

POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE DE-FACTO KURDISTAN REGION-IRAQ

مێژووی سیاسی هەریمی دیفاکتوی کوردستان-ئێراق

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Abstract

The origins of the Kurdistan region of Iraq dated back to the outcome of the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The uprising of the Shi'a people in the south and the Kurds in the north against Saddam Hussein and the harsh crackdown of the uprisings by the Iraqi security forces resulted in the establishment of (the Kurdistan region of Iraq) KRI. This study aims to illustrate the political history of the de-facto Kurdistan region-Iraq. The region's political ups and downs more than a decade from 1990s are explained. The prominent thesis of the discussion is the explanation of the election and establishment of the legislative power in the region for first time in the history of Iraqi Kurds, the political system and political parties as a mechanism for the political participation of the people are well examined. This study precisely observe the elections, parliament, and political parties along with the role of the external actors as the main institutional mechanism of the KRI's establishment.

Key Words: Kurdistan Region-Iraq, Political Party, Political Participation, election, Parliament.

کورتە

بناغەى دروستبونی هەیمی کوردستانی ئێراق دەگەڕێتەوە بۆ دەرئەنجامەکانی شەری کەنداو لە ساڵی ۱۹۹۰-۱۹۹۱. خۆپێشاندان و هەستانەوهی هاوڵاتیانی شیعە مەزھەب لە باشور و هەستانەوهی کوردەکان لە لە باکور دژی سەدام حوسین، و دامرکاندنەوهی ئەو شۆش و هەستانەوانە لە لایەن هێزە ئەمنیەکانی ئێراقەوه بۆ هۆی دروستبونی هەریمی کوردستانی ئێراق. نامانجی ئەم توێژینەوه بریتیه لە روونکردنەوهی مێژووی هەریمی کوردستانی ئێراق. روونکردنەوهی بەرزى و نزمییه سیاسیهکانی هەریم لە ماوهی زیاتر دەیهیک لە ساڵەکانی ۱۹۹۰ مەکان. گەرنگترین خالی گەتوگۆی ئەم توێژینەوهیه بریتیه لە روونکردنەوهی هەلبژاردنەکان و دروستبونی دامەزراوهی یاسا دانان لە هەریمی کوردستان بۆ یەكەمجار لە مێژووی کوردی ئێراق. هەروەها، سیستەمی سیاسی و پارتە سیاسیهکان وەکو میکانیزمی سەرەکی بەشداری سیاسی خەلک خراوتە روو. ئەم توێژینەوهیه بە دیاریکراوهی لە ، هەلبژاردن، پەرلەمان، و لە پارتە سیاسیهکان هاوکات لەگەڵ رۆلی ئەکترە دەرەکیەکان دەکۆڵێتەوە وەکو میکانیزمی دامەزراوهی لە دروستبونی هەریمی کوردستانی ئێراق.

هۆشه کلێیهکان: هەریمی کوردستانی ئێراق، پارتی سیاسی، بەشداری سیاسی، هەلبژاردن، پەرلەمان

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1. Introduction and the Historical Background

This is a qualitative descriptive study of the history of political structure of the de-facto Kurdistan region-Iraq. The rationale for using the qualitative method in this study is that it focuses on the interpretation of qualitative data from different sources, not just dispassionate presentation of statistical data. This work is dependent on empirical data collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study employs case-study as its method. The study analyzes and describe the status of the Kurdistan De-facto region and its political institutions prior to 2003. It's argued that while the regions existence were a de-facto there were functioning institutions, including government, parliament and political parties.

The origins of the Kurdistan region of Iraq dated back to the outcome of the 1990-1991 Gulf War. The uprising of the Shi'a people in the south and the Kurds in the north against Saddam Hussein and the harsh crackdown of the uprisings by the Iraqi security forces resulted in the refugee crisis (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 34; Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 838,829). In the North, popular uprising began on March 5, 1991. The uprising (Raparin) took place in Ranya, a city in the northern edge of Sulaymaniyah governorate that ended with the control of the cities by Kurdish fighters (Peshmerga). In the following days, the uprising spread to all the region from Koya (KoiSanjaq) to Sulaimaniyah, Halabja, Arbat, Erbil, Dohuk, and later Kirkuk on March 20, 1991(Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 35; Gunes & Finotello,2019: 3; McDowall, 2004: 371).

Masud Barzani, son of Mullah Mustafa Barzani and the head of KDP, stated "the uprising came from people themselves. We did not expect it." (McDowall, 2004: 371). The Kurdish Front consisting of the Kurdish political parties followed the people onto the streets. The Kurdish Front was hesitant to enter the cities in case of massive retribution. It preferred to remain under the civil control and civil authorities to negotiate with the local Iraqi army in the region (McDowall, 2004: 371). However, shortly after the uprising the Iraqi forces were regrouped and suppressed the uprising that resulted in the massive migration of Kurds in March-April 1991. Turkey refused to take refugees, yet to facilitate humanitarian aid(Gunes & Finotello,2019: 28) to the people who escaped from the dictatorial regime to prevent a humanitarian disaster (Gunes, 2020: 324,327). On April 5, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution 688 that implemented a no-fly-zone in the north and south of the country (Voller, 2014: 69,70). The UN Security Council called for a meeting on April 5, 1991, upon the initiation and request of France and Turkey to discuss the adaptation of a resolution to condemn the Iraqi government for repression of its civilians(Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 37; Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 838,829). However, the resolution was not passed unchallenged. Some countries such as Cuba, Yemen and Zimbabwe challenged the resolution and voted against the adaptation of the resolution. China and India abstained. Iraq itself formally protested the resolution (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 37). Finally, the resolution 688 was adopted on April 5, 1991.

This action by the UN Security Council was a vital development in Kurdish history which enabled the Kurds to manage their own affairs and to establish a self-ruled government (Gunes & Finotello,2019: 28). On April 13, 1991, the US and the Turkish governments agreed to begin the relief operation to help refugees in the border area as a stop-gap measure until the UN was able to provide humanitarian needs. The Operation Provide Comfort was

conducted which provided relief supplies to the displaced people (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 39). Almost 20,000 troops from thirteen different nations participated in the operation (Prados, & Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 1994: 4). The idea of a safe heaven was suggested in the initiation by Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal because he was anxious to avoid the international pressure to let half a million refugees enter the country. Hence, he called for the creation of a safe heaven on the Iraqi side of the border (McDowall, 2004: 375,376). Ozal suggested the idea to the UK prime minister who called to protect the Iraqi Kurdish region in the European Communities Summit in April 1991 (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 40). On April 16, 1991, the US president George Bush stated that the US military force would move to the north of Iraq and establish refugee camps to shelter and feed the fleeing people in the Iraq-Turkey border (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 40). He declared:

Consistent with the UN Security Council resolution and working with the International organizations and with EU partners, I have directed the military forces to begin immediately to establish several encampments in the northern Iraq where the supplies for these refugees will be available in the large quantities and distributed in an orderly manner... adequate security will be provided at these temporary sites by the U.S, British and French air and ground forces again consistent with the UN security resolution 688...all we are doing is motivated by humanitarian concerns... (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 40)

The first camp was established in the city of Zakho by the European Community and the Dutch government. Later, the safe heaven increased in size to include the cities close to the Duhok governorate. Expectedly, Baghdad wrote a letter to the UN secretary-general as a protest against the operation safe heaven claiming that it was an unjustifiable attack on the Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, the UK and US governments warned Iraq not to fly over the north of the 36th parallel, and the armed forces were not allowed to be in the 63-by-63-mile zone created by the safe heaven operation for the safety of the Kurdish population (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 40; Dahlman, 2002: 289). On April 18, 1991, the deal was stuck between the Iraqi government and the UN to provide humanitarian assistance to the Kurds who were displaced, but finally, the Iraqi government agreed to ensure the safe passage of relief supplies and provided forms of logistical support (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 38).

The Kurdish leaders were anxious about the reliability of safe heaven and they realized that they need to negotiate with the Iraqi government and Saddam Hussein for the autonomy agreement. This idea was also supported and backed by the European Community especially the UK government (McDowall, 2004: 376). The Front Leader including Jalal Talabani visited Baghdad to discuss an Iraqi offer to establish autonomy for the Kurds within the federated structure of Iraq. The federated structure included democratic pluralism and constitutional rule of law in Baghdad. Masud Barzani emphasized the point that the Front did not look for political independence from Iraq and even they did not seek for the resignation of Saddam, but only democracy for Iraq and autonomy for the Kurds. Talabani shocked the world when he stated that Saddam Hussein agreed to abolish the revolutionary command council and to hold a free multi-party elections within six months (McDowall, 2004: 376). Masud Barzani announced that he had won from Baghdad the designation of Kirkuk as the capital of the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq (Yildiz & Tayşi, 2007: 43).

Even though Iraqi troops were able to re-control the region, however, another uprising drove back Iraqi forces and as a result, the Iraqi regime withdrew from the region and pulled all its administration and military back from the region. The Kurdish people had to deal with the vacuum of the Iraqi administrations by filling the administration and in the following year elections were held for the Kurdish parliament, (Abbas Zadeh & Kirmanj, 2017: 587,588) and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was established on June 4, 1992(Rudaw, 2019). Thus, the No-Fly-Zone decision in April 1991 resulted in the establishment of the de facto Kurdish region in the northern Iraq in 1991, and the Kurds used the opportunity to gain domestic and international legitimacy (Gunes & Finotello,2019: 28). The three governorates (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk) have been under the rule of the Kurdish administration and the Kurdish political parties since October 1991. The KDP and PUK dominated the administration up to 2005 and Kurdish autonomy was officially recognized in the new Iraqi constitution(Gunes & Finotello,2019: 21).

When the US administration discussed the war options against Iraq in 2002, most of the Kurdish people wished to get rid of Saddam Hussein's regime and they did not trust Arab nationalist and Islamist opposition that had always opted for the unitary, central state. However, the Kurdish leaders in KDP and PUK parties tried to keep a fine line between supporting for the regime change and abstaining from approval for the military intervention, while they were bargaining behind the scenes (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 830).

The US invasion of Iraq along with British military forces in 2003 brought a new era of Kurds' influence in Iraq. To reinforce their influence, the political leaders made a decision to merge the two administrations of two main political parties, KDP in Erbil and PUK in Sulaymaniyah on June 12, 2003. As they acted united, the Kurds could be able to consolidate their positions in Iraq and the region which was formally reintegrated to Iraq, but remained favourable to the Kurdish wishes. In the 2005 election, Kurdish political parties participated in a joint list and the Kurdish de facto autonomy was accepted in the referendum in October the same year (Voller, 2014: 99). The Kurds secured some significant positions such as the presidency and the ministry of foreign affairs (Gunes & Finotello,2019: 29). Despite the Kurdish ruling political parties' efforts to paint a picture of KRG as the other Iraq, trying to approve the word: "state inside state" region with a functional democracy and economic stability, the Kurdish autonomous region has not reached to the level of consolidated democracy and good governance. Even though there are regular elections, the region developed an elite-driven political culture and main political positions have been occupied by Barzani and Talabani's family members. The military forces (Peshmarga) are divided between the two dominant parties in the region and the army is not under the control of the KRG but the control of the KDP and PUK leaders. The living conditions of the Kurdish population have not been improved much. While the Kurdish government had received its share from the Iraqi budget until 2014, after then, the Iraqi government suspended the KRG budget. The cut of the budget has challenged domestic legitimacy and resulted in economic and social instability in the region (Gunes & Finotello,2019: 33,34). The economic instability and KRG's inability to pay the salaries of its employees have caused regular protests since 2014.

After several decades of destruction experienced by the Kurdish population, it seems that the Kurds today have more influence and power than ever in modern Iraq. The Kurdish region consists of three governorates controlling some disputed areas. The Kurds are enjoying self-rule under the KRG. Representatives of KDP and PUK have been holding senior governmental positions in Baghdad. The dominant forces of post-Saddam Hussein in Iraq have accepted the current status of the Kurdish region with its institutions as the only federal region within the federal state of Iraq. For the mixed populated area such as oil-rich Kirkuk, the Kurdish parties have succeeded in inserting formula in the constitution which is the normalization process, census, and ultimately referendum (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 824).

The unified KRG was established in 2006 after several months of quarrelling between the KDP and the PUK (Brief History of the KRG, 2021). The first KRG had forty-two ministers. In an attempt to achieve sustainability, KRG has sought to attract foreign investors and oil companies to the Kurdish region (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 832). Today, the Kurds are relatively homogenous and united. The Kurdish community is diverse in terms of religion and language and dialects; however, a distinct Kurdish identity exists which is overlapped with the contradicted identities (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 825).

2. The Role of External Actors in the Emergence of the Kurdistan Region-Iraq

The role of external factors in the KRI mainly started when the Iraqi regime forces pushed the Kurdish population to flee to the Turkish-Iraq, Iran-Iraq borders. The role of the international coalition and the UN emerged at the time of creating the Operation Provide Comfort and creation of the safe heaven for the Kurds. The idea was to protect the Kurds from further attack by the Iraqi regime. Under the pressure of media reports and public pressure at the beginning of April 1991, a request letter was sent by Turkey and France to the UN, to meet to discuss the Kurdish Issue (Malanczuk, 1991: 119,127). After the discussion among countries, the idea of safe heaven was proposed to solve the refugee crises in the Iran and Turkey borders. The British Prime Minister John Major approved the suggestion of the president of Turkey, Turgut Özal (Leezenberg, 2000: 8). The critical meeting was held among the Turkish and European diplomats on April 5, 1991, in Ankara. The draft of resolution 988 was discussed and agreed upon Altunışık, 2005: 43; Sarı, 2019: 287).

France, the UK and Belgium put the draft on the Security Council's agenda and the council also took notes of letters from Iraq, Iran, and Luxembourg. Many countries such as the representatives of Canada, Denmark, Germany, Greece, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey were invited to the meeting by the Council without the power and right to vote (the UNSC Resolution No. 688, April 5 1991). The French government submitted and persisted in that discussion which finally resulted in the adaptation of the resolution 688, on April 5, 1991. The votes included ten for the resolution (Austria, Belgium, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, France, Romania, USSR, United Kingdom, United States, Zaire), three against (Yemen, Cuba, and Zimbabwe) and two abstentions (China and India) (the UNSC Resolution No. 688, April 5 1991). The Iraqi government rejected the resolution which led to the growth of the international condemnation of the Iraqi regime for mistreating its own Kurdish ethnic group (the UNSC Resolution No. 688, April 5 1991).

The idea advanced to create safe heaven by the UN which was backed by the military forces in the Kurdish areas to protect the Kurdish population from further attack by Saddam's forces. On April 8, another meeting which was the summit of European communities was held among the EU leaders and Turkey in Luxembourg. The British government proposed the decision to provide safe heaven under the detailed management of the UN for the Kurdish refugees in the Iran and Turkey borders (Malanczuk, 1991: 119). On April 17, 1991, armed forces of the US and other countries began to move into the northern part of Iraq. This was a time when Iraqi forces repeated their attack on the Kurds. The international forces declared that they were setting up camps to secure the Kurdish refugees and to provide relief supplies (Nader, Allen, & Scotten, 2016: 19). The US president Bush warned the Iraqi forces not to fly above the 36th parallel and not to engage in any military operation in these areas. The US intended to provide security for the sites and gave the administration of those areas to the UN (Malanczuk, 1991: 120). This allowed the UN to station 500 security guards to protect the relief operation that had a chance to be renewed after it will have ended. The international forces which included 13,000 soldiers from the US, Britain, France, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Australia and other countries, occupied almost 10,000 square kilometres of the territories of Iraq, some 100 kilometres extended along with Iran and Turkey's borders, with 60 kilometres from the south. This lasted for almost 3 months. The operation provided 450,000 Kurdish refugees the opportunity to return to their homes safely. The camps in Turkey's border were closed with the last camp at Cukura was closed in June 3, 1991 (Malanczuk, 1991: 120).

The creation of a safe zone to protect the Kurdish people by the international coalition and UN forces was the first time in history. Turkey cooperated by stationing coalition forces on its soil. However, Iran did not support the safe heaven because it was afraid that the same safe heaven could be established in the Iranian border at a suitable time. It was clear that Turkey was more eager than Iran to create safe heaven in northern Iraq (Olson, 1992: 485). The positive role of France must not be neglected during this period, because the action was mainly reflected in the foreign ministry of France Ronald Dumas's Conviction as; "Just as Germany's murder of the Europe's Jews brought about the concept of a crime against humanity, so Mr. Hussein's mistreatment of the Kurds called for the recognition of a duty to intervene to prevent gross violations of human rights." (Kirişci, & Winrow, 1997:159).

As the UN decided to establish a protection and no-fly zone to protect the Kurdish people, the UN's decision was initially sponsored by France, the UK, and the US. For the next decades after the intervention, the Kurds established their own KRG government, separated from the central government in Baghdad. In this case, it was the first time that the international community took away the sovereignty of the Iraqi state and established the de-facto region within the Iraqi northern part (Mansour, 2014: 1184). The role of the European countries and neighbouring Turkey cannot be underestimated, however, there have been persistent role of the UN and the US in the region.

3. Politics in the Kurdistan Region - Iraq

The Politics in the Kurdistan region of Iraq cannot be explained without illustrating the institutions, elections, political system and political parties, and their effect on the political system in the region.

3.1. The First Election in the Kurdistan Region - Iraq

The Kurdish people and forces took control of the Kurdish Region in October 1991 following the removal of Saddam's forces and Iraqi government offices from the north of the country. The Front formally withdrew from the negotiation for autonomy with the Iraqi government. The Kurds declared their intention to replace the old Iraqi legislative assembly with the Kurdistan National Assembly (later in 2009 renamed to parliament) that will be elected by the Kurdish people in the region. Hence, the election was proposed for April 3, 1992. It was hoped that the election would form a government based on the people's choices (History of Parliament, 2021). The Kurdish people wished for a government that would eliminate the paralyzed institutions in the Kurdish Region. The Front approach allowed all political parties to act independently, but in harmony with each other. Any of the political parties even the small parties could reject the Front's decision. There was also hope that the elected government would establish unified peshmerga and police forces which were around 80,000 peshmerga men and 20,000 police forces to replace the unified fighters on the street (McDowall, 2004: 3719,380).

The elections and the campaign in the region were conducted in a personality contest, most of the people voted based on their loyalties to the leaders. The ideology was not a matter in the people's vote for the parties. People voted based on the patron-client relationship networks. The voting tendency and being included within the political party were more family-based during this period, for example, if the head of the family became a political party member, the rest of the family had to follow his decisions to be loyal to the same party. It was a kind of communal solidarity pattern.

The Kurdish people finally held elections on May 19, 1992 and Jawhar Namiq became the first speaker of the Kurdish Region's Parliament (History of Parliament, 2021). The elections were held for 105 seats for members of the Kurdish regional parliament with 5 seats for the other minority groups. Based on proportional representation, there was a threshold of 7 percent of the votes to be eligible for a seat (Rogg & Rimscha, 2007: 828,829). All parties agreed to this because they were confident of gaining 7 percent. Some political parties joined the combined lists to enhance their chance of having seats. The Toiler Party which was guaranteed three seats in return, joined the PUK. Pasok and KSP joined in a list and the Islamic groups also joined under the list of the Islamic movements. However, pro-PKK party (Partiya Azadiya Kurdistan) did not participate.

The Assyrians allocated 5 seats, of which four seats were taken by the Assyrian democratic movement, and one seat was taken by the Kurdistan Christian Unity Party (McDowall, 2004: 380). The Kurdish region's election was historic in terms of fraud and misconduct. It was externally unique. It was unique to have a peaceful multiparty elections in the Middle East except for Turkey and Israel. The Kurdish region had done that in the 1992 election. This peaceful election was not the only threat to Saddam, but all unelected regimes in the MENA region. It was revealed from the result of the election that, only KDP and PUK received seats. The KDP won 45 percent of the votes while PUK won 43.6 percent. The other political parties had almost nothing, the Islamic movement received 5 percent, KSP 2.6 and ICP took 2.2 percent, while KPDP received 1 percent (McDowall, 2004: 381).

In the elections for the leadership, Barzani received 48 percent of the people's votes, while Talabani received 45 percent, and Othman Abdul Aziz received only 2 percent. The result for the leadership election was ignored and it was decided that Barzani and Talabani would run the Front jointly. It was unclear what to do with the result of the election. The election was recognized neither by the Iraqi government nor by neighbouring countries. They recognized neither assembly nor the KRG that was established on June 4, 1992 (McDowall, 2004: 381). The government consisted of the KDP and PUK members equally, however, neither KDP nor PUK leaders participated in the government (McDowall, 2004: 382). Fuad Masum from the PUK was appointed prime minister, however, he resigned because of the protests in March 1993 (McDowall, 2004: 385). The governmental positions were shared equally. This means that if the minister belonged to the KDP the deputy must belong to the PUK.

With Barzani and Talabani being outside of the government and competing not cooperating, travelling to world capitals to pursue international support separately worsened the problem, because exercising the power outside the elected parliament and Kurdish regional government did not help the democratic development and democratic institutions. The Kurdish Region was run by the two parties' headquarters. Though, for every decision to be made, there was a need to go back to both parties' leaders. If they had joined the parliament and the government, there would not be this uncertainty. It was just two parallel KRG administrations in practice, each was dominated by one of the two main parties. One was in Erbil and Dohuk dominated by KDP and the other one was in Sulaimaniyah dominated by the PUK (Dahlman, 2002: 290; Gunes, 2020: 324,327). With the two administrations, it was possible to see two different teaching staffs in schools or police forces on the street. In a situation like that, recruiting members was one of the aims of political parties which the patron-client relationship undermined any chance for democratic institutional growth in an inexperienced government (McDowall, 2004: 385). The joint rule of the region formed an uneasy power-sharing arrangement, and it was broken down in the early 1994. The breakdown came after the disagreements on sharing of joint revenues and territorial control by both parties in the region (Home Office, 2009). The conflict between the KDP and PUK resulted in the failure of the unified KRG (Home Office, 2009). The split of the two administrations continued until 2003. The decision to merge the two administrations was reached on June 12, 2003, and KDP and PUK established a joint list in the Iraqi election in 2005 (Voller, 2014: 101,102).

3.2. The Kurdish National Assembly (The Parliament of the Kurdistan Region- Iraq)

The establishment of the Kurdish National Assembly (later renamed the Kurdistan Parliament in 2009) was among the first act of institutionalization of the Kurdish autonomous region. It was functioning by regularity and provisional law self-emitted by the regional emergent institutions of the Kurdish Region (Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1114). The Kurdistan Parliament dates back to 1992 when the Kurdish people revolted against the Ba'ath regime in Iraq (Kurdistan-review- Invest in Group, 2014). The Kurdish people and the Kurdish leaders sought to have their first-ever democratic election to choose their representatives in the

Parliament for their newly founded region. The elections were held on May 19, 1992 (Kurdistan-review- Invest in Group, 2014).

About one million citizens in the controlled area of the region participated in the elections to vote for 105 members to represent them in the Kurdish Parliament that was to become the executive power of the region (Prados, & Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 1994: 8). According to article 8 of the Kurdistan electoral law, elections for the parliament had to be held every four calendar years, however, the elections for the parliament were not held for the second time until 2005 due to the outbreak of the civil war in the Kurdish region. According to the law, anyone who was aged 18 and a citizen of the Kurdish region were allowed to participate in the direct, universal, and secret ballot elections (Kurdistan Parliament: 2021). The members of the Kurdistan parliament were elected through a proportional representation of the electoral system (Kurdistan-review- Invest in Group, 2014). The electoral system was a closed party list with a threshold, minimum of 7 percent (Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1116). The minimum age for a parliamentary candidate was 25 (Kurdistan-review- Invest in Group, 2014). Despite some irregularities that were reported during the elections in 1992, international observers from 13 different countries acknowledged the elections as relatively free and fair (Kurdistan-review- Invest in Group, 2014; Prados, & Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 1994). In the elections for the parliament, four lists were seen to participate in the elections including two main Kurdish political parties the KDP and the PUK, the Assyrian movement and the Kurdistan Christian Movement (Naji, 2018: 9). The KDP and the PUK were the only two political parties that entered the parliament and agreed to divide the parliamentary seats fifty for each side, with five for the minorities that were assigned to the Christian Minorities, and 25 percent quota seats were provided for women, based on that 6 members of parliament guaranteed for women (Gunter, 1993: 299; Prados, & Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 1994).

After the 1992 parliamentary elections, the institution became a central legislative power that serves the Kurdish region. The democratic and transparent commitment and process of the legislature differentiated the Kurdish region from many neighbouring countries in the Middle East except Turkey and Israel (Kurdistan-review- Invest in Group, 2014). The Kurdish regional parliament is a legislative body composed of the president, the vice president and the secretary. The positions are elected in the first session of the parliamentary meeting. In the 1992 elected parliament, Jawhar Namiq Salim from the KDP bureau became the president of parliament and Mohammad Tawfiq from the PUK political bureau became the vice president. Any decision made by the Kurdish Parliament came out from the political kitchen discussions of the two main political parties and then was forwarded to the Kurdish parliament for ratification (Stansfield, 2003: 133).

The Kurdish regional government and other institutions were functioning based on the laws legislated by the parliament on July 15, 1992. The law number 1 was legislated in 1992, and has since become the first foundation stone of the KRG, and the other de-facto institutions of the region (Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1116). The Kurdish parliament had the power to legislate laws on a large array of issues (Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1115 ; Auzer, 2017:2,3), such as health, education, security, economy, agriculture and many

others(Shallcross, 2015: 5,19 ; Auzer, 2017:2,3). To discuss the issues, the Kurdish parliament was active until the beginning of the civil war in the region in the 1993. After the beginning of the civil war, the Kurdish parliament refused to be a part of the war. Parliamentary members of both parties decided to remain in the parliament hall without getting involved in the war. During the two administrations, the parliament legislated laws for both administrations in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah. The KDP members of the parliament including the speaker of the parliament Jawhar Namiq who released a statement opposing the civil war among his party the KDP and the PUK. Other members of the parliament from both parties protested the civil war and sat in the “Panagiri” hall inside the parliament. Despite the continuation of the civil war even after the parliamentary protest, this became a crucial position of the parliament and its members. Thus, the parliament did not halt its legislative processes (Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1118).

The situation continued until the agreement of ceasefire between both parties and the law number 16, in 2002, was legislated by the parliament with the ratification of the Washington Agreement between the parties. However, the two administrations and the two split governments continued. During this period, the parliament extended its term which was supposed to end in 1996. As discussed earlier, members of the parliament from both parties started meeting in the transitional parliament and continued until the 2005 elections(Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1118). Due to the civil war and internal instability, the parliamentary elections were not held on a regular basis every four years. The second elections were held in 2005, which was thirteen years after the first election(Taha & Movileanu, 2020: 1116).

For the entire year, there were two parliamentary sessions, one started in March and ended in June, while the other started in September and ended in December. According to the parliamentary protocol, the duties of the parliament are defined as follows: to legislate laws, to debate critical issues facing the Kurdish region and its people, to determine the legal relationships with the Iraqi government, to name the prime minister of the region, to support or to criticize ministerial offices and many more(Stansfield, 2003: 132,133).

The legislative process in the parliament started from proposing the laws and regulations by the parliamentary councillors and the council of ministers, the councillors have the right to propose the laws and resolutions if the law represents the opinion of then members of parliament. Another job of the parliament is passing the law in which the motion sent to the parliament committees to discuss then the agreed motion or the proposal with the committee’s comments return back to the presidium, and then the draft enters to the agenda of the parliament to be discussed by all members of parliament. This is when the law is coming from councillors of the parliament. The second way is when the proposal coming to the parliament from the council of ministers, similar procedures are required and the confirmation of the proposal by the parliament needs the majority of votes by the members of the parliament unless there is a call for the special majority(Stansfield, 2003: 134). The members of the parliament can ask questions to anyone from the ministerial offices and the council of ministers and lower positions about any subject of interest of parliamentarians. Until August 1996, the parliament held 193 ordinary sessions and 15 extraordinary sessions. From all the sessions, 140 laws and resolutions were promulgated (Stansfield, 2003:135).

4. The Party System and the Prominent Political Parties in the Kurdistan Region-Iraq

One of the mechanisms for participation in political life is the existence of political parties. They are essential components of representative democracy. The political parties investigate political life to ensure the political stability in a country. Indeed, it is not easy to imagine how the governance of modern states could be accomplished without meaningful political parties. In general, the political parties are the key channels to build an amenable and accountable government (Reilly, Norlund, & Newman, 2008: 3). The emergence of modern Kurdish political parties dated s back to the post Second World War era (Hevian, 2013: 94). Later, during the Iraq-Iran War that started in 1980 and ended in 1988, Kurdish political parties found more opportunities to re-establish their bases and to restart their military and political activities in the country (Gunes & Finotello, 2019: 8). The existing political parties mainly the KDP and PUK exploited the Iraq-Iran War for their advantage. They used the reduced Iraqi army's opportunity in the region to increase their activities (Gunes & Finotello, 2019: 26, 27).

In the late 1980s, numerous Kurdish political parties were initiated to establish a framework to operate within the country. The Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party and other political parties mediated between the most influential KDP and PUK (Waisy, 2015: 222). The result of the talks was the formation of the Kurdistan Front in 1988. The Front as an umbrella organization represented various Kurdish nationalist forces (Olson, 1992: 486), that consisted of the KDP, PUK, the Socialist Party of Kurdistan in Iraq (SPKI), the Kurdish Socialist Party (PASOK), the Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party (KPDP), the Kurdistan Toilers Party, the Kurdish Section of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), the Assyrian Democratic Movement and also the various Islamic parties which participated (Gunter, 1993:298). In the early 1990s, the international community provided a safe heaven for the Kurdish people and this helped to remove the Iraqi forces from the Kurdish region. This action opened the door to establish new political movements and organizations in the Kurdish region (Abdullah, 2018: 607). It also allowed the Kurdish parties within the Front to consolidate a plan for the post-Saddam era (Stansfield, 2003: 92).

These steps resulted in the 1992 elections for the Kurdistan Parliament, in which only the two main political parties which are older than KRG itself, the KDP and the PUK won the votes (MacQueen, 2015: 432). Some other political parties participated in the elections, however they won no seat in the newly established national assembly (Abdullah, 2018: 607). Since the first elections in 1992, and in accordance with the Law number 17 that legislated the Kurdistan parliament in 1993, there have been dozens of Kurdish political parties in the region that have practiced political activities(Political party law, 1993). Like France or Germany, the multiparty system is adopted in the Kurdish region. However, in reality, it might be correct to suggest that it's a two-party system, in which the KDP and the PUK controlled the whole system since the first elections in 1992(Abdullah, 2018: 607). How much effect the small political parties have or are they real parties are still questionable, but they have been allowed to practice political activities.

The multiparty system is rooted in the diversity of the communities in Kurdish society. The diversity was revealed in the presence of nationalist parties such as the KDP and the PUK. Islamic religious parties such as the KIM, the KIU and the KIG, the leftist parties such

as Kurdistan Communist Party and Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party, and the ethnic minorities political parties such as Turkmen Parties (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:755).

The parties that were expected to gain votes in the first parliamentary elections in 1992 and participated in the elections were the KDP, the PUK, the Kurdish Popular Democratic Party (KPDP) led by Sami Abdul-Rahman, Kurdistan Socialist Party-Iraq (KSP-I) led by Rasul Mamand, the Kurdish Socialist Party (PASOK) led by Abdullah Agrin, the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) led by Mullah Uthman Abdul-Aziz and the smaller unaffected parties such as Iraqi Communist Party-Kurdistan Branch (ICP) led by Aziz Muhammad, the Kurdistan Toiler Party (KTP) led by Qadir Aziz, and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) led by Younadim Yusuf (Kurda, 2015: 7,8; Bali, 2016: 209).

The political parties in the region were varied according to their political view and ideology. Some political parties are liberal, some have an Islamic identity and the others have a tribal basis (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:754). Regardless of their ideological and political views and geographical differences, the political parties in the Kurdish region share some common features. Rather than democratic institutions. They all rely on charismatic leadership (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:2). For example, until he died in 1979, Mullah Mustafa led the KDP and even the Kurds' revolt in Iraq. This was mostly because of his charismatic tribal and party leadership character (Khadduri & Ghareeb, 2001: 190,198). Jalal Talabani led the PUK until his death and Shaykh Uthman Abdul-Aziz led the IMK until his death. Among the newly established political parties after 2005, Nawshirwan Mustafa, the founder of Change Movement also led the party until he died in 2017. The KIG is still led by the founder of the party. The KIU attempted to change this model and changed the founder of the party leader but it lasted for only one term (Abdullah, 2018: 609).

Thus, relying on charismatic leadership has been the common feature of the Kurdish political parties. This dependency is characterized by the control of parties, weak institutions within the parties, control of the financial resources by very few members of a specific family or person and the use of force by the leader of the party for those political parties that have military forces such as the KDP and the PUK in the Kurdish region. Lastly, controlling media outlets by the charismatic leader or a small group of people from a family or a group within the party, also can be seen in the KDP and the PUK's control of their parties' media (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:4).

The political system in the Kurdish region is a reflection of the feature of a charismatic leadership in political parties (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:8). For instance, many decisions in the KRI issues are taken by the political party or charismatic leaders outside the government and the parliament. Once, the decision is made by the charismatic leaders, the parliament and the other institutions just approve it (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:9). The system itself allows party dominance over the political system and prevents strong representation in the parliament (Jiyad, Küçükkeleş and Schillings, 2020: 45).

Another feature of Kurdish political parties in the Kurdish region is nationalism. Most of the political parties in the region incorporate at least some degree of nationalism. They support greater autonomy or independence for the KRI, including Islamic parties supporting the independence of the Kurdish region in Iraq. For example, all political parties supported the referendum for independence in September 2017 (Abdullah, 2018: 607; Hama &

Abdullah, 2021:2,12). The lack of transparency is another feature of the Kurdish political party system. The political parties in the Kurdish region have lack of transparency in the practice of governance, the income and expenditure. The significant cause of the civil war during the 1990s was the income sources and the share of the revenues. In general, the sources of finance of political parties have been vague (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:12).

The indisputable power of the two largest political parties created the risk of clientelism based on political affiliation, family connection or tribal kinship. Soon after the creation of the KRG, the political parties controlled the KRG forces, business, public sector employment, salaries and all other sectors, specifically the border customs and the oil sector in recent years. Both parties have used the region's economy and have controlled government economy to help their supporters. They have used the public budget to fund their party activities and media outlets (Bali, 2018: 98). The party politics in the Kurdish region is notoriously complex and confusing. From their creation until the late 1997 were characterized by round fighting and this divided the region into two zones for decades. The leading parties in the Iraqi Kurdish region all suffered breakups and reunions throughout the last century which may not stop in the next century (Stansfield, 2017: 64). The two different political cultures divided the political party system in the Kurdish region of Iraq. One from the Erbil zone, the other from Sulaimaniyah. These two different zones have rarely been under the control of unitary power arrangements. From the history of emirates under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, these two zones were not only separated, but generated different political cultures, whether liberal or conservative (Stansfield, 2017: 67).

Even though the political party system in the Kurdish region has been in the transition process (Stansfield, 2017: 67), in general, the political parties have suffered the lack of real democratic value. This manifests itself in the corrupt resources of income, violations of human rights, and the ability to steal the votes especially by the constituent parties, which have access to the recourse and forces (Abdullah, 2018: 610). The two major political parties in the region have seen themselves as the system of government. There have been a wide range of overlaps between partisan action and government action. The government decisions have mostly been party decisions (Bali, 2018: 98). The gear of private and public economy has been controlled by the constituent political parties' institutions.

4.1. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)

Emergence of political parties in the Kurdish region is dated back to the pre-formal institutions of governance in the region. It started with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) as the first and the oldest Kurdish political party established in the Iraqi Kurdish region (MacQueen, 2015: 431). The creation of the KDP was based on the remnants of at least four political groups including Hiwa, Shorsh (Revolution), Rizgari (Liberation) and the Iraqi branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) (Gunter, 2011: 172,173). The KDP was originally founded in Baghdad by Hamza Abdullah on August 16, 1946 (Kurda, 2015: 1). Mullah Mustafa Barzani was elected as the president of the Party while he was in exile in the Soviet Union and Hamza Abdullah was elected as secretary-general (Hevian, 2013: 97,98). The two landlords Shaikh Latif Shaikh Muhammad Barzinji and Shaikh Zyad Agha became vice presidents (Gunter, 2011: 172,173). The KDP was guided by nationalist principles. It

was based on the nationalist traditionalist pillars that have been dominated by Barzani. This dominance and traditionalist view later caused a breakup within the KDP. The division appeared among the traditionalist wing that was led by Barzani and the Marxist leftist wing that was led by Jalal Talabani (MacQueen, 2015: 431).

The KDP held thirteen party congresses since its establishment in 1946. It held approximately one conference every five and half years, which is abnormal for a normal party and it has also remained under tribal and family control (Congresses of Kurdistan Democratic Party, 1946-1999). Since its formation, only two people were elected as the president of the party, both of whom belonged to the Barzani tribe and family. From the first congress of the party foundation in 1946 until the eighth congress and the death of Mustafa Barzani on March 1, 1979, the party had been led by himself. After the death of the father, his son Masoud Barzani inherited the leadership of the KDP in the ninth congress on December 4-13, 1979 (Kurda, 2015: 1). He has been re-elected by the party members at every subsequent congress. Since 1979, he is still the president of the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party, 2021). Nechirvan Barzani became the deputy party's leader after the tenth congress. Besides these party positions, most of the KRG positions have been led by the Barzani family. For example, until recent years, Masoud Barzani was the president of the Kurdish Region. His nephew Nechirvan Barzani is now the president and his son Masrour Barzani is the Prime Minister of the KRG (Hama, 2019:1020). Within the KDP, Masoud Barzani is the only number one figure that can decide on all the issues (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:5). Other influential members within the KDP are Hoshiyar Zebari and the second son of Masoud Barzani, Mansour Barzani. The KDP and the family run several TV stations including the Kurdistan TV, Rudaw, Kurdistan 24 and many platforms (Hevian, 2013: 97,98).

The various factions within the KDP can be seen since its establishment. It covered a wide spectrum of ideologies from the communist left to the right liberal-conservative wing. There were also socialists and traditionalists in the middle. Some have asked for a nation-state, whereas others asked for limited autonomy within the Iraqi borders (Kurdistan Democratic Party, 2021). A progressive socialist Ibrahim Ahmed joined the party at the end of 1946 and became the KDP representative in Sulaimaniyah. Ahmed led the leftist wing of the party. Deliberately, the struggle comes out between the traditionalist and leftist wings of the party. The traditionalist or tribalist wing in Kurmanji-speaking areas is associated with Barzani against the Marxist leftist wing in Sorani-speaking areas. The Marxist leftist wing, that was called the KDP Politburo, was led by Ibrahim Ahmed and his son-in-law Jalal Talabani (Gunter, 2011: 172,173). The struggle started since the creation of the PUK and continues till today. According to its website, the KDP believes in internal peace and stability, therefore the KDP leadership employed every significant tool to settle its internal dispute with the rival PUK (Kurdistan Democratic Party, 2021).

From its establishment in 1946 until the late 1970s, the KDP was the only voice of the Kurdish people in Iraq. Later, other political parties emerged. Today, there are many Kurdish and non-Kurdish Ppolitical parties in the region that exercise s their democratic rights due to the adaptation of the multi-party system in the region after 1992 (Kurdistan Democratic Party, 2021). The leadership and organizational structure of the KDP are as follows: president, vice president, political bureau, and central committee. Finally, it's important to note that for more

than 7 decades the KDP is so far the largest and the strongest Kurdish political party in the KRI(Kurdistan Democratic Party, 2021).

4.2. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded on June 1, 1975, in Damascus, Syria, after the Algerian accord and the defeat of the Kurds in the 1974-1975 fights with the Iraqi government (The Official Website of The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, 2021). The PUK was formed as a result of the split inside the KDP that was rooted back to the mid-1960, between the traditional and left-wing of the party. Ibrahim Ahmed and his son in law Jalal Talabani opposed the dominance of the president Mullah Mustafa Barzani of the KDP. After several breakups and reunions, the PUK was finally formed by Jalal Talabani and some of his friends (Stansfield, 2017: 65,66). The formation of the PUK is a result of a schism within the KDP and from its foundation to the present day, the noticeable feature of the party is the existence of factions and splits among the PUK groups. It's not wrong to say that the suffix of 'Union' within the name of the party is a goal that remained unachieved (Hama, 2019:1012).

The PUK can be seen as an umbrella organization that united three different groups of people under the leadership of Talabani (Hevian, 2013: 98; Kurda, 2015: 1). The most prominent groups were: the groups of dissidents who broke away from the original party KDP; the leftist Komala Organization under the leadership of Nawshirwan Mustafa; and the Kurdistan socialist Movement under the leadership of Ali Askari. The combination of these three groups enabled the PUK to restart the armed struggle against the Iraqi Government in 1976. Therefore, the PUK could consolidate itself as a strong political and military organization in Iraq (Gunes & Finotello,2019: 26). The co-founding committee members of the PUK were Jalala Talabani, his close friend Nawshirwan Mustafa Amin, Dr. Fouad Masoum, Dr. Kamal Fouad, Adil Murad, Omer Sheik Mus and Abdul-Razak Faili (The Official Website of The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). Since its establishment, the PUK and the KDP have become the major rivals to each other with an almost equal power circle(Hevian, 2013: 97,98). The PUK has been located in Sulaimaniya close to the Iran with which the PUK maintains a good relationship. It has adopted a similar policy to the KDP towards the Iraqi government until the regime change and the new Iraqi government in 2005(Hama & Abdullah, 2021:1). Three main contributing factors lead to the rise of the PUK, which are the response to the end of the Kurdish revolt by the KDP in 1975; the use of brutality by the Iraqi government against the Kurdish people and the recruitment of people by the Baath Party in the Baathification campaign towards government employees and the Kurdish citizens to become Baath party members (Hama, 2019:1015). After the first Gulf War and the creation of safe heaven, the PUK along with KDP participated in the elections, the establishment of the KRG in 1992 and joined the Kurdistan parliament. Both parties kept their own military forces under the parties' control. Both entered into the civil war in early 1994 over the revenue share and power. During this period, the PUK actively participated in the political process (Hevian, 2013: 97, 98; Hama, 2019:1020).

According to the party program, the PUK strives for the right of the Kurdish people to have self-determination within the border of democratic Iraq. The PUK is established to claim and advocate for the rule of law and solving the Kurdish question in Iraq. The PUK was

established to defend the human rights and recognition of the national and cultural diversity in Iraq. It claims for the promotion of democratic institutions including civil society (Hevian, 2013: 97, 98). Despite its claim of being a socialist, secular and Democratic Party, the PUK held four party congresses since its foundation in the middle of 1975. Due to his charismatic character, Talabani remained as the secretary-general of the party from 1975 until his death in 2017. He controlled all areas within the party as if his power was almost absolute. The admiration of party members and the organizational structure of the party helped his control (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:5). Talabani was the sole leader of the party that could combine all different wings within the party until moving to Baghdad for his presidency in 2005, which reduced his ability to control the wings. After his death and after many delays, the party held its fourth congress that ran more towards the family party, (Hevian, 2013: 97,98). Because his son Bafil Talabani and his nephew Lahur Talabani controlled the presidency of the party and became the co-presidents of the PUK (Bafil Talabani and Lahore Genki selected for the co-presidency of PUK, 2020). Like its rival, the PUK affiliations run the business and its elites run the major TV and social media outlets (Hevian, 2013: 97,98). However, in July Bafil Talabani ousted his cousin from power and started acting as the only president of the party (Dri, 2021). Therefore, the structure of the party became the single leader from a single family.

4.3 The Kurdistan Islamic Movement

The Kurdistan Islamic movement is the first armed Islamic party that is formally established in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1987 by a small religious group led by Mullah Osman Abdul Abdulaziz. The party participated in the revolt against the Bath regime. After the establishment of the de-facto Kurdistan region the Kurdistan Islamic movement participated in the first elections under the list named Islamic (Islamy) (Karim, 2017). The leader Mullah Osman Abdul Abdulaziz was nominated by the party to be elected as the leader of the Kurdish front. However, the Kurdistan Islamic movement could not gain 7 percent of the votes (Kurdistani, 2021). During the civil war the Kurdistan Islamic movement involved in the war and fought against different Kurdish parties especially the PUK (Kurdistani, 2021). In 1999 the Kurdistan Islamic movement with the revolution Islamic movement united and created the Yekbwn Islamic Movement. However, in 2001 the Kurdish Islamic group and the Jund Al-Islam separated from the Yekbwn Islamic Movement, and the mother party returned to its original name (Karim, 2017). Since its establishment the Kurdistan Islamic movement held 12 party congresses and had 5 leaders (Raber) that all of them belong to a single family. The latest congress was in 2022 that there was only one candidate to be elected as a new leader of the movement however didn't get the required vote of the members to be a leader therefore the current leader Irfan Ali Abdulaziz remains in his position (the Kurdistan Islamic Movement, 2022). The party's source of income is not clear, however there might be donations from local and foreign donors to the party to persevere in its political role. The Kurdistan Islamic Movement is now one of the small parties in the KRI that does not have much effect on the political system especially in their role in the parliament and the government.

4.4. The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)

The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), also known as Yekgrtw, is one of the numerous Islamic movements that is active in the northern Iraqi Kurdish region. The KIU is the most influential and the largest Islamic organization in the Kurdish region (Hevian, 2013: 2). It was formally founded in 1994, by a group of religious Kurds led by Secretary-General Salahadin Muhammad Bahaadin (Gunter, 2011: 180). The roots of the KIU went back to the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq that emerged for the first time in the 1950s. The KIU was within the IMK during the 1992 elections, then declared itself in 1994 (Kurdish Islamist Movement, 2003). Its goal is to establish a state that corporate with the democratic principles in the western style and freedom of the press if not incompatible with the Sharia law. The party also supports free trade and investments. It combats corruption and bureaucracy. The party also privileges the women's rights and all ethnic and national rights to the minority groups. The KIU has effectively been involved in charity work helping poor people and supporting students in the region, especially in the rural areas (Hevian, 2013: 2).

As a moderate Islamic organization, the party neither has armed force nor participated in any armed struggle with other parties in the KRI, it instead believes in a non-armed political process (Kurdish Islamist Movement, 2003). It strives to solve the political, social and cultural problems of the society in the Kurdish region through an Islamic perspective (Hevian, 2013: 2). The residents from various ethnic groups in the KRI were seen among members and leaders of the KIU. Sunni Arabs and Turkmens who were displaced by the Baath party from their places within Iraq were among the KIU members. In the beginning, the KIU's primary goal was the coexistence among Kurdish and other Iraqi political parties. For this purpose, the KIU worked to create a pluralist federal parliamentary system within the united Iraqi state. However, later, between the second and third congresses, the party moved towards becoming a Kurdish national party that works for the self-determination of the Kurdish people in Iraq. Therefore, the non-Kurdish members were given an option to stay in the party or leave the party if they can't accept the new party program (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:11). In general, the KIU is advocating something between loyalty to Islam and nationalism. It attempts to seize the moral ground by accusing the two major parties, the KDP and the PUK in the KRI of the mismanagement of the economy and corruption (Gunter, 2011: 180).

The KIU has utilized different ways to finance its organizations including extracting money from its members of parliament, internal and external investments. Like other Islamic movements, it receives funding from the donations of various Islamic countries especially donations from the Arab Gulf countries. Lately, because of the war on terror some of the funds were cut. The KIU is now more dependent on its cadres and private investments, however, this is not enough to finance the party organs in the whole Kurdish region. Therefore, a wing that called itself a reformist within the KIU in the eighth congress presented an agenda to create a solid financial structure that rescued the party financially, therefore the KIU will only depend on itself and not to rely on the support of others (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:13).

4.5. The Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG)

The Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) was formed as a result of a breakup from the Islamic Unity Movement in 2001. The party has been led by Mullah Ali Bapir since its foundation. The KIG's base is located in Khormal district, in areas near the Iranian border. According to the KIG's constitution, the party follows the ideas of jihad and shura. It seeks to implement Islamic rules (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:11). However many different political views can be seen within the party members (Abdullah, 2018: 612). The KIG believes in the legitimate rights of the Kurdish people and believes in the self-determination of the Kurds in Iraq (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:11). In recent years, the KIG has been involved in the political and electoral processes. In different periods, the KIG played a crucial role as an opposition force (Abdullah, 2018: 612)

Like other Islamist parties around the world and within the KRI, the sources of the party's finance are investment projects, the financial support from its members in the parliament both in the Kurdish region and in Iraq, and ministerial boards and retired ministers and parliamentarians as well. The PUK also provided financial support during the Talabani period as secretary-general of the PUK. The KIG has received supports from foreign countries such as Iran. These supports are usually received through the personal relationship of the party leaders with the foreign countries (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:13). During the last congress in 2021, the party accepted new strategies and the name of the party has changed to the Kurdistan Justice Group (Komali Dadgary Kurdistan). The party strategies include preparation for an independent Kurdistan in Iraq through the rule of law and institutionalization of all sectors, along with the strong economic infrastructure. For KIG, the institutionalization means to standardize foreign relations, the relations between KRG and the central government in Baghdad, trade relations and the unification of the Peshmerga forces (Hama & Abdullah, 2021:11).

For the Islamist parties including the KIU and KIG, the party founders can remain in power through their charismatic leadership and influence. The only exception occurred in the sixth congress in 2012 when the KIU changed its secretary-general from Bahaadin to Muhaamd Faraj. But, it was only for one term because in the seventh congress Bahaadin the founder of the party returned to power and has remained in power until today (Abdullah, 2018: 609).

It's not wrong to note that the Islamic parties in general has an educational rather than political role. Especially the KIU is more look like an educational organization than political party that aims to rich to power and run the country. The Islamic parties are not really brave to make a political decision during the Crises especially when related to the change in political status. This un-braveness has been seen in several cases such as the formation of the local government in Sulaimaniyah governorate, the presidential crises in the parliament and afterwards. Rather than political existence the Islamic parties had a mediator role.

Conclusion

The base for the official position of the KRI initiated with the establishment of the de-facto-region in the northern part of Iraq. The opportunity that external actors gave to the Kurds to rule themselves within their areas. The Kurds, didn't waist that opportunities in the 1990s through establishing its institutions through popular election for the first time. The self-

rule by the Kurds along with the interest of the external actors bring about the federal region of Kurdistan. Thus, it's important to say that after several decades of destruction the Kurdish population experienced, it seems that the Kurds today have more influence and power than ever in modern Iraq. The Kurdish are enjoying self-rule under the KRG. The dominant forces of post-Saddam Hussein in Iraq have accepted the current status of the Kurdish region with its institutions as the only federal region within the federal state of Iraq. Consequently, it's not wrong to say that the contribution of this study is giving a detailed description of the pre-official position of the Iraqi Kurdistan region within Iraq. This study is prominent because without understanding political structure of the de-facto-region in the 1990s, it is hard if not impossible to understand the current status of the KRI.

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