ağustos 1913)*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 2008.

### **The Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands in the Treaty of Lausanne**

According to the 4th Article of the instructions which were written by the Council of Ministers of Türkiye and given to the delegation before the conference of the Treaty of Lausanne which would represent Türkiye in Lausanne regarding the principles to be followed during the signature of the Treaty, *it was requested to act according to the sense of occasion during the negotiations regarding the islands and the annexation of the islands that were very close to our shores, otherwise the delegation was asked to request information from Ankara.*<sup>5</sup> During the signature of this Treaty, the Turkish delegation requested the Eastern Aegean Islands under the Greek invasion, and especially insisted on giving the control of the Gökçeada and Bozcaada along with the Lemnos and Samothraki Islands to Türkiye. However, this was not possible because Greece and Great Britain and its allies which supported Greece opposed this request by stating that in accordance to the provisions of the 5th Article of the Treaty of London dated May 30, 1913 and the 15th Article of the Treaty of Athens dated November 14, 1913, the decision regarding the Dodecanese Islands was left to the great powers and the great powers left those islands to Greece with their decisions that they notified to Greece on February 13, 1914 and to the Ottoman State on February 14, only the Gökçeada and Bozcaada were left to Türkiye as this was the case in the decision of the great powers. With the 13th Article of the Treaty, those islands were subjected to the demilitarized status. And regarding the matter of the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands no request or meeting request was made by the Turkish party for the duration of the negotiations. However, as we have stated earlier, Italy needed to return those islands to Türkiye in accordance to the Treaty of Ouchy. Also, by the secret treaty which was made between two countries due to the Balkan War, the returning of the islands was left to the period after making a peace treaty with the Greek Government. Therefore, Türkiye had stronger bases for sovereignty of those islands when compared to other islands. However, the subject matter of the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands appeared in the 15th Article of a draft treaty that the great powers prepared regarding the undecided affairs and notified to the Turkish delegates during the proceedings on the date of January 31, 1923. With this Article, the Meis Island which was left to the Ottoman state and the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands were left to Italy, which caused us to lose the Meis Island along with the Rhodes and

5 Bilal Şimşir, *Lozan Telgrafları*, Vol. I, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 1990, p. X.



the Dodecanese Islands. For this reason, after the end of the first session of the negotiations, when the Turkish delegates returned to Ankara, they were criticized in the Turkish National Assembly regarding the subject matter. Also, it is because of this reason that in the second session of the negotiations, the delegates attempted to get the Meis Island, however it was not possible to get this island back because it was accepted to leave this island to Italy in the response given for the draft treaty on February 4.

As it is understood from the archival documentation, Italy, which was deceived by its allies after the war and became upset due to leaving İzmir to Greece which was promised for Italy, left Anatolia upon the important successes of the National War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha and wanted to get some concessions by making overtures to Türkiye. Italy, which was continuing this approach during the negotiations of the Lausanne Treaty was after certain economic concessions. And Türkiye was experiencing the difficulties of struggling alone in the lion's den in Lausanne. For this reason, Türkiye warmly welcomed this approach of Italy which was among the allies and while stalling Italy regarding economic concessions on one side, for the purpose of not estranging Italy Türkiye did not oppose the Italian requests regarding the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands which had been under the Italian invasion approximately for more than 10 years.

Indeed, the matter of islands took its final shape in the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed on the date of July 24, 1923 and the 12th and 16th Articles of the Treaty were about the Aegean Islands. The 12th Article stated *that the Northern and Eastern Aegean Islands except the Gökçeada, Bozcaada and Tavşan Islands were left to the Greece's control*, the 13th Article stated *the demilitarized status of the islands which were left to Greece's control*, the 14th Article stated *the status of the islands that were left to Türkiye*, the 15th Article stated *that Türkiye relinquished all of its rights and titles on the Rhodes, Dodecanese and Meis Islands on behalf of Italy*, the 16 Article stated *that Türkiye gave up all of its rights over the islands except those islands on which Türkiye's sovereignty was recognized by this Treaty*. However, with this Article, the possibility of setting out the future of the mentioned islands was accepted and Türkiye and Italy signed a treaty on January 4, 1932 regarding the ownership of some small islands located around the Meis Island and the Karaada right across the Bodrum Bay. With this agreement which went into effect on May 10, 1933, the Karaada remained in the hands of Türkiye, and 19 islands related to the

Meis Island were given to Türkiye, and 11 islands were given to Italy.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands during the Second World War**

This matter was mentioned by especially Germany from time to time during the Second World War. Germany attempted to use the Aegean Islands against Türkiye for its own benefit. In this war, especially after the Italian withdrawal, significant fighting took place in the Aegean Sea between Great Britain and Germany and from time to time the islands exchanged hands among the two countries. Von Papen, the German Ambassador in Türkiye, stated that in that period the subject matter of the islands was a matter of dispute among the Turkish politicians, and there was no consensus among the members of the Turkish Government regarding this matter. The Turks were indecisive and in disagreement about the islands for the purpose of not getting into trouble between the Allies and the Germans.

Another development regarding the Aegean Islands was experienced at the later stages of the war. Following the war's gradual turning against the Germans, the Germans applied to the Turks and notified them that they wanted to transfer the Aegean Islands which were under their invasion to Türkiye. However, the Turkish Government first deemed it appropriate to inform the British about the German offer because the Turkish Government was believing that there was no reason for the Turks to get a share of the spoils of the war because they did not participated into the war and contrarily this would create dangers considering the current conditions back then. In their response, the British stated that they needed the islands and they would invade them and the matter was closed. In summer of 1944, the Turco-Soviet relations were very tense and Türkiye was under a Soviet threat. In fall of 1944, Great Britain landed its troops on Greece, and Türkiye notified to the Greek Government that it would not have any requests and claims on the Dodecanese Islands in November of 1944 for the purpose of maintaining cooperation with Greece again. The Greeks were already eager to capture those Islands again. The newly established British Administration on the Islands which was established on the date of May 8 upon the surrender of Germans on May 7, 1945 appeared to have full control over the Rhodes and the Dodecanese Islands, the Greeks populated every echelon of the British Administration.

6 For more information see: Necdet Hayta, *1911'den Günümüze Ege Adaları Sorunu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları*, Ankara 2020, pp. 135-152.

In the peace meetings that continued until July 12, 1946 when the War came to an end, it was decided to give the mentioned islands to Greece. This was expressed in the 14th Article of the Italian Peace Treaty signed by 21 states including Italy on the date of February 10, 1947. However, differing from the Treaty of Lausanne, *it was set out that those islands and the adjacent smaller islands needed to be demilitarized and disarmed.* Thusly, Greece took the Dodecanese Islands.<sup>7</sup>

## **Problems of Turks on the Rhodes and Kos Islands**

### **Problem of Citizenship**

Majority of the Turks of Rhodes and Kos Islands were composed of Turks of Karaman Principality who were settled there after the conquest of the Rhodes Island in 1573 and the Turks who migrated there from Crete in 1897. The Turks of Rhodes and Kos Islands were accepted as a religious community upon the Italian invasion of those islands. After giving the islands to Greece in 1947, majority of the Turks migrated to Türkiye due to reasons such as rejection of their cultural identities, emergence of an environment with violence and hate, and inability to obtain permission regarding establishing businesses and purchasing real estate. After 1950, the migration of the Turks from the islands to Türkiye increased. Turks who had to leave the Dodecanese Islands were asked to sign documents regarding that they would not return to the Rhodes Island again, and pressures on the Turks living on the Rhodes and Kos Islands increased due to the junta's coming to power in Greece in 1967 and the developments taking place in Cyprus. Between 1955 and 1998, many Turks lost Greek citizenship because of the 19th Article of the Greek Citizenship Law. After Türkiye's Peace Operation in Cyprus in 1974, the number of people migrating from the islands reached to the maximum level. Based on this Article in the Law, the number of Turks who were deprived of their Greek citizenship is kept as a secret, however it is estimated that approximately 60 thousand Turks were deprived of their Greek citizenship. Majority of those who were deprived of their citizenship are the students who left for pursuing their education in Türkiye, the US and Germany. Additionally, new identity cards are not given to persons from the Rhodes Island and currently having valid Greek

7 For more information see: Necdet Hayta, "İkinci Dünya Savaşı Yıllarında Ege Adaları Sorunu", *Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. 12/Issue 36, Ankara 1996.

identity cards by stating that their registration at the Rhodes Municipality were deleted.<sup>8</sup>

### **Problems Regarding Education and Learning Turkish**

Despite the fact that they are a principal element of the Turkish culture, the Turks of Rhodes and Kos Islands are also citizens of the Greek State. Thus, the problem of education for the people of the islands stands between being a member of the family with Turkish origins and being a citizen of the Greek State. As the Turks of the Dodecanese Islands were not recognized as minorities due to the Treaty of Lausanne which is different from the Turks of Western Thrace, it was not possible to send teachers from Türkiye to the Turkish schools on the islands. In the process after Greece became sovereign on the islands, it is striking that the lessons such as history and geography were taught in Greek in the schools on the Rhodes and Kos Islands. Besides, it is also noteworthy to teach lessons such as physics, chemistry and math in Turkish.

The name of the Süleymaniye Madrassa which was one of the last schools lecturing in Turkish on the Rhodes Island was changed as the 13th City Primary School of Rhodes in 1972 and since that date, lecturing in Turkish was permanently banned. The situation is also same on the Kos Island. Today, the Turkish kids continuing education in the public schools are able to speak Turkish at the minimum level. There are also uncertainties regarding the ability of those kids graduating from those schools performing their professions on the islands. Until today, Turks have never been employed in any one of the government offices on the Rhodes and Kos Islands. The Turks are able to benefit from middle and high schools in a limited manner and in terms of education those kids remain pretty behind the average level of education across Greece. The closing down of the Turkish schools put the islander Turks in a difficult situation. The well-to-do islander Turks send their kids to Türkiye during school semesters, and let them get Turkish classes and religious information. It is also known that “the Turkish language” which is

8 Mustafa Kaymakçı-Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi “Ege Denizi’nde Yükselen Sessiz Çığlık”*, Rodos, İstanköy ve Onikiada Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği Yayınları, İzmir 2015, p. 63-67, 85; Mustafa Kaymakçı, “Rodos ve İstanköy Türklüğünün Güncel Sorunları”, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türk Toplumunda Eğitim-Öğretim*, Rodos, İstanköy ve Onikiada Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği Yayınları, İzmir 2022, pp. 210-211.

the medium of the islander Turks to express their culture and the related cultural transmission means such as education and religion are greatly endangered by the cultural purging policies that Greece has been applying.<sup>9</sup>

### **Problem of Religion and Worshipping**

The Turks living on the Rhodes and Kos Islands were being represented by the Muslim Community Administration (*İslam Cemaati İdaresi*). Italy which invaded the islands after 1912 recognized the Office of the Mufti on Rhodes Island with a local decree. The “Mufti’s Office of Rhodes” was allowed to maintain its existence by the Greek authorities for some time unofficially after 1947 which was the date for the transfer of the Dodecanese Islands to Greece. In this regard, it is seen in the official records that there were 11 imams on the Rhodes Island and 4 imams on the Kos Island in 1947. However, the Greek Government cut the salary of Süleyman Kaşlıoğlu, the Mufti of the Rhodes Island which had been given to him by the administration under the invasion and following the death of İhsan Kayserili, who was the Mufti’s substitution in 1990, the Greek Government actually eliminated the Office of the Mufti.

Today, in terms of religion, the Turkish minority on the islands is not represented. The absence of a religious leader who would protect the rights or maintain the religious affairs of the community constitutes a serious danger for the existence of the islander Turks in terms of their identities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Problem of Protection of the Cultural Heritage Transferred from the Ottoman Turks**

At the present time, it is a well-known matter that the maintenance and repairs of the cultural heritage remaining from the time of the Ottoman Turks were not permitted, the repairs were ostensible and the cultural artifacts were left to the destruction of time. As it is known, initially the famous Süleymaniye Madrassa on the Rhodes Island was attempted to be demolished. The Süleymaniye Madrassa is a historical building constructed

9 Mustafa Kaymakçı-Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi...*, pp. 17-24; Cihan Özgün, “Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinde Bellek Sorunu ve Türk Dili Öğrenimi”, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türk Kültürü*, Rodos, İstanköy ve Onikiada Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği Yayınları, Konya 2015, pp. 68-72.

10 Mustafa Kaymakçı-Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi...*, pp. 29-30; Mustafa Kaymakçı, “Rodos ve İstanköy Türklüğünün Güncel Sorunları”, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türk Toplumunda Eğitim-Öğretim*, pp. 212-216.

in 1876 for the purpose of providing primary, middle and high school education for the Turkish kids. The Greek Government started to excavate the foundations of the Süleymaniye Madrassa with the excuse of unearthing the old St. Jean Church under the Madrassa and closed down the school. In fact, this Madrassa belonged to the Office of Foundations that the Turks of Rhodes established, however the Madrassa was seized by the Greek Ministry of Culture with a legal excuse. The demolition of the Süleymaniye Madrassa was halted by the national and international attempts of the Cultural and Solidarity Association of the Turks of the Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Islands (*Rodos, İstanköy ve Onikiada Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği*). The works regarding transferring the Süleymaniye Madrassa to the Aegean University of Greece were almost finished at the beginning of 2014. The mosques on the Rhodes Island are closed down with the excuse of remodeling. Today, only the İbrahim Pasha Mosque is open for religious services. Against the application which was made to open Süleymaniye Mosque for religious services, the Greek Government provided a negative response by stating that the Mosque would not be opened for religious services because it was classified as a historical building by UNESCO. The restoration works which were started later lasted for decades and the Ottoman designs were changed in the restoration works. The mosque, whose restoration works were completed in 2012, was opened for religious services on the Holiday of the Sacrifice (*Kurban Bayramı*). It was stated that the Mosque would become a museum.

The Ali Hilmi Pasha Mosque was restored and converted into the Cyprus House, the Şehitlik Mosque became a health center and the Mosque of the Katavya Village is being used as a cafeteria. The school and mosque of the Gani Ahmet neighborhood was converted into an apartment building. The mosque of the Salakoz Village was demolished. One of the important cultural heritages of the Ottoman Turks of Rhodes is the Murat Reis Tomb and Complex. The buildings of the Complex in which a mosque is also located are in disrepair and they can barely stand. Half of the cemetery of the Complex was destroyed. It was also attempted to convert the section of the Mosque Complex which was used as the Mufti's residence into a conservatory. The list of similar buildings may be extended. Another mosque whose minaret and windows were demolished within the scope of a restoration was the Muradiye Mosque. This mosque belonged to the Turkish community until 1970. The mosque, which was left to the Rhodes Metropolitan and remained

closed after this date, was transformed into a church with the funds provided by the EU. In fact, the reality behind destroying the cultural artifacts by leaving them to the destruction of time is to cut down the bond of the islander Turks with their past and to apply assimilation. Summarily, the architectural artifacts transferred from the Ottoman Turks on the islands are being plundered and the remaining ones are attempted to be protected only for showoff.<sup>11</sup>

### **Problem of Foundations**

The basic duty of the state during the Ottoman period was to protect the lives and properties of the citizens and the boundaries of the state and to provide order. Services such as education, health, religion, public works and social assistance were not perceived as the services among the responsibilities of the state and those services were being provided through the foundations. In the Ottoman period, all foundations were placed under the administration of “Ministry of Foundations” in 1836 by Mahmut II. And the Turkish foundations in Greece were established in accordance to the Ottoman legal system before the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and today they need to be managed according to the Ottoman Law, Islamic Law and the mutual agreements. In this regard, a fact which is well-known but not pronounced well is the fact that “*the properties of foundations may not be purchased, sold, expropriated and divided as inheritance*” according to the Charter of Foundations (*Evkaf Nizamnamesi*). According to the agreement, all of the sales and donations that have been carried out until today are all null and void according to the Charter of Foundations.

With the placement of the Ottoman foundations under “the Ministry of Foundations” in 1836, the Administration of Foundations responsible for the affairs of the foundations was established in Rhodes. In a data that belongs to the Administration of Foundations in 1301 according to the Rumi calendar (1885) it was indicated that there were 44 mosques, 4 lodges, 3 madrassas, 1 library, 1 middle school, 1 primary school, 50 water fountains and 20 Muslim cemeteries either directly or indirectly related to the foundations.

Following the transfer of the islands to Greece in 1947, a Law numbered and dated 517/1947 was issued. With this law, the suppression and annihilation policy was started to be applied in the islands, and initially a government

11 Mustafa Kaymakçı-Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi...*, pp. 60-62.

representative was appointed to inspect the community and the foundation management. After the death of Sadettin Nasuhoğlu in 1965, the leader of the community, the valuable artifacts and real estate that belonged to the community and the foundation were taken away from the minority through sales or donations. Greece also introduced the following provision in 1970: “*The real estate properties that are not notified to the land registry office are transferred to the treasury*”. By indicating this provision as an excuse, the properties that belong to the Turks on the islands are seized and the problem of foundations has remained as an unsolved problem until today.<sup>12</sup>

### **Problem of Minority and Assimilation**

Another problem regarding the Turks of the Rhodes and Kos Islands in the world public opinion is the perception that the existence of Turks in Greece consisted of only the Turks living in Western Thrace. Although the Turks of the Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Islands were not included into the status of minority from a legal perspective, it has to be accepted that they are minorities from the social perspective. On the other hand, when the cultural structures of the islander Turks are taken into consideration, it is obvious that they also have ethnic problems. However, the Greek authorities do not recognize the Turks in the Rhodes and Kos Islands as “Muslims” as this is the case in Western Thrace and they do not register associations that include terms such as “Turk” or “Minority” in their names. For instance, the activities of “the Rhodes Turkish Community” established in 1912 were banned in 1967 and the association was closed down in 1987. On the other hand, no Turkish education has been provided in the schools since 1972. One of the most important elements of assimilation policies was the closure of the schools allowing teaching the languages of the minorities.

In 1974, after the Cyprus Peace Operation intense pressures were applied to the Turks of the Rhodes and Kos Islands just like the Turks of Western Thrace. The previous limitations that were imposed on the rights of minorities by using bureaucratic methods turned into an administrative policy after this date.

The islander Turks may not even benefit from the basic rights such as the human rights and the rule of law of the European Union and the European Commission which are known to be a civilizational project. Nowadays, it is

12 Mustafa Kaymakçı-Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi...*, pp. 55-59.



not very possible to meet Turkish kids and youngsters who are able to speak Turkish. And those who are able to speak Turkish can barely speak it. Another important element of assimilation is the applications regarding prevention of linguistic rights of the minority people. One of such applications in the Rhodes and Kos Islands has been performed by destruction of the mosques where people perform their prayers.

Another application is about religious education. Despite the fact that the Athenian Government recognized the Turks living on the Dodecanese Islands as “Muslim Greek citizens”, religious education does not exist in the school curricula.

In the Greek schools, Orthodox Christianity is taught in the religious classes, and the Greek priests give those classes. Until recently, the Turkish kids had to stay in the classrooms during the religious classes where Orthodox Christianity was taught.<sup>13</sup>

### **Problem of Hate and Oppressive Environment**

Since the past until today, a hate and oppressive environment has been maintained against the Turks of the Rhodes and Kos Islands. The oppressive environment in the Rhodes and Kos Islands is maintained by the news in the local media. For instance, the local media labeled the Brotherhood and Cultural Association of Muslims of Rhodes established in 2000 and the Cultural Association of Muslims of Rhodes as “the spies of Ankara”. Also hate based attacks took place in the Rhodes and Kos Islands. A place of worship in Kabapınar was demolished by the Kos Municipality and a public park was built in its place. The Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Pasha Mosque and the Lonca Mosque were spray-painted in Kos. An attack was performed on the Brotherhood and Cultural Association of Muslims of Rhodes by unidentified individuals on the date of December 23, 2010. Another incident took place on the date of February 24, 2014. Also, it was seen that torn pages of the Holy Qur’an and pamphlets of the ultranationalist Golden Dawn Party (Hrisi Avgi) were thrown into the Turkish-Muslim Cemetery by unidentified individuals in Rhodes.<sup>14</sup>

13 Mustafa Kaymakçı-Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi...*, pp. 62-68; Nilüfer Erdem, “Batı Trakya Türkleri İle Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Kültürel Asimilasyonuna Dair Değerlendirmeler”, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türk Kültürü*, Rodos, İstanköy ve Onikiada Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği Yayınları, Konya 2015, pp. 31-38.

14 Mustafa Kaymakçı- Cihan Özgün, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türklerinin Yakın Tarihi...*, pp.

## Conclusion

Today, the Muslim Turks living on the Dodecanese Islands have problems in many matters such as freely expressing their Turkish identities, having a say in the management of foundations, bringing into force the office of the Mufti, initiation of Turkish and religion classes in schools, opening up closed mosques for religious services and returning the citizenship of the Turkish inhabitants of the Dodecanese Islands who lost their Greek citizenship. The islander Turks are forced to accept the “Greek Muslim” identity which is still imposed by Greece, not their own Turkish identity. The islander Turks are deprived of their right to receive education in their native language, and in terms of the religious realm, since 1972, the office of the Mufti is vacant. Summarily we may say that the Turks of the Dodecanese Islands are facing the danger of being annihilated at the beginning of the 21st century. The Turks of the Dodecanese Islands who are equal citizens (?) of a country which is a member of the European Union are far from benefitting from the benefits of a project which is labeled as a civilizational project. Namely, the islander Turks may not express that they are Turks to the persons whom they do not know well, and instead they have to express that they are Greek Muslims.

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69-73; Mustafa Kaymakçı, “Rodos ve İstanköy Türklüğünün Güncel Sorunları”, *Rodos ve İstanköy Türk Toplumunda Eğitim-Öğretim*, pp. 220-225.

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