

## CFMUNESCO 2018

**COMMITTEE:** Security Council

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## INTRODUCTION

The Kurds are the 4<sup>th</sup> stateless nation in the world: they inhabit the area around the Zagros Mountain in the Middle-East, united by the same culture, language and history. During the decades they have been marginalised and persecuted. The Kurdish population is mostly spread within four countries but it is hard to define borders of the region they call Kurdistan: Northern Kurdistan is located in the south-east region of Turkey and a smaller part in Armenia, Rojava in Northern Syria, Southern Kurdistan in Northern Iraq and Eastern Kurdistan in the south-west of Iran.



Their language is recognized as an official one in Iraq and as a regional language in Iran. The majority of Kurds is Sunni Muslims, and a minority is Shia Muslims. Even if they share the same culture, there are many political parties with different ideas spread in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey that led to a number of conflicts in request of autonomy and independence. Although Kurdish population has been mainly ignored by international and middle eastern politics, the creation of an independent Kurdish State has been proposed many times. Greater autonomy within the countries involved could be an option to face the issue, another way could be to assimilate Kurdish minorities in order to minimize their condition of marginalization and to rebalance the tense situation.

## KEY WORDS

**Kurdistan (geographic area):** according to the Oxford Dictionary, it is a region in the Middle East south of the Caucasus and the traditional home of the Kurdish people. This means that it is not a state with political borders, but an area where the Kurdish Nation lives.

**Difference between nation and state:** the fundamental distinction is that “nation” refers to a people, that shares culture, language and history, while “state” refers to a geographical entity, controlled by sovereign government.

**The Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq:** it is a semi-autonomous region in Northern Iraq, that shares its borders with Iran, Turkey and Syria. Since the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime, it has gained more autonomy for Iraqi Kurds from the central government of Iraq in Baghdad and its governate organ is Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

**Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK):** Kurdish organization formed in the 1970s to fight against the Turkish government claiming autonomy within Turkey for Kurdish people. In 1974 the PKK attacked the Turkish Government asking for an independent Kurdish state, but in the 1990s it stopped its request for an independent Kurdistan, asking instead for more rights. It is still very active.

**People's protection Union (YPG):** founded in 2004, it is composed by defence forces of the Kurdish area of Syria. It emerged after the Civil War erupted in Syria and started to spill over into Syrian Kurdistan, now known as Rojava, or Western Kurdistan.

**The Peshmerga:** whose name translates as "those who face death", are the Kurdish fighters of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq. They evolved from tribal defenders to nationalist fighters for an independent Kurdish state and currently they are an essential part of Kurdish culture. Since 2014 they have been fighting against the Islamic State, known as Isis, who seized large swathes of territory in the North.

**The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP):** it is the oldest Kurdish political party in Iraqi Kurdistan, founded in 1946.

**The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK):** it is an Iraqi-Kurdish political party that splintered from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the mid 1970s after the KDP's Peshmerga forces were defeated by the Iraqi Army led by Saddam Hussein.

**The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPIK):** it was founded in 1945, and called for a separate Kurdish state, though nowadays it is more concerned with attaining Kurdish rights.

## **EXPLANATION OF THE TOPIC**

Historically the Kurds were a nomadic people until they settled down in a mountainous region of the Middle East at the beginning of the 20th century.

Without a country to call their own, the Kurdish people have been grossly mistreated and the question of a Kurdish independent state dates back to the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). The Treaty was an agreement reached after World War I between the Allied Powers, led by France and Great Britain, and the leaders of the Ottoman Empire. It had the purpose to give a territory to each of the peoples, that were under the Ottoman Empire, deciding the borders of the modern State of Turkey, offering an autonomous Armenia and including a country for the Kurdish nation, which never took place.

In fact the Treaty of Sèvres was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which did not include the recognition of a separate Kurdish state, but recognized the boundaries of the modern state of Turkey, the British possession of Cyprus and the Italian possession of the Dodecanese.

After nearly a century, Kurdish people are still divided into regions: about 20 millions of them live in Turkey, 9 millions in Iran, 6 millions in Iraq, 3 millions in Syria and the rest has emigrated all over the world. In many European countries there has been a Kurdish Diaspora: for example, in Germany there is a Kurdish community made by 1 million Kurds.

### **Kurds in Armenia**

Kurds have always represented a small percentage of the Armenia population. There have never been violent conflicts between Kurdish people of Armenia and the Armenian government since Kurds are treated as any other citizen of the country.

## **Kurds in Iraq**

It is known that the Kurds, compared to the other countries in which they live, have most of their rights in Iraq. However, this has been the Iraqi-Kurdish situation in the last decade, in fact in the 20th century, Kurdish people did not face much assimilation in Iraq.

Between the 1930s and 1940s, the first Kurdish rebellions against the Iraqi government started, in attempt to settle a Kurdish state. In 1961 the first Kurdish-Iraqi war began: Kurdish rebels were trying to gain control of a Kurdish region in Northern Iraq. The conflict ended in 1970 with a peacekeeping agreement, a first important attempt to solve the Kurdish-Iraqi question, promising Kurds more autonomy. Due to more conflicts emerging, the peace agreement failed and the second Kurdish Iraqi war took place between 1974 and 1975. In 1983 there was a Kurdish rebellion against Saddam Hussein in a quest of autonomy: he responded by attacking Kurdish inhabited areas with the use of armed forces and chemical weapons. Moreover, he ordered a gas attack in 1988 on the Kurdish town of Salabja, killing thousands of Kurdish civilians as a result. This action was considered a genocide by several countries and led the UN Security Council to pass resolution 688, which reprimands Iraq for its actions against the Kurds. In 1991, after the Gulf War, an international anti-Saddam coalition put into effect a semi no-fly zone in areas where the conflict was going up, permitting Kurdish forces to establish their power in Northern Iraq. In 2003, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the United States of America created a no-fly zone, a so-called "safe haven", over many Kurdish settlements: as a result, a Kurdish region in Northern Iraq was recognized as an autonomous region by Iraqi constitution in 2005 (the KRG controls the area).

This relatively peaceful situation in the region of Kurdistan was short-lived since in 2014 the Islamic State attacked this area, killing 5000 Kurds. Peshmerga forces have been the main military players defending Iraqi territories, getting more and more strategic relevance in the region, especially protecting the city of Kirkuk and pushing back the Caliphate (ISIS forces) from Mosul.

On 25 September 2017 more than 92% of voters in Iraqi Kurdistan opted for independence in a referendum, but the central government from Baghdad did pressure to 'cancel' the vote and its outcome. Before the referendum, the UN Security Council had warned of the potentially destabilising impact of a planned vote on independence for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States had urged the KRG to reconsider or postpone the event, in order to negotiate with the Iraqi government. On 15 October 2017, Iraqi forces launched an operation to take Kirkuk. The city took part in the referendum since it was under the Peshmerga forces but not under the KRG, and this was considered as a Kurdish attempt to conquer Kirkuk. To avoid conflicts with the Iraqi government Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region has offered to "freeze" the result of the referendum on independence and begin dialogue with Baghdad. On 29 October 2017, Masoud Barzani announced his intentions to step down as President of Iraqi Kurdistan after 12 years as the leader of the KRG. Currently the instability in the Iraqi Kurdistan is caused by two Kurdish political parties: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). They have ruled the area peacefully since 1998, thanks to a power-sharing agreement reached after nearly four years of civil war. After one year of political instability due to the lack of a president of the KRG, Barham Salih (PDK politician) was elected president on October 2nd. The KDP could now take revenge by forming a ruling majority of the KRG that excludes the PUK, but it is more likely to seek a new deal to minimize the tension and to prioritize the problems of the Kirkuk governorate, where the Iraqi government is trying to gain control.

## **Kurds in Turkey**

The most struggled situation of the Kurdish people may be in Turkey. In the 20th century, the Turkish government's target was to "turkify" the country, spreading the idea of one nation, one people. The government banned the Kurdish language from public and private use and prohibited the wearing of traditional Kurdish attire within the country. These actions led to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, which began at the end of the 20th century when Turkish-Kurdish people, led by the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), were asking for rights and for autonomy for the Kurdish nation. The PKK first rebellion

was in 1984: it was unsuccessful since the request of an autonomous Kurdistan within Turkey failed. The PKK asked for more Kurdish rights in the 1990s: as a result the PKK's leader was imprisoned for "treason" in 1999. With the attempt to improve its reputation, the PKK announced a unilateral ceasefire that lasted until 2004, when it rebelled again, after being recognized as a terrorist group by Turkey and other Western countries. The conflict lasted until 2009, when the PKK asked for a ceasefire. After that the Turkish government imposed strict measures against Kurdish people. In 2011 violent encounters took place between PKK soldiers and Turkish authorities. Moreover, in this conflict PKK forces targeted civilians through violence. Following the July 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan by mutinous Turkish officers, the PKK is targeted by the Turkish government drastically and it is even more in struggles in Iraq and Syria, where Turkey is trying to assert its power. In a BBC interview the PKK leader Cemil Bayik said: "We don't want to separate from Turkey and set up a state. We want to live within the borders of Turkey on our own land freely... The struggle will continue until the Kurds' innate rights are accepted". In Turkey's point of view, the PKK wants to come over the Turkish government and create a Kurdish State within Turkish borders.

### **Kurds in Syria**

As in Turkey, Kurds have been discriminated by the Syrian government for years. They have been stripped of their Syrian citizenship many times; as a matter of fact, they have to show proof that they, or their family, have lived in Syria since 1945 or before, otherwise they lose their citizenship. After years of discrimination, Kurdish protests evolved in armed conflicts, with the purpose of gaining control of Kurdish inhabited areas. The main Kurdish player in Syria is the People's Protection Union (YPG). The YPG has tried to defend Kurdish areas during the Syrian civil war. It is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, since it is seen as an extension of the PKK.

Since 2013 Kurds have been in struggle both in Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The war between ISIS and Syria Kurdish separatists began when Kurds tried to gain control of areas under ISIS control, such as al-Hasakah, Aleppo and Rojava, by pushing back ISIS militias, with the purpose of being considered by Syrian government for their participation against ISIS. A similar thing happened when ISIS attacked Iraqi Kurdish cities of Sinjar and Makhmour. The USA had an important role in the Kurdish war against ISIS, helping them by sending drones and jets in areas where Kurdish forces were fighting.

Syrian Kurds have been in struggle the last year with Turkish forces in Afrin, the capital of the homonymous Syrian district located between the Turkish border in the North and West, the region of Idlib in the South and the rest borders with the city of Aleppo. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, local Kurdish forces with the support of the PKK have gained a de facto political and military autonomy of Afrin, linked to the other Kurdish-Syrian regions in the North-East of the country.

The Turkish offensive, helped by Syrian forces, has moved on all fronts of the Turkish border and the southern border of Idlib, where Turkey already has a military presence and enjoys the support of local anti-Kurds militias, gaining control over Afrin and defeating Kurds forces. Afrin has seen much of its Kurdish population displaced: this is clearly a Turkish attempt to alter the long-established Kurdish-majority demographics in the area to defeat Kurdish power. On a recent visit to the United States in late September, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reaffirmed his intention to expand his attacks against his Syrian Kurdish adversaries. Furthermore, he said he will focus his crosshairs East of the Euphrates River on the two-thirds of northern Syria controlled by Kurdish-led forces to establish new "safe zones" for Syrians there.

### **Kurds in Iran**

The relationship between Kurds and the Iranian government has been tense since the Party For Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) has been an active organization, based on the Iraqi-Irani border. Since 2015, PJAK has tried to reach Kurdish autonomy in the Iranian provinces of Kordestan and Hermanshah.

## **ACTIONS TAKEN**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> April of 1991 the Resolution 688 was voted by the Security Council (SC): it was adopted after Turkey, France and Iran wrote letters to the SC concerning the Kurdish question. After the resolution was adopted, Iraq was obliged to accept international human rights organisations within its borders to protect civilians after and during conflicts against Kurds, since the Resolution condemned the repression of the Iraqi Kurdish civilian population in many parts of Iraq.

To support national development efforts on political humanitarian levels in Iraq, the SC founded the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), with the adoption of the SC Resolution 1500 (14 August 2003). Moreover, by the adoption of Resolution 1883 (2009) UNAMI was authorized to continue providing security and logistical in the Iraqi Kurdistan and to facilitate the political situation between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

In 2017 the SC announced its opposition to the upcoming referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan, asking the Kurdistan Regional Government to facilitate the dialogue with Baghdad. On 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017 the Resolution 2363 was published, extending the UNAMI mandate in order to manage the instable situation created after the referendum that took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> September.

Currently the Security Council is trying to facilitate negotiations between the main States involved and Kurdish representatives to stabilize the struggled situation.

## **CHAIRS' SUGGESTIONS**

A multifaceted approach is required to face this issue: it is unrealistic to think about the creation of an independent Kurdish State, since too many countries are against this solution.

It is necessary to understand that the Kurdish independence needs to happen step by step. Before thinking to an autonomous State, it is important to focus on Kurdish rights: delegates need to apply pressure to States, where Kurdish people live, to recognize fundamental human rights to Kurds, to accept their language and to evaluate Kurdish political representatives, in order to make Kurds feel respected, accepted and represented in the country they live in. It is fundamental to improve negotiations between Kurdish political parties and the States involved to avoid future conflicts.

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