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## **Paradiplomacy of Regional Governments in International Relations: The Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (2003 – 2010)**

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### **Abstract**

Until now there has been relatively little systematic analysis of the foreign relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Based on interviews with senior officials of the KRG, this article places this activity within the conceptual framework of paradiplomacy. It argues that, in the framework of regional geopolitics and economic benefits for the Kurdistan Region from its place in Iraq, the practice of this paradiplomacy does not indicate an intention to secede from Iraq.

### **Keywords**

Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq, Paradiplomacy, Foreign Relations

### **INTRODUCTION**

Until now most research on paradiplomacy has been on federal regions in the 'developed' world (Aldecoa/Keating 1999; Hocking 1993; Michelmann/Soldatos 1990), with relatively little systematic analysis of the foreign relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This article builds on this literature, and engaging with recently published works (Caspersen/Stansfield 2011; Natali 2010), argues that the involvement of the Kurdistan Regional Government in international relations, while it once inhabited the 'grey' area of unrecognised states (Owtram 2011) and quasi-states (Kolsto 2006), is now more firmly consolidated into the activity of foreign relations of federal states. The argument, initially advanced in earlier work (Mohammed 2010; Owtram 2009; 2011), is that the key factor in this transition is geopolitics and the international system and specifically, the atti-

tude of great and regional powers. These geopolitical realities and super-power interests buttress the maintenance of the state of Iraq in a loose decentralised form of federalism, which enables the KRG to continue to develop economically and politically. Due to these political economy factors and material interest of the political class in the Kurdistan Region, it is unlikely that the current situation will change. Unless there is a radical change in the structures of international power or regional geopolitics there will be no declaration of independence or bid to secede from Iraq by the Kurdistan Region, because there is no plausible basis by which the region might hope to gain recognition of a declaration of independence either from a great power or regional powers. Furthermore, the Kurdistan Region benefits from the current situation of political stalemate (Natali 2010: 132). However, it must be born in mind that the Middle East is currently a fast changing environment, and the implications and effects of the Arab spring, the US withdrawal from Iraq, and the war in Syria are unlikely yet to be fully played out.

In contributing to the literature this article attempts to answer four questions related to foreign and diplomatic relations between the KRG and other states and regions: 1) does the KRG have the capability to enter into foreign and diplomatic relations with other states and/or regions? 2) What are the instruments used by the KRG to implement foreign relations? 3) What are the objectives of the Kurdistan Regional Government? 4) What successes have KRG diplomatic efforts reaped?

The article illustrates and explores these issues by reference to the responses of senior officials in the Kurdistan Regional Government interviewed in 2010. The article first lays out the theoretical framework of the research and secondly analyses the interviews; finally, it sheds light on the practice of paradiplomacy by Kurdistan as a federal region and the interviewees perception that it does not mean an intention to secede from the Iraqi Federal State.

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT: A POLITICAL ENTITY AND 'PARADIPLOMACY'

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has had a wide range of analytical labels applied to it. Harvey and Stansfield (2011: 19) argue that "since the early 1960, the predominantly ethnic Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq represented, at

one time or another, an insurgent state, an autonomous region, an insurgent state/proxy and, from the 1990s onwards, a range of state-like forms, such as *de facto* state, *de facto* states (due to the division of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq following civil war), an unrecognised state, a recognised unrecognised state, as well as a regional state of Federal Iraq”.

Paradiplomacy entered academic discussion in response to the changes in federal states in the 1970s and 1980s in the framework of the “new federalism” discourse (Aguirre 1999). The term paradiplomacy was coined to take into account the inadequacy of the term ‘diplomacy’ to cover developments in international relations. Due to decentralisation of power and increase of jurisdictional autonomy in domestic affairs regional governments are also involved in foreign policy via establishing contacts with foreign partners at governmental and non-governmental levels (Duchachek 1990: 1). Many influential regional governments have their own permanent representations in other countries and international organisations, and this activity of non-central governments in the international arena has been characterised as paradiplomacy (Aldecoa/ Keating 1999; Hocking 1991; idem 1993; Michelman/Soldatos 1990; Fry 1990, idem 1998).

Keating (1999: 1 ff.) provides a conceptual overview of the “increasing involvement of regional governments in the international arena” surveying their motivations, the opportunities that are there for them, the strategies and styles adopted in this activity and the limits of such activity. He places the phenomenon in the context of globalisation, free trade and the interpretation of domestic and international spheres of action. Looking at the new paradiplomacy from the perspectives of the regions themselves, Keating identifies three sets of motivations: economic, cultural and political. First, economically, regions seek investment, markets for their products, technology for modernisation and to promote themselves as tourist destinations. Regions also seek by collaboration among small and medium-sized firms in different places to exploit the same complementarities and synergies that characterise successful industrial districts, again enhancing market competitiveness. Secondly, regions with their own language and culture also seek resources and support in the international arena. Thirdly, regions have a variety of political reasons for entering the international arena: those with nationalist aspirations seek recognition

and legitimacy as something more than mere regions. Conceived in this way paradiplomacy is distinctly different to conventional state diplomacy: it is more functionally specific and targeted, often opportunistic and experimental. It is also characterised by a high degree of involvement of civil society and the private sector.

Using this framework, attention will now be given to its relevance to Iraqi Kurdistan. The current status of Iraqi Kurdistan came about from the Transitional Law for the Administration of Iraq (TAL) signed in March 2004, followed by the 2005 Iraqi permanent constitution, which recognised Iraqi Kurdistan as a legal region of the Federal State of Iraq (Natali 2010; Chorev 2007). Following the creation of the unified KRG government in January 2006 a Department of Foreign Relations was formed headed by Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir.

The increase in the paradiplomatic activity is represented by the offices of the KRG abroad and the presence of foreign diplomatic missions and international offices in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; currently there are more than 20 consulates and commercial offices in Erbil.

#### ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS OF KRG FOREIGN RELATIONS BY INTERVIEWEES

The list of interviewees are: Azad Barwari, Deputy Prime Minister of KRG; Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, KRG High Representative to the United Kingdom; Burhan Jaf, KRG Mission to the European Union; Falah Mustafa Bakir, KRG Head of Department of Foreign Relations; Mohammed Ihsan, Head of KRG representation in Baghdad; and Talib Rasheed Yadgar, General Director in Presidential Diwan of Kurdistan Region Presidency. These constitute senior officials of the KRG involved in foreign relations; in addition, Frederic Tissot, the French Consul General was interviewed, and his comments provide a useful external insight on KRG foreign relations from a member of the international diplomatic community. The topics discussed are: the opportunity structures for paradiplomacy including the constitutional framework and implementation of the policies; objectives and instruments of KRG foreign relations; successful participation in international relations; and KRG relations with the Federal state structures. This includes the discussion of the absence of plans for secession from Iraq, and prospects for future cooperation and coordination between the KRG and the Federal government of Iraq.

Referring back to Keating's identification of an "opportunity structure" for participation in international relations was a focal point in the interviews, specifically the constitutional framework and the implementation of the policies.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the external relations within a particular federal country the constitutional stipulation (or prerequisite) of that federation is one of the starting-points. As for the legal provision to implement paradiplomacy, all the respondents concur that the status of the Iraqi Kurdistan region is constitutionally entrenched and guaranteed. Furthermore, they assert that the Kurdistan Region has been granted legitimate powers to implement foreign relations but not formulate foreign policy. Furthermore, regarding the constitutional restriction, all the respondents assert that the Iraqi Kurdistan region implements foreign relations without breaching Iraqi sovereignty, as well as without overstepping the limits of federal exclusive authorities.

When speaking about the constitutional framework, Azad Barwari, Deputy Prime Minister of Kurdistan Regional Government states: "it is right that formulating foreign policy and diplomatic representation of Iraq are included within the exclusive authority of the Federal government, but, according to the Article 121/4 in Iraqi constitution, the regions and governorates have rights to establish offices in embassies and participate in diplomatic missions in order to follow cultural, social, and developmental affairs" (Barwari, 2010). Also, the KRG representative to the United Kingdom makes the same point about this Article and adds that "in the Kurdistan Regional Government there is an order (No. 143 on 25th of January 2009) issued last year regarding the Department of Foreign Relations. So, these are the two main legislative umbrellas under which we exist. But, I have to say that the Kurdistan Regional Government's representations abroad existed before the Iraqi constitution" (Abdul Rahman 2010). Asked about whether the Kurdistan Regional Government's participation in the international arena contravenes Iraqi sovereignty or the Iraqi constitution, all the respondents answered that the KRG's involvement in international affairs did not breach Iraqi sovereignty. Most respondents were very confident and assertive during the interview in

talking about the issue that the KRG does not infringe any Iraqi law in this regard. Among them, Falah Mustafa Bakir affirms that “as part of Iraq we implement the foreign policy based on the interest of the Region in a way that does not contradict with the interest of the Federal government in Baghdad” (Bakir 2010). According to Frederic Tissot, the French General Consul in Erbil, if the Kurdistan region adheres to and respects the Constitution, it can perform foreign relations, which is not regarded as a problem, but on the contrary it is seen as beneficial for the Region and the country (Tissot 2010).

Another interesting point is made by Talib Rasheed Yadgar (2010), General Director of the Presidential Diwan at the Kurdistan Region Presidency, in respect to the ability to implement foreign relations by the federal regions. According to Yadgar, a federal region’s involvement in international affairs depends on the legal personality of the region. He adds that the regions possess the legal personality in two ways: first, through the constitutional framework, and, second, through the efficiency of the region itself to implement the policies. He considers that since Article 117 of the Iraqi constitution stipulates that Kurdistan is a federal region, it can practice foreign relations and be involved in international affairs. Furthermore, in the Iraqi constitution, Article 110 identifies the exclusive powers of the Federal government. All the paragraphs of this Article do not mention the implementing of foreign policy. Thus, he says that Article 115 identifies that what is not stipulated in the exclusive authorities of Federal government belongs to the authorities of the regions. Also, Article 121/4 gives the right to the regions to have offices in embassies and diplomatic missions in order to follow cultural, social, and developmental affairs. Accordingly, Yadgar confirms that the Kurdistan Region’s paradiplomacy does not contravene or breach Iraqi sovereignty or overstep the limits of Federal exclusive authorities. Also, Mohammed Ihsan (2010) emphasises that “in terms of exercising international relations, according to the Articles of Iraqi constitution, so far what the KRG has done is legal without breaching Iraq sovereignty”. Moreover, Brendan O’Leary considers that the Iraqi constitution wholly fulfils the Kurds’ long-held demand for autonomy for Kurdistan and democracy for Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government has the right to have offices to represent the Region in all embassies and consulates in all matters within the Kurdistan National

Assembly's powers. He states that "the new constitution of Iraq recognizes the Kurdistan National Assembly, Government and Region, and all of the Region's laws and contracts since 1992. It grants the Kurdistan National Assembly complete autonomy in all but the very small number of exclusive and limited powers of the Federal government, and the right to nullify or modify any Federal legislation where powers are shared between the federal and regional governments" (O'Leary 2008:38).

As far as the constitutional framework is concerned, the Kurdistan Region implements paradiplomacy according to the interpretations of the Articles and paragraphs of the Iraqi constitution. The wordings of some of them allow room for three interpretations or readings of the legality of KRG's foreign relations. The Kurds have taken these three readings as justifications for their paradiplomatic activities. First, Kurdistan possessed the representation offices prior to 2003 and was carrying out external activities according to the local law and regulations of the KRG. The second reading is that Kurdistan cannot carry out some authorities because they are exclusive authorities of the Federal government. According to the Article (110/1), formulating foreign policy and diplomatic representation are among the exclusive authorities of the Federal government. However, Article 115 states that residual authority is placed with the Federal entities in Iraq: any competence not expressly reserved for the centre is automatically considered to belong to the entities (regions). The provisions of the constitution served to legitimise, on an international level, Kurdistan's paradiplomacy, autonomy and self-rule. Therefore, the Constitution does not mention the process of implementing foreign policy, and the KRG considers it as its legal right to perform foreign relations. The third reading emerges from Article 121/4 in which it is stated that regions can establish offices in Iraqi embassies to promote cultural, social, and developmental affairs. Therefore, Kurdistan implements paradiplomatic activities without breaching Iraqi sovereignty. In a public talk at the University of Kurdistan Hawler in April 2011 Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman made the point that nowhere is it stipulated in the Iraqi constitution that the KRG office has to be physically located in the same building as the Iraqi embassy and that the KRG does not have offices in any country where there is not an Iraqi embassy.

As a result, all the aforementioned confirm that the Kurdistan region has a level of autonomy, which is shaped by the decentralised structure of Iraqi federalism. The constitutional framework and the level of autonomy are important elements shaping Kurdistan's paradiplomacy. As a federal region, Iraqi Kurdistan has the legal authority and autonomy granted by the Constitution to implement foreign relations and paradiplomacy, in accordance with the constitutional Articles and paragraphs. Since Kurdistan is a federal region, its engagement in international affairs is regarded as paradiplomacy.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICIES

The second aspect of the opportunity structure of Kurdistan Region's paradiplomacy—the implementation of the policies—will now be discussed through analysis of the data collected from the interviews.

The respondents mention that the Kurdistan Regional Government has offices of representation abroad. They say that these offices have been opened according to the KRG order and they are legal. As Falah Mustafa Bakir indicates: "because of the need the KRG adopted this in order to establish the Department of Foreign Relations in accordance with the Article in the Constitution in order to follow the cultural, social and developmental needs of this Region" (Bakir 2010). But, Burhan Jaf (2010), KRG Mission to the European Union and Mohammed Ihsan, Head of KRG representation in Baghdad, say that despite having a Department of Foreign Relations (DFR), the KRG representatives work separately from Iraqi embassies. They deem that these representatives are linked to the DFR and to the KRG Prime Minister in Kurdistan, but are not linked either to Baghdad or to the Iraqi Foreign Affairs Ministry, because these matters have still not been organised by law. This constitutes one of the problems between Baghdad and Erbil. Therefore, Bakir says that "we are trying to also find a mechanism of cooperative relations between KRG offices abroad and the Iraqi embassies, so that we work without having any sensitivity, because we don't want to go beyond what the Constitution has entitled us" (Bakir 2010).

One point made by some respondents is that although the official order of the Kurdistan Regional Government Council of Ministers was issued in 2009 to authorise the Department of Foreign Relations, according



to Burhan Jaf and Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, KRG representation offices existed before 2003. Thus, Abdul Rahman maintains that “one very good example for that is the KRG representation in Europe and America began in 1998” (Abdul Rahman 2010). According to Bakir, the KRG has official representations in several countries. So, “as part of the KRG’s restructuring and outreach to the international community, we hope to open more representations abroad in the near future” (Bakir 2010).

As for the issue of having KRG offices inside Iraqi embassies, most of the respondents confirm that the KRG has no representation offices in any Iraqi embassies. Jaf explains that “the Constitution of Federal Iraq gives Federal regions the right to have offices. However, there seems to be different interpretations used as to how will this to be organised. The KRG pursues relevant independently functioning representation offices that have coordination and cooperation with the Federal authorities” (Jaf 2010). But, Yadgar thinks that as long as there is a constitutional framework, the KRG can implement external relations.

However, although the KRG has no representation offices physically within Iraqi embassies, Abdul Rahman and Jaf say that the KRG offices have good cooperation with Iraqi embassies in Europe and they do not have any problem with them. Also, Bakir says that the KRG wants to work in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Iraq to strengthen the position of the Kurdistan Regional Government with foreign countries in the fields of culture, social affairs, economy, and development.

Furthermore, regarding the international actions of the KRG, Jaf and Abdul Rahman, both reliable informants, describe involvement in activities, which include such issues as the conclusion of agreements, participation in the activities of international organisations, organisation of the official and unofficial visits abroad, and participation in the international conferences.

Nevertheless, talking about the capability of the KRG in implementing foreign relations, all the respondents (Abdul Rahman, Bakir, Barwari, Ihsan, Tissot, and Yadgar) say that the Iraqi Kurdistan region has the capability to enter into foreign and diplomatic relations with other states and regions. For instance, Jaf makes clear that KRG representation offices abroad have proved that Kurdistan is capable of engaging in foreign rela-

tions with other states, regions and entities. In addition, Yadgar confirms that the KRG has the capability to perform diplomatic and foreign relations based on the Constitution, human resources, and the wealthy economy.

Consequently, the activities of the Iraqi Kurdistan region are similar to those found in other federal countries, which are the establishment of permanent representations in foreign countries, participation in international conferences, trade missions and other events, as well as conclusion of international agreements and participation in joint international projects (Michelmann/Soldatos 1990; Hocking 1991; Aldecoa/Keating, 1999).

#### OBJECTIVES AND INSTRUMENTS OF KRG FOREIGN RELATIONS

In this part, the objectives and the instruments of the Iraqi Kurdistan region's involvement in foreign relations will be discussed through analysing the information collected in the interviews.

Thus, regarding international involvement, the respondents (Barwari, Bakir, Yadgar, Ihsan, and Abdul Rahman) talk about cultural, social, economic, political, and developmental objectives guiding the KRG's involvement in international affairs. Azad Barwari (KRG Deputy Prime Minister) states that "we aim to strengthen the position of the Kurdistan Regional Government in the international arena in the fields of politics, culture, social affairs, economy, and development, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Iraq" (Barwari 2010). Also, Bakir advances the KRG's objectives in terms of foreign relations that are economic, cultural, developmental, and political. According to Bakir, economic and developmental objectives include promotion of trade and investment, enhancing foreign direct investment and increasing commercial ties between the KRG and elsewhere. Cultural objectives include the issues of promotion of Kurdish culture, educational exchange and other related aspects. In terms of political aims the KRG's goal is to establish and strengthen good relations with the international community. The same conclusion is drawn by Barwari, Ihsan, and Yadgar.

However, an interesting point is made by Ihsan in respect to the KRG's priorities concerning these aims. He reveals that in pursuit of its own body of foreign-policy objectives through the liaison and representation offices worldwide, the KRG emphasises economic and developmental

objectives so as to attract foreign investors into Kurdistan. He maintains that “mainly after 2003, the objectives became totally developmental and economic, because our representatives abroad are working hard to get the investor, to get companies, to get things to be in Kurdistan, which is good for the whole of Iraq” (Ihsan 2010).

Since the KRG’s paradiplomacy is mostly motivated by economic concerns, it has the clearest rationale and it provides a well-documented example of paradiplomacy in a new context.

Nonetheless, central governments have a set of instruments to implement foreign policy. Some instruments are diplomacy, negotiation, economic tools, economic sanctions, trade restrictions, and military force. Furthermore, given that the external activity of regional governments constitutes the elements of foreign policy, the regions have to maintain instruments to implement their foreign relations in the international arena.

Most of the respondents (Barwari, Bakir, Abdul Rahman, Ihsan, Jaf, and Yadgar) talk about the tools by which the KRG implements foreign relations. They explain that since the KRG is a non-state actor and is not a sovereign state, it uses the tools of diplomacy, negotiation, and economic strategies to pursue its own body of foreign relations objectives. Azad Barwari says: “in implementing the diplomatic relations, we follow the common instruments of foreign relations. According to the authority that we are granted by the Constitution, we have the Department of Foreign Relations, which is under the Premiership of the Council of Ministers of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, and this department uses the tools that are followed by the KRG in implementing foreign relations” (Barwari 2010).

Moreover, Abdul Rahman and Ihsan describe how the Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani have played an important role in Iraq since 2003. Their very strong and positive role has meant that other governments, for example Britain, always have to take note of Kurdistan, the Presidency, the KRG, and the Kurdish political parties in Baghdad. The same conclusion is drawn by Yadgar, Bakir, and Jaf.

#### SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Panayotis Soldatos (1990: 35; idem 1993) suggests that the external activities of non-central governments can be considered as paradiplomacy

when they are constituent elements of foreign policy. According to him, paradiplomacy has “objectives, strategies, tactics, institutions, a decision-making process, instruments, and a foreign-policy output” (1990: 35). Consequently, the non-central government should possess enough autonomy to formulate its foreign-policy objectives, to determine the way in order to achieve these objectives and to deal with implementation of the policy. In this context, the simple implementation of the central government’s decisions cannot be considered as paradiplomacy. Paradiplomacy is not about delegating or contracting-out of the policy implementation from central government to the local governments.

The participation of regional governments in international relations is important and beneficial for the region and the federal governments. All the respondents (Barwari, Abdul Rahman, Jaf, Bakir, Tissot, Ihsan, and Yadgar) assert that the KRG’s participation in international relations is important and beneficial for Kurdistan and for Iraq as well. For instance, Tissot thinks that both the regional and the federal governments benefit when the regional governments are involved in international affairs. In respect to the KRG’s link to international politics, he says: “it is good for Kurdistan and it is good for Iraq. And, I hope more regions in Iraq, for example, the Basrah region, will be able to have relations with other countries and other regions, but they have to respect the Constitution and not breach the sovereignty of Iraq” (Tissot 2010). The participation of the regional governments in international relations is beneficial to the democratic development of a federal state.

Nevertheless, since 2003, the KRG has conducted a wide range of foreign relations on the regional and international levels, taking advantage of all the room for manoeuvre given by the Iraqi constitution and using its political leverage inside Iraq. The diplomatic efforts and the foreign relations of Kurdistan, as a Federal region in Federal Iraq in the post-2003 era have been fruitful and productive. In this regard, all the respondents deem that despite the challenges of establishing external relations, the KRG has gained much from these relations. Thus, Barwari believes that the KRG has achieved many successes in the diplomatic relations, and the evidence is “the increase in international consideration and attention to Kurdistan in the fields of politics and investment. Also, the increase in in-

ternational consideration of Kurdistan by the KRG's establishment of relatively stable relationships with neighbouring countries" (Barwari 2010).

In addition, Jaf advances some gains, which are the strong relationships with U.S.A, Europe, and neighbouring countries, corroborated by Yadgar.

Analysis of most of the diplomatic efforts made by Kurdistan leaders reveals the significance of a clear vision in developing foreign relations. Specifically, over the past decade the KRG has developed special relations with the U.S.A, U.K., European Countries, Turkey, Iran, and some Arab countries. Furthermore, Bakir, Ihsan, and Abdul Rahman contend that the Kurdish leadership has played a great role in developing the relationships and concluding productive and fruitful relations with all the sides, external and internal powers. However, Ihsan argues that although the KRG's diplomatic relations reaped many successes, "we lost many things, because we were the only representative of Iraq before 2003. After 2003, we managed to divert our policy, before we were the only gate for everything for Iraq because Saddam Hussein was in power, no one was ready to deal with him, and everybody was dealing with us" (Ihsan 2010). On the other hand, Jaf advances a contrasting idea regarding the diplomatic ties, saying "I do not think there is loss in diplomatic relations. We have not lost but gained a lot from our diplomatic engagement with the European counterparts. For example, we have strong and consistent relations with Members of the European Parliament" (Jaf 2010). Also, in terms of neighbours, the geographical location of the Kurdistan Region on the border with the gateway of Europe, Turkey, is favourable for the development of international and cross-border cooperation with Europe and other parts of the world. Therefore, the KRG maintains good relationships with the neighbouring countries. Consequently, Tissot believes that the diplomatic relations in the post-2003 period put Iraqi Kurdistan in a better position than other Iraqi groups. He concludes that "the Kurds are not alone; they are respected by a lot of countries, for example, the French government, German government, British government; Kurdish people and Kurdish region and authorities are part of the solution of building Iraq" (Tissot 2010). There would be no call for truly international relations on the part of KRG if there were no foreign partners available to undertake such relations with its official representatives, sometimes at the highest levels.

Thus, the Kurdistan region foreign policy-apparatus has sought ways to adapt in more flexible ways to both new competencies and novel challenges on the international scene.

Paradiplomacy is thus a reconfiguration of a state in accordance with the demanding global environment.

#### THE KRG AND SECESSION FROM IRAQ

In terms of plans and policies of the Kurdistan Regional Government towards the Iraqi Federal State, the respondents (Barwari, Abdul Rahman, Jaf, Bakir, Ihsan, and Yadgar) talk very confidently and assert that the KRG has no plans to secede from Iraq currently, nor in the future. In addition, they contend that the Kurdistan Regional Government does not implement all the external activities to gain support for an independent state. For example, Abdul Rahman argues, "having good foreign relations does not necessarily mean a quest for independence. When we look for international support, we do not look for independence but we look for support for the Kurdish position, and the Kurdish point of view to be public in the world" (Abdul Rahman 2010). Moreover, they concur that the best policy for Kurdistan is to remain as a Federal region within a federal democratic pluralistic Iraq. As stated by Jaf, "at present our policy, KRG's policy, is to be part of the federal democratic Iraq. Hence, all of our diplomatic activities are in line with the policies of the Federal government" (Jaf 2010). In addition, Abdul Rahman adds more regarding the Kurdish figures in Iraqi government in Baghdad, and explains: "we had made a conscious decision after the liberation of Iraq that we voluntarily are part of Iraq. We are committed to a federal, democratic and pluralistic Iraq. We have committed to that and we have demonstrated our commitment. We have Kurdish members of parliament, ministers, and the President is a Kurd as well" (Abdul Rahman 2010).

Furthermore, Barwari and Bakir confirm that as part of the federal democratic Iraq, the KRG and Kurdish leadership have committed to a free democratic Iraq, as well as to do the best to strengthen the new political system in Iraq. Therefore, they emphasise that the KRG does not intend nor has any plans to split from Iraq; on the contrary, the KRG's policy is to stay as a powerful Federal region within Federal Iraq.

Nevertheless, Tissot argues that Kurds have to be prudent because Kurdistan is not a state. According to him, remaining as part of Iraq has advantages from two sides, and is beneficial for the future of the country. When Bakir is asked the question about secession from Iraq, he answers confidently that KRG does not intend to secede from Iraq. Then, he makes an interesting point in respect to the role of the Kurdish leadership in managing the aspirations among Kurdish people for independence. He states that: "There is a difference between what you wish to achieve, what you like, what is your desire and what is achievable and durable. OK, there is a reality; if you go back to the referendum in 2005, you see that 97.5% of the people voted for an independent Kurdish state. However, the leadership in Kurdistan was able to manage the expectations of the people, and to explain to the people that it is better to achieve what we are able to achieve constitutionally within the framework of Iraq than to take the risk of losing whatever we have achieved" (Bakir 2010).

Moreover, Ihsan argues that the KRG wants to show that it implements and executes everything within the framework of Iraqi constitution, "but there is no trust. Iraqis do not trust us, and we do not trust them, and sometimes we [Kurds] are overplaying our role" (Ihsan 2010). Consequently, the notion that the Kurdistan region's paradiplomacy may lead it to separate from Iraq or might become protodiplomacy—whereby the international activities of regions no longer parallel those of their central governments but act against them and threaten the integrity of the state—does not have to be the case: the practice of paradiplomacy by Kurdistan as a Federal region does not necessarily mean an intention to secede from the Iraqi Federal State.

#### FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR THE KRG'S COOPERATION WITH IRAQ

According to the interviews, it seems that there is cooperation and coordination between KRG foreign relations-agencies and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, but not to a great extent. The relationship is varied and it depends on the Iraqi embassies and KRG representation offices in the foreign countries as to how they deal with others. For example, Abdul Rahman (2010) explains the good relationship between the KRG representation office in London and the Iraqi Embassy there, and she clarifies that "we have a very good relationship with the embassy, always we are in

touch with them, and we invite them to our events, and they sometimes invite us to their events". Additionally, Ihsan (2010) also states: "there should be more organisation between KRG and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. There is cooperation between KRG and Iraqi foreign Ministry but not at that good level; this cooperation should be organised more".

On the other hand, the preamble of the Iraqi constitution states that adherence to the Constitution preserves Iraq's unity of land and sovereignty. All of the respondents (Barwari, Abdul Rahman, Jaf, Bakir, Tissot, Ihsan, and Yadgar) stress the importance of this principle. Falah emphasises that "it depends on the Federal government more than on the Kurds to adhere to the Constitution and to keep Iraq's unity, since we have committed ourselves to the Constitution" (Bakir 2010). Barwari (2010) adds: "we abide by the Iraqi constitution that guarantees all the rights of the people in the Region, as well as ensuring primacy of their nationality in the Federal Iraq".

Accordingly, the respondents believe that there is coordination and cooperation with Baghdad in terms of foreign relations, but it has to be improved because it is necessary and essential for the development of Kurdistan and Iraq in the international arena. However, in terms of foreign relations, the official documents of the KRG emphasise that in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Iraq, the Department of Foreign Relations implements the external activities.

Ihsan argues that if officials in Baghdad think logically, they have to consider KRG's participation in all foreign policy, although there is coordination with the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. Accordingly, Yadgar believes that the KRG has to convince Iraqi officials that the purpose of the foreign relations of the KRG and having representation offices abroad, or establishing offices in the Iraqi embassies, is not for separating from Iraq. On the contrary, Kurdistan as part of Iraq, intends and does its best to strengthen and develop the foreign relations of Iraq generally, and of Kurdistan particularly. Thus, to improve the relationship and coordination with the Iraqi foreign apparatus, Jaf (2010) thinks that "the Federal government should not see Kurdistan Region's offices as a threat, but try to include them in its diplomatic domain. This could be achieved by providing diplomatic status to the staff of KRG representations offices



abroad". Finally, according to Abdul Rahman (2010) "it would be helpful if the Federal government in Baghdad takes on board the views of the Kurdistan region in foreign policy. There is no reason not to take our opinion, our advice, and our requests".

The relationship between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Federal Government has fluctuated since the demise of the former Iraqi regime in 2003. However, in this part the issues that are related to foreign affairs and foreign policy will be discussed and analysed through the data collected from the interviews and, therefore, the internal issues and disputes are not dealt with. In the aftermath of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the Kurds chose the federal option to reconnect with Baghdad. Thus, they moved to their best option: they rejoined Iraq but made sure it would be a federal union, which would give their region enough cultural, economic, and political independence. Meanwhile, the Kurds' desire for an independent state has been put in abeyance, and the future prospects for Iraqi Kurdistan region's foreign relations (paradiplomacy) are based on KRG's clear vision and rationale to stay as part of Iraq, as well as to strengthen the cooperation with Iraqi Foreign Ministry.

#### CONCLUSION

This study focused on the paradiplomacy of regional governments and particularly it examined the case of Iraqi Kurdistan's involvement in international affairs from 2003 to 2009, analysing its capability to enter into foreign and diplomatic relations with states and regions, and the tools, motives and objectives for its paradiplomacy. The collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003 and its designation as a Federal region in the Iraqi constitution ushered in an era of unprecedented opportunity and prosperity for Iraqi Kurdistan; in terms of foreign relations, a new chapter in the Kurds' history was opened. The Iraqi Kurds were given an opportunity to control their destiny as never before in their turbulent history. Anderson and Stansfield (2004: 180) state that the adage "the Kurds have no friends but the mountains, is in fact an accurate reflection of the Kurdish experience during the twentieth century". In contrast, since 2003,

the Kurdistan Regional Government has been promoting ties with countries all over the world<sup>1</sup> through its paradiplomacy.

In addition, Kurdistan, as a non-secessionist region, executes paradiplomacy without breaching Iraqi sovereignty. The activities of Iraqi Kurdistan region are similar to those found in other federal countries. The actions are the permanent representations in foreign countries, participation in international conferences, trade missions and other events, as well as conclusion of international agreements and participation in joint international projects. The study revealed that the Kurdistan Regional Government employs tools, such as diplomacy, negotiation, and economic instruments, in implementing paradiplomatic activities to pursue its own body of foreign relations objectives, which are guided by the cultural, social, economic, political and developmental motivations. Thus, the KRG has the rationale and its case can be seen as an example of paradiplomacy based on the objectives (motivations) of international activities. The Kurdistan region's diplomatic efforts have reaped success and arguably put this region of Iraq in a stronger position than other Iraqi groups, between 2003 and 2009, by giving it stronger leverage in the international community. The Kurdistan Regional Government has no plans to secede from the Iraqi Federal State and does not implement all the external activities to gain support for an independent state. Therefore, the practice of paradiplomacy by Kurdistan as a Federal region does not mean an intention to secede from the Iraqi Federal State.

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