

Abstract

Key words: Kurds, Middle East, independence, nation, Kurdish nation, state, nationalism, political demands, Capital of Independence, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

This dissertation explores the problem and issues concerning the Kurdish peoples, who do not have an independent state. The main objective is to present a comprehensive study of the reasons why an independent Kurdish state has not been established in the Middle East.

The work combines the theoretical and empirical dimension and consists of six chapters in which those two alternate throughout this work. Chapters 1,3 and 5 address theoretical issues concerning the Kurdish people, while chapters 2,4 and 6 address empirical issues related to the choice of research methods, as well as the analysis I have conducted. The detailed structure of this dissertation is presented below.

Chapter one outlines theoretical issues and constitutes an introduction of the Kurds as a nation inhabiting a territory in the Middle East. Their presence there has become an example of the unrealized right to self-determination, which is one of the elements of international law and refers to the ability of nations to shape their own destiny. The Kurds are an example of attempting to create their own state, alas without success. This chapter also addresses the theoretical approach to the issue of state-forming processes as well as nationalism, which plays an important role in formation of national identity. The Kurds, despite having their nationality, still do not have their own country. The prerequisites to establish a state is sovereignty and control over one's territory, along with other elements like constitution of state laws and economy. The Kurds have been unable to establish their state so far because they do not yet possess those essential prerequisites. The last part of this chapter presents the situation of the Kurds who are striving to gain autonomy in the areas they inhabit. Despite this, they still have no say in the matter in the international arena and are still forced to live in a situation of political instability and armed conflict.

The second chapter aims to diagnose the current conditions of the Kurds in the Middle East and examine the needs of the Kurdish community in their quest for autonomy. This

section clarifies the field of research, so-called independence capital (*kapitał niepodległościowy*) and constitutes various aspects such as political, social, military and cultural which I examine in this chapter. The study poses research questions relating, to name just a few, to the role of the Kurds in the domestic politics of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, the strength of the Kurdish sense of national identity in the Middle East, as well as the possibility of building military capacity and finding sources of funding for the newly formed state. Research hypotheses are also presented, including the one concerning Kurdish independence aspirations, which are perceived as a threat to regional stability. Therefore, building a positive image of the Kurds in international consciousness is crucial to their independence aspirations. Research methods include a survey, covert participant observation and individual interviews.

The third chapter of this paper analyzes the history and evolution of the Kurdish peoples in the Middle East, considering how the Kurdish national consciousness has been forming along with their quest for independence over the periods from the Middle Ages to the present. Next, the functioning of Kurdish tribes and their importance in the region is discussed. The influences of Safavid and Ottoman rule on the Kurds until the end of World War I have also been analysed, along with the difficulties and conflicts the Kurds faced at the time, and how it impacted on their sense of national identity. Another element of my research is the formation of Kurdish national consciousness in the interwar period, with consideration to the Kurds' pursuit of independence and how the political situation in the Middle East at the time impacted this pursuit. I have also studied the influence of post-World War II political changes on the Kurdish question, particularly Kurdish movements in Turkey in the 20th and 21st centuries, their goals, methods of operation and the response of Turkish government. Next, I have investigated the role of the Kurds in Iraq's domestic politics, recognizing the challenges the Iraqi authorities had put on the Kurds, and their contribution to the country's development. The conflict between the Iranian Kurds and the state authorities has also been studied, including causes of the conflict, such as discrimination, repressions and lack of autonomy, and the methods of seeking independence. Finally, I have discussed the impact of the Arab Spring on the situation of the Kurds in Syria, along with the consequences of the civil war and the acts the Kurds carried out in defence of their interests and autonomy.

The fourth chapter discusses political activities of the Kurds and their quest for autonomy. I have described the Kurds' struggle for independence in Iraq, Syria and Turkey and their participation in elections, as well as their political successes. I have also focused on

the formation and functioning of defence units, armaments, the influence of leaders on societal integrity, and the impact of democratic confederalism on Turkish and Syrian Kurds presented. The chapter also investigates the economic foundations of building an independent Kurdistan, including the economic potential of the Kurdish regions in Iraq and Turkey, agriculture as a livelihood of most Iranian Kurds, and foundations for sustaining Syrian autonomy. This part of the dissertation also highlights the challenges the Kurds have been facing building an independent economy, considering the lack of investment, decentralized structure of the economy and the poor infrastructure. In this chapter I have emphasized the importance of a solid economic foundation in building an independent Kurdistan so that the region will be stabilizing and developing in the future.

Chapter five presents the external components of Kurdish independence capital in the Middle East, including the role of pro-Kurdish NGOs, the policies of world powers and state support. It focuses on the activities of pro-Kurdish organizations in Europe and around the world and their influence on the Kurds' quest for independence. The U.S. attitude toward the Kurds in Iraq and their cooperation is analyzed. The impact of British policy, French support and the dilemmas of German policy toward the Kurds are also examined. Russia's position toward the Kurds and its influence on the political situation in the Middle East is also discussed. The chapter presents a comprehensive look at the external factors influencing independence capital of the Kurdish nation, their aspirations for independence and recognition of their national identity.

The last chapter of this paper presents empirical research and the Kurdish sentiments on the current situation and prospects for the future. The results of the research methods I selected are presented there. The last section of the work discusses mainly the analysis of a survey with 143 respondents. The survey was interesting for many reasons but, from the researcher's point of view, quite laborious since some respondents were reluctant to participate in the survey—they were afraid of possible reprisals and feared for their own lives; some respondents did not answer all of the questions. However, the completed surveys allowed us to learn about preferences and trends among the Kurds, assess the impact of Kurdish actions towards gaining independence, and understand Kurdish political attitudes. The method of covert participatory observation provided insight into the realities of Kurdish life and how their actions work in practice, including strategies, tactics and actions taken to increase their independence capital. By using this method, I have obtained the information that would

otherwise be difficult to collect through other research methods. The interviews I have conducted provided more detailed information about the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees, allowing for a better understanding of the factors affecting Kurdish independence capital.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Conetta', is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'A.' followed by a series of connected loops and strokes.