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## The Geopolitical Position of Northern Iraqi Region and its Impact on the Relations with Turkey

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### Abstract

This paper is focused on an overview of Northern Iraq relations with Turkey, especially in terms of its geopolitical potentials, on those fields like geographical, political and economic challenges. It portrays and examines the main essence of relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq. It tries to answer the questions of how economic relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq affect each country. It explores the political, economic and geographical aspects which foster the relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq. It equally shows the energy aspect as the key instrument in building relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq. Northern Iraqi government begins to strengthen the relationship with all neighbors. It is due to the Northern Iraq's geographical position, especially its importance for tourists, so, a lot of people are interested in Northern Iraq, number of businessmen from the neighbor countries especially from Turkey come to Ibrahim Khalil custom. Northern Iraqi region is rich in terms of natural sources such as oil, gas and many minerals, so, this leads for having good relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq. ISIS fighting in Northern Iraq interrupts relations between Erbil and Baghdad and causes economic downfall in the region, but it has an impact on Turkey and Northern Iraq relations in exporting oil and in the near future exporting natural gas from Northern Iraq to Turkey and to the other countries. This thesis consists of four main sections. The first chapter, as an introductory chapter, is focused on main research question, sub-questions and characteristics and research technique of the paper. Second chapter deals with the impact of geography on the relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq. The third chapter informs about political position of the Northern Iraq and its impacts on the relations with Turkey and the referendum in North of Iraq. In the fourth chapter, energy reserves in the Northern Iraq and its impacts on the relations with Turkey will be analyzed. In the conclusion, various aspects of the Turkey-Northern Iraq relations are revealed.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Gas, Northern Iraq, Oil, Tourism, Transportation, Turkey.

### 1. Introduction

This thesis studies the geopolitical relations of Turkey and Northern Iraqi region focusing on the economic relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq, not leaving out other factors such as political and geographical relations. The geopolitical relation between Turkey and Northern Iraq is one of the most interesting topics in current world politics. Iraq's economic blockade in 90s was the reason for the greatest inflation and Northern Iraq region

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as a part of Iraq was not excluded from the blockade. Then, Northern Iraq region established its regional government after the Kurdish people uprising and start creating relations with neighbor countries especially Turkey. Turkey's geographical location can be used as a gate to the whole world. The relation started by exporting goods to the region through Ibrahim Khalil's border gate, which considered as a good beginning for developing the relations. The objective of this study is to show the dynamics behind Turkey and Northern Iraq region's relations, its developments and key aspects. This thesis attempts to contribute to the recent academic efforts for studying Turkey and Northern Iraq relations. As such, the content of the thesis is important because it offers a brief account of strategic Turkey and Northern Iraq relations. The Kurds in Northern Iraq experienced a huge financial and economic crisis due to the war against the Islamic state. The political issues were also further triggered by the call of a referendum near the disposal of the Islamic State. The purpose of the referendum was to divide the Kurdish government with the Iraqi government.

## 2. Discussion

### Conceptual Framework: Geography and Relations

It is necessary to present an introduction about the geographical border of the Northern Iraq and Turkey to make reveal the impacts on the relations. Northern Iraq is the part of Iraq, which is positioned inside Iraq border, Iraq that was made after the First World War. Northern Iraq is a federal region consisting of Northern Iraq presidency, government of Iraq, and Parliament. Establishments have the authority of legalization and enforcement for many aspects as specifying region's budget, security, police, education and health, politics, and supervising natural resources by enforcing of economic infrastructure this region is a humanitarian region in the first place, although it is the land of the Kurds and the majority of its population are Kurds (Muhammed et al., 1998: 8), but multiracial and multi religiously speaking it is separate from Iraq. Beside Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and Assyrians live together, this in a hand, on the other hand, although the majority of the region's populations are Muslims, but Christians and Yezidis live there too (Department of Foreign Relations, 2015).

There are many factors why tourists visit Northern Iraq. For example, religious reasons, environmental, cultural and political purposes. Northern Iraq is the land of the peaceful religions living, like (Islam, Christian, Yezidi, Haki and Kakaii). A large number of mosques, churches and ancient shrines can be seen in Northern Iraq, which is the factor for tourist attraction locally and globally to come and pray and pay their respect. Northern Iraq as a special climate, in winter snow, falls in mountainous areas, in spring the climate is nice and in summer the temperature is normal. It has natural and artificial trees, from flowers and plants, from animals and birds, from cultural and historical sites, from the breath-taking views of villages and tents of traveler tribes all over the heights and lows of the area's topography. The region consists of Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrian, Chaldean, Armenians and Arabs nations, they live in harmony, and there are many tribes of Kurds. There are many cultural museums in Hawler, Duhok, Sulaymaniyah and Kalar.

It has many handmade professions and until this day, many of them are still being made and shown to the tourists (Naqshbandee 1979: 39). Finally many people visit northern Iraq for political reasons too. Northern Iraq has an ancient history, there were many local and foreign forces that ruled the area, many wars and conflicts has ended on Northern Iraq soil, the most famous of them was the war between Alexander the Macedonian and Dariush the Persian which was near Hawler and ended with Alexander's victory. The Islamic wars, Mongol, Ottoman, Britain army and sequential forces of Iraq have left a trace on the soil.

Erbil has also been appointed as the capital of tourism in 2014 by the Arab Council of Tourism. During the council's conference in Cairo, four cities Beirut, Taif, Sharjah and Erbil, competed to win the title of tourism capital for the year 2014.

Northern Iraq is one of the most fertile regions for agriculture; it has a good water source with a fertile soil, because of knowing agriculture age in Northern Iraq, which evaluated as (9-10) thousand years (Rashid 1980: 20). Northern Iraq owns four million acres (approximately 2,470,000 million acres) and 30 billion square meter water; these can depend on in an agricultural field, this vast area cannot be used properly because of droughts and villagers immigration to the cities.

Turkey consists of (96.96 %) of the Asian continent and it is called Anatolia, and its remaining of (3.4 %) is in Europe ([Konda Araştırma ve Danışmanlık, 2015](#)), Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits separate both parts. Turkey's geographical significance is that it is the midway of Asia and Europe on land. Geography of Turkey also has become an obstacle in front of Russian advancement towards the Mediterranean Sea and the oil fields of the Arab Peninsula. Turkey's largest city, Istanbul, has a number of major attractions derived from its historical status as capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. These include the Sultan Ahmed Mosque (the "Blue Mosque"), the Hagia Sophia, the Topkapi Palace, the Basilica Cistern, the Dolmabahce Palace, the Galata Tower, the Grand Bazaar, the Spice Bazaar, and the Pera Palace Hotel. Istanbul has also recently become one of the biggest shopping centers of the European region by hosting malls and shopping centers, such as Metro city, Akmerkez and Cevahir Mall, which is the biggest mall in Europe and seventh largest shopping center in the world. Other attractions include sporting events, museums, and cultural events.

Foreign tourist arrivals increased substantially in Turkey between 2000 and 2005, from 8 million to 21.2 million, which made Turkey a top-10 destination in the world for foreign visitors. 2005 revenues were US\$17.5 billion which also made Turkey one of the top-10 biggest revenue owners in the world. In 2011, Turkey ranked as the 6<sup>th</sup> most popular tourist destination in the world and 4<sup>th</sup> in Europe, according to UNWTO World Tourism barometer ([World Tourism Organization 2012: 6](#)).

### **Historical Framework: Impacts of Politics**

After Kemal Ataturk's authority in 1923–1937, the second modern period of Turkey started. It was in the period of "Turgut Ozal", because before his reign Turkey was isolated with Europe countries and United States of America, Ozal renewed the foreign policy also economic sectors progressed which helped Turkish citizens grow. During this period, eastern world widely opened its doors for Turkey. This was because Islamic politicians and Kurds actively took part in elections. Also, they were competing with secularism and national compels. Lately, Turkish army showed its power in and outside of Turkey. These activities were made Ozal being the then Turkish Prime Minister in 1983–1989 and president in 1989–1993 known as Ozal period or "the second modern period of Turkey" ([Laçiner 2009: 153-205](#)).

Changes that Turgut Ozal made were in two different categories. They were internal and external. If one takes a look at the internal side, it is seen that Turkey was dealing with them in a liberal way. It was divided into three parts which were freedom, of thought religious freedom, and economic freedom. Also, Ozal could take people's attention and he was having many fans during his being the president, especially the people that were in the middle of Anatolia. He was smartly getting near to rich people in those areas. Also, Ozal could take people's attention and he was having many fans during his presidency; especially, the people that were in the central Anatolia. He was smartly getting close to rich people in those areas. Also, he was friends with old political groups in the area. From famous Ozal's sayings is "Serving people is serving God". He could get people's attention by this. Most of his fans were Islamic politicians ([Zurcher 2009: 469](#)).

The external changes that Ozal made were in a time that big changes happened to the world. In the beginnings of 1990s, the second war of gulf and collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. These events were very good for Ozal's being active in his external relationships. Turkey's historical experience was only to care about the Western world and ignore the Eastern world. This had made Turkey alone in the east ([Hama Kareem 2013: 129-133](#)). Ozal changed this trend and started to work with the east. He believed that Turkey must have its own real authority in the Islamic world and in the Middle East. This method was really successful because Turkey has been a bridge between East and West now ([Muhittin 2002: 7](#)). These things were all reasons that people call Ozal's period as the second modern period of the Republic of Turkey, because Turkey was very different in policies with internal and external powers ([Nur al-deen, Rice 1997: 18-19](#)).

At the same time, Northern Iraq decided to open its official foreign offices outside Northern Iraq, so as it could maintain the foreign relations. It can be asked about what signifies the opening of foreign offices outside Northern Iraq. In reply, it can be said that: it is for establishing and strengthening Northern Iraq relations with foreign countries, As well

as protecting Kurdish peoples' interests and Northern Iraq' interests. Encouraging and raising the level of political and economic relations of the region with international entities, especially with neighboring countries, are to advance peace, political stability, trade and mutual interests. Because of the stability and peace that exists in Northern Iraq, some of the countries have opened their embassies and representative offices in the capital of the Northern Iraq in Hawler, in addition to this Northern Iraq could open its representative office in some foreign countries. This is a key factor to advance and facilitate political, economic and trading affairs.

Previously the political relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq region, it is seen that their associations were not good enough and sometimes, they were getting worse. This was because the Turkish counter-terrorism operations in the region. Hence, political associations are very significant for both sides because northern area is the only region that has autonomy, its own government, and its own parliament ([Jamestown Foundation 2008: 72](#)).

After Iraq had been attacked by the United Nations in 2003, and the situations got worse and unsafe in Iraq. Turkey started to carefully work with Iraq in the fields of politics. Its relationships go under the authority of Kurdish leaders in the government. After that Turkey started to work with the region separately, big changes happened to the policies of Turkey ([Hawrami 2014: 18-20](#)). Political changes in Turkey were reasons for the new friendship between Erbil and Ankara. After that in 2009, Ahmet Davutoglu, who was the then Foreign Affairs Minister of Turkey, visited Erbil. He also met Masoud Barzani, president of the Northern Iraq. This was a historical visit because Davutoglu was the first Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs who visited Northern Iraq. Also, this was a great start for political and economic business together ([KRG, 2009](#)).

Turkey's relations changed and developed with these counties in a way that their relationship with Northern Iraq developed. With regards to Kurds, Ozal was focused on discussion and dialogue. He asked PKK to eliminate their guns and start discussions with the government. Turkish government wanted to have witnessed and/or some bystanders in the case, so they met with both leaders Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani in 1992. They were both leaders of two powerful parts of the region in that time. Masoud Barzani was the leader of PDK, and Jalal Talabani was leader of the PUK. After Ozal's death, no one was very serious to solve the problem. Then, the conflicts started to appear again between Turkey and PKK. These made the Turkish government and security to arrest the leader of the PKK. In 1999, Abdullah Öcalan, arrested head of the PKK, was arrested and put in prison ([Mira, 2014](#)). Relations between both sides developed. And this case has always been discussed in the meetings, especially when the President of Northern Iraq Masoud Barzani, was visiting Turkey. The first visit was made in 2011. Masoud Barzani visited Turkey and met Abdullah Gul, the then President of Turkey. Also, he met with Ahmet Davutoglu, the then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. They claimed that "military solutions are no more preferred and allowed. We do not get anything with our guns". This was a step to restart the peace process again.

Moreover, the president of US began with a sense of optimism felt throughout the Middle East, but now there is disappointment toward his foreign policy in the final year of the then US President of Barack Obama administration. If they believe that his foreign policy is a disappointment. At the beginning of his presidency, the goal was to shift the focus of American foreign policy from the Middle East to Asia based on his speech on the first of his term. When the Arab Spring began, the then US President of Barack Obama administration fell prey to the temptation to attempt to shape events to further American interests. However, the administration's intervention in Libya ultimately backfired over the long term, which made Obama reluctant to directly intervene militarily in Syria ([Barakat et al., 2015](#)).

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It is unclear whether Trump has considered the implications of increasing military support for the Kurds and not Baghdad, not only will it cause friction between cooperating partners, but most ISIS-held territory is also far away from Kurdish areas. Despite Trump expressing frustration about the trillions of dollars spent by the US in Iraq and the seemingly low return on investment, the fact that he views and laments Iran as “taking over the country” suggests complete disengagement will not be his preferred policy. Instead, the reality of the sunk costs associated with Iraq means Trump is likely to continue supporting Baghdad both militarily and financially, possibly with stricter conditions.

The apprehension Ankara had on the policy of USA in Iraq prior to the current conflict and back to the aftermath of the first Gulf War, when, led protection zone in northern Iraq, including the no-fly zone to the emergence of a Kurdish autonomous entity. Throughout most of the nineties, it proved that Turkey approve the stationing of American and British planes at Incirlik air base to support the no-fly zone in northern Iraq has become one of the most important efforts to contain Saddam Hussein, USA policy pillars. It can be said with confidence that without Ankara to the United States suffered center in Iraq from serious setbacks. Prior to the 2003 war, the United States of America, a statement from Turkey, transferring confidential teams from Turkish territory into Iraq to lay the cornerstone of the invasion process (Aliriza, Aras, 2012: 5-7).

Whilst also in the Syrian civil war, the divergence between the West and Turkey has finally become visible. If at the beginning the US and Turkey had the same main objective to eliminate Russia influence in the region as well as weaken Iran’s position in Middle East, the situation has gradually changed, and the threat of Islamic State has become more important for Western civilization, which has helped to make the Kurdish forces the most important US ally in the war. Turkey refuses to accept his secondary role inside the West and behind its core state, the US. Turkish President Erdogan has not hesitated to move closer to Russia and make a “secret deal” with Putin, after Syrian and Russian authorities expressed concern about Syrian ethnic divisions; Turkey launched the offensive “Euphrates Shield” (Geopolitical Monitor, 2016).

Relations between USA and Turkey after USA's elections and starting Donald Trump as America's new president has been decreased because of the direct USA's support to HDP which made turkey confused Because Turkey describes HDP as terrorist organization To solve these problems in May 2017 Erdogan visited the USA and hold a meeting discussing effects of these problems.

Developments between the United States and the Iraqi Kurds, which began on a humanitarian basis in the form of economic aid to the existence of a confidential relationship, but directly between the two parties arrived at the official level in July 1972 as a result of a number of factors. These were the factors that made the existence of the Kurds useful as a tool to balance, among other things, a Soviet penetration in both Iran and Iraq, and the support of the United States along with Iran as the second pillar of the strategy of Nixon against Soviet communism and the Iraqi Baathist regime, in addition to the policies of Saddam Hussein nationalism and nationalization policies and the Treaty of friendship between Iraq and the Soviet Union in 1972, where he began in the post-cold war a new era for the country in international politics (Kharontaki, 2012).

A wide open and official relation in 1992, culminating in the aftermath of the events of September 11 in which America felt that the establishment of stable and institutional relations with the Kurds, it is of strategic importance to its interests in the region. As to Turkey's refusal to participate dynamically in the war on Iraq in 2003 it led to the emergence of the role of regional Kurds, and eventually evolved into the shape the United States policy toward the Kurdish issue within the framework of the Iraqi state in the post-Saddam era, and therefore considered the fifth stage of the relations between them.

An agreement was further signed between the EU and Turkey in return December 16, 2013, in parallel with the launch of the visa liberalization dialogue. It has been conducting a series of peer evaluations in order to assess the status of implementation of Turkey visa roadmap. It has ratified the readmission by the European Union and Turkey agreement and its entry into force. Full and effective implementation of face-to-face all member states are crucial. Turkey and the European Union continued to work to improve their cooperation in the energy field, extending the scope to obtain nuclear and sustainable energy. The increase

between the link between Turkey and the European Union, in the areas of agriculture and rural development, and the work will focus on food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, agriculture and fisheries. These will be used as the basis for priority sector programs enhancing structural reforms, allowing for more targeted assistance and improve the impact of the financial assistance. Turkey participates in the following EU programs: The Seventh Framework research program, Customs, Fiscals, and Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programmers, progress, culture and lifelong learning, youth in action. Turkey has also recently concluded or is in the process of concluding new agreements for a number of programs ([European Council 2014: 3-14](#)).

Iraq has been facing internal and external turmoil since the 1980s. The years following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 have been characterized by a high degree of political volatility, sectarian violence, population displacement and socio-economic devastation. Subsequent UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions have provided a broad mandate to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to assist and support Iraqi political and reconstruction process ([United Nations Security Council, 2004](#)). Thus, they start to develop their relations and this clearly reflected on the Kurdish region's government as well as the development of the northern cities economically and investments.

After the ISIS attack to Iraq and particularly northern region's minority districts in 2014 EU helped the regional government and the send aid to the internal refugees as well as arming the Peshmerga whom fighting ISIS since then. Then the delegations from different countries start to visit the region to confirm their support to the regional government by sending emergent aids to the refugees.

Historically, the Russian Empire often expanded at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, and the relations between Russia and Turkey are often formulated by the number of wars fought and predecessor States. But there have been periods of cooperation and interdependence as well, most notably during the Russian Civil War in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, which coincided with the Turkish War of Independence ([Mankoff, 2016](#)). Cooperation has also increased in the energy field, flourished Turkish contractors in Russia, and lifted restrictions on visas. Relations reached a level of strategic partnership in the first meeting of the high-level cooperation, intergovernmental cooperation mechanism that lays the foundation for the partnership between the two countries. The meeting was held in 2010 in spite of tensions between Russia and the West in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Georgia in 2008, which drew sharp criticism from the United States and NATO ([Hurriyet Daily News, 2011](#)).

Turkish-Iranian Council, High Level Cooperation Council (HLCC), which was founded in 2014, has provided a structured basis of Turkish-Iranian relations, the first meeting of the HLCC in Ankara was held on June 9 2014 during a visit by Hassan Ruhani, head of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey and second in the April 7, 2015 during the visit to Iran by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of the Republic of Turkey. Finally, on the occasion of a visit Hassan Ruhani, head of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey on April 16, 2016, it has realized the third meeting of the HLCC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). On the occasion of the visit of His Excellency Hassan Ruhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey on 16 April 2016, the third encounter of the HLCC was realized. Also, the partnership of Turkey a military superpower, and a member of NATO and an ally of Western historically enjoyed a flexible economy to provide for the regional government a "buffer" zone of its own against the security structures in Iraq and the rest of the region. The government and non-governmental actors that threaten the regional government in the current political and security environment will think twice before challenging the interests of Turkey's security in Iraq, and so far, those interests overlap with the interests of the regional government. Regional government also benefit from increased foreign investment and technological expertise and openness to European markets. The constant interaction also contributes to easing tension in Turkey with other Kurdish groups in the region ([NRT, 2015](#)).

Historically, Iran benefited from the Kurdish issue of the region to pressure the Iraqi government and Iran has dealt with this issue, also allied their political parties through "Qarargai Ramazan", a branch of Iran intelligence. Hence there are political and economic relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the regional government of Northern Iraq. Iran has a great role in

helping Kurds when they faced the danger of ISIS attack on the region. When ISIS first controlled one of the Iraqis major city Mosul, they were making a huge stride towards Baghdad, which was at one point considered by Iran to be its 'red line'. Soon later, ISIS shifted its advancement towards the Kurdish region. During the same period, the grand Ayatullah Sistani issued a fatwa calling upon the Shi'as to practice jihad (legally sanctioned combat), which resulted in the creation of the Shi'a militant group 'Hashed Alshabi', which practices a politics of sectarianism. They also hoped to portray ISIS and its alleged barbarism as an example of violent Sunni Islam.

However, the relation between two allies are seems good but sometimes a tension occurs because of the tough statements or threaten speeches of the Iranian side which leads to tension between them temporarily. The latest threat was from an Iranian military commander was released through his speech stating that Iran will destroy the region. A senior commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) recently threatened Israel, saying the ground is ready for the annihilation of "the Zionist regime". The comments by IRGC Deputy Commander Hossein Salami were made at a ceremony in Tehran prior to prayers marking Al-Quds Day. Salami also threatened Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq to keep their promises, saying that Iran would "completely destroy any place that constitutes a threat to our regime" (Benari, 2016).

In short, Iran has an important political impact over the region, which is necessary to its existence. Due to the majority Sunni demographic of the Kurdish people and the relative strength of the Islamic is developing in the region. This awakening is represented by a 17 % share of Islamists in the Parliament, ever-increasing presence of the Salafi, and the high percentage of adherents to Sunni Islam among the Kurdish population in the region; Iran has little or no ideological influence on the region at all. It is important to note that under the current geopolitical system and in light of the advancement of the position of the region due to its opposition to ISIS and its natural resources, Iran is reconsidering the region. Furthermore, it is likely to change its politics towards the region as this process continues. Iran understands that, with Turkey as a key ally and, with the prospective support of the Arab states and with the deepening identification of Kurds as Sunnis, Kurds will survive without Iran's support. Therefore, in recent years, Iran has been looking for friendly relations with the region and has expressed a desire for more economic interaction with the Kurdish region similar to the way in which Turkey works with the region (Rudaw, 2016).

Another major plan that triggered the poor axis between norther Iraq and the surrounding countries was when a referendum of independence was confirmed to be on the 25 September 2017 (Rudaw, 2017). On Monday 25th September, people in Northern Iraq voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence in a non-binding referendum that was aimed at arming Masoud Barzani with territorial bargaining chips. The outcome of the results illustrated that 93 per cent voted in favour of independence, with 7.3 % voting against. More than 3.3 million people or 72 per cent of eligible voters took part in Monday's ballot, further proven by the electoral commission (Mckernan, 2017).

However, in the lead up to the vote, all suggestions of secession by the Kurds was bitterly opposed by the government in Baghdad, as well as by neighbors such as Turkey and Iran who threatened to isolate the region – the United States also pressed Kurdish leaders to call off the poll. This was because USA wanted to disperse all ISIS in the Iraqi region, hence they claimed that the referendum will cause further disputes between the Kurdish and Iraqi government and it surely did. The notion of referendum led to a severe political controversy as the Iraqi politicians asserted that they will refuse to have a dialogue about the referendum outcome, further proven by Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi who stated that "if they want to start talks, they must cancel the referendum and its outcome."

Hence it is accurate to claim that the Kurdish Referendum led to a severe of political controversy in the Middle East. This point can be proven by reactions prior and after the referendum from many politicians. Prior the referendum the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi demanded that Kurdish authorities must "cancel" the outcome of the independence referendum in northern Iraq or else they will experience the consequences of what is rapidly escalating into a major regional crisis. Abadi alerted that the referendum was unconstitutional as Parliament urged the Iraqi central Government to send troops to take

control of pivotal oil fields held by Kurdish forces and called on all foreign governments to close their diplomatic missions in Erbil.

Turkey expressed their attitude after an urgent meeting of national Security Council of Turkey heading by Erdogan president of republic established a non-agreed declaration containing the referendum in North of Iraq which excites in, and in declaration, the then Prime Minister of Turkey Binali Yildirim about that topic said that: "it doesn't make stability and it doesn't cause wars in the area" (Xor, 2017). Turkey's meetings declarations continued, but it does not indicate a rough attitude and none accept able situation which given the result that. Turkey doesn't impose economical because the volume of trade between turkey and north of Iraq increases annually. Turkey exports its products which is about 8 billion dollars to north of Iraq while its only 4 million dollars with Iraq (Anwar, 2018: 196-198).

### **Energy Relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq**

The large energy resource of Iraqis regarded as a part of Iraq-Turkey relations. The fact that Kirkuk province is located in the heart of Iraq, and more interestingly it was well-known for Iraq's largest oil and gas territory but has been extremely exploited ever since its discovery in the 1920s and export in 1935. Iraq relied on Kirkuk's oil up to 1960. After that further oil fields were found which made Iraq to focus less on Kirkuk, the province was ignored even more when conflicts and sanctions occurred.

The leadership of modern Turkey has historically viewed its relations with the Iraqi Kurds through a traditional security lens. The prospect of a Kurdish nation the Northern Iraq emerging as an autonomous region within Iraq and possibly an independent state was viewed as an existential threat to the unitary nature of the Republic of Turkey (Park, 2005). Furthermore, the close proximity of the Northern Iraq market, consumer demand for new goods, and the trans-border mercantile culture of companies in Turkey and the Northern Iraq contributed to the rapid expansion of economic interdependence between Ankara and Erbil (Olson 2006: 3-45).

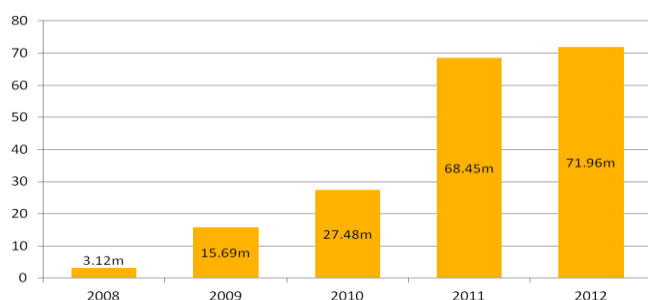
Due to the visa-free regime for Turkish citizens who wished to stay in the Northern Iraq for under 15 days, Turkish companies were able to send workers of all skill levels to the Northern Iraq without fore planning, without completing any government paperwork, and at a relatively low cost, Turkish companies that wanted their employees to stay in the Northern Iraq simply applied for either a short or long term residency permit. It is obvious that Turkey is considering as an important state in the Middle East because of it is position and role in the region has a big economic and political relations with Northern Iraq and this makes European countries and US's eyes to be on them regarding the developments in the region. Problems were complicated in such a way that regional government decided to export and sell its oil without returning to Baghdad through Turkey to the world, which is allowed in Iraqi constitution. Problems between Erbil and Baghdad increased the relation between Turkey and Northern Iraq in a rate that traditional exchanging between them is estimated 10 milliards in a year. Turkey's opening process with peace process was perceived as a new grade, politicians viewed it as a half-way to reach the complete treatment (Rudaw, 2015). Progress in economic relations between Turkey & Northern Iraq was an effect to progress in economics of both, and this is from these large number Turkish companies who are working in Northern Iraq. According to a Northern Iraq statistics there are 2955 foreign companies working in Northern Iraq, 1329 of them are Turkish which contains most of them, a number of lubbers got jobs either inside Northern Iraq or in Turkey, which became a factor for a good economical living rate in Turkey and Northern Iraq (KRG, 2014).

Producing oil in a country causes a great economic developments and happy peaceful life for its citizens. It can convert deserts to civilizations, as the deserts of the Arabian Gulf countries such as UAE (United Arab Emirates), Qatar, and Kuwait. In fact, their production of oil has changed the entire life of their citizens. Furthermore, it has converted deserts into modern cities. On the other hand, some deserts that do not produce oil have been a place for poor people, hunger, and spreading different kinds of diseases, as it has been seen in; Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and other countries in southern Africa. Any country that produces oil, other countries give a special care and make relations with the produced oil countries to have an external communications of diplomatic and political changes to the highest levels of relations. In a way, most of the western countries will keep an eye open on these countries



because of their wealth. Also, these economic benefits have caused to protect those countries. For example, in 1990, the western world really stood with Kuwait and did not let Saddam to read it. This means that if a country produced oil, that country will have protection (Barham, 2014). Oil production in Northern Iraq started in the middle of 2007. This happens after that Kurds could recover lands that were raided by the Iraqi government in Kirkuk and Mosul. The Kurdish government has announced for oil and gas companies come and start working in 40 oil fields. People hope the oil production ratio will increase to five times more than today's production, which is about 1 million barrel per day (160000 m<sup>3</sup>) (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2013).

The companies that are working in Northern Iraq in fields of searching, and producing oil are Exxon Mobil, Total Chevron, Talisman energy, Russian Gazprom, Genel Energy, Hunt Oil, Golf Custom Petroleum, Marathon oil and Dana Gas (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2013).



**Fig. 1.** Oil productions in Northern Iraq, Millions of barrels in 2008-2012

Source: Ministry of Natural Resources (2013). Oil, <http://mnr.krg.org/index.php/ku/oil-ku/vision>

Oil has divided Kurds and today, some people say that oil will gather Kurds together again, meaning Turkey and Northern Iraq to have one politician destiny. Also, Nabokov project ties Turks and Kurds together, too. Nabokov is the transportation of natural oil and gas from Azerbaijan to Europe. This line is known as Bako flies-Cihan (Rozha, 2011: 10). After that, Kurds could make a federal government in 2003. This was a result of the revolution in 1991 that Kurdish people made against the Iraqi government. Producing and exporting oil was an old dream of Kurdish people. Northern Iraq exporting oil started after it was officially announced in a conference in Hawler. It was a great beginning to oil business for Northern Iraq and Turkey (CNN, 2009). As it was predicted, Iraqi government stood against the project and did not agree. Also, Iraqi government's disagreement is against the Iraqi Constitution Article 122. It is mentioned in the Article that the Ministry of Natural Resources of Northern Iraq is responsible for Northern Iraq oil and gas business. The Iraqi government stopped sending the Kurdish budget, which was 17 % of the whole Iraqi budget for 2013 since now. It had made negative effects on Northern Iraq economy till now. Even though Northern Iraq is legally doing its business from Turkey, but it cannot solve the economic crisis by itself. According to official statistics, 3955 foreign companies work in Northern Iraq. According to official statistics, 3955 foreign companies work in Northern Iraq. Most of them are from Turkey. Turkish companies are nearly 1329 companies. Northern Iraq is secure and protected, so international companies come and start working in the region (KRG, 2014). This is the reason why Turkey is considered as one of the most important countries for Northern Iraq oil and gas business. Fortunately, the relationships have really developed. Every day, Northern Iraq exports 600,000 barrel of oil, which means 18 million barrel per month. Also, Northern Iraq is planning to send approximately 20 billion m<sup>3</sup> of gas in 2016-2018 with Genel Energy companies. It is, of course, a great achievement for both sides (Rudaw, 2015).

In 2009, Northern Iraq decided to start selling Northern Iraqi's oil by its own authority and without referring to Baghdad. It was the first time when Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani both launched the oil pipes in a formal ceremony in Erbil. According to episodes 111,

112, and 141 of Iraqi constitution, Northern Iraq is totally liberated to treat with the oil case. Exporting oil is defined as a remarkable phase in Kurdish history regarding some experts who passed judgments on the accomplishment as a mistake. Exporting oil has benefits to Kurds in a quantity of means. In the internal side, oil production can be used as a reason to stop the petroleum crises in Northern Iraq. Also, it has changed Northern Iraq to a stronger authority in the political game in Iraq. In the international side too, it affects the world to convince that Northern Iraq is a real economic, political, and national power in the area. Even though the outcomes of this oil exporting goes to Baghdad, but it did not have any effect on increasing Northern Iraq budget, but it was the reason to make a lot more arguments between Erbil and Baghdad (Rashid, 1980).

There are multiple reasons for the region's economic crisis, the most vital one is due to ISIS. It is another essential reason of Northern Iraq crises. After that conflicts and arguments started between Erbil and Baghdad, ISIS started attacking Northern Iraq borders. This caused Kurdish government to spend too much money for the war consumption. Even though international countries helped Northern Iraq by sending weapons and helping Peshmerga forces, but it was not enough. According to the last statistic of the testament union of Northern Iraq, the economic crisis costed more than 10 billion dollar to the Northern Iraq since 2014, financial downturn that hit the region following the drop in oil prices and the ISIS war. It also expecting this amount increases to 15 billion dollars (Rudaw, 2015), if these crises last till the end of 2016. "We have had investors who went completely bankrupt over the past two years because of the sudden halt of the economic growth in Northern of Iraq" said Yaseen Mahmoud, a spokesperson at the union. According to Mahmoud some 500 small and middle size businesses have declared bankruptcy while hundreds more have been "severely" affected by the economic stagnation. Another case appeared between Erbil and Baghdad after Kirkuk's governorate Dr. Najmadeen Kareem suggested to the governorate council in March, 14<sup>th</sup> 2017 to vote for rising north of Iraq region's flag on all the government offices in Kirkuk. This decision led to many obstacles e.g, At the first a part of Turkmen parties made demonstration against that decision (Jamal, 2017) and Prime minister of Baghdad Haidar Abadi said a press conference asked local government of Kirkuk to respect constitutional articles (Rudaw, 2017). Whilst also Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Turkey while giving a speech for voting to 'yes' in Turkey's constitution amendment referendum said that "raising up the second flag in Kirkuk is totally wrong, those who do that thing are hypocrisies, and we mention them that Kirkuk is not only a Kurdish city, it is Kurdish, Arabic and Turkmen city", also said that "I ask administration in north of Iraq to Review that decision, if they did not lower that flag, They will pay a harsh punishment". Before the speech of President Erdogan, the then Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, expressed their concern over that issue (Rudaw, 2017).

Iran showed their situation about the second flag in Kirkuk in 3/4/2017, Bahram Qasimi, and Spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran expressed his countries situation about that case and said that "raising any flag except of Iraqi's flag is unconstitutional to us. Iran supports pride of Iraqi land" and asked all to be committed with Iraq's constitution for solving problems between them.

After ISIS controlled most of the Sunni's areas in the middle of Iraq and Syria, and they got their goals, they changed its name from ISIS to Islamic Caliphate then they elected Al-Baghdadi as Caliphate in July 2014, and they tried to remove the borders in the region (Rahman 2015: 15). Later, between 1 and 15 August 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) expanded northern Iraqi territories under their control. In the region north and west from Mosul, ISIS conquered Zumar, Sinjar, Wana, Mosul Dam, Tel Keppe and Kocho, in the regions south and east of Mosul the towns Bakhdida or Qaraqosh, Karamlish, Bartella and Makhmour (Arango, 2014). The offensive resulted in 100,000 Iraqi Christians driven from their homes, 200,000 Yazidi civilians driven from their homes in the city of Sinjar, 5,000 Yazidi men massacred, 5,000-7,000 of the Yazidis' women enslaved, and a war of several countries against ISIS (Neurink, 2014). Also from the beginning of the war against ISIS the Kurdish Peshmerga Ministry said in a statement that 1466 Kurdish soldiers have been killed since the start of the fighting against the radical group of Islamic State (ISIS) in

northern Iraq. Also, 8610 Peshmerga have been reportedly injured so far in the war on ISIS (Issa, 2016).

Challenges facing the relationship between Turkey and the regional government do not mean that the alliance Ankara-Erbil doomed. First, despite the on-going military cooperation between the various Kurdish groups in the fight against ISIS, it is not clear whether these actors at any time will be able to overcome their ideological differences and political. Since 2014 developments have proved that the relations between Barzani and the PKK/PYD have not completely gone away, despite their alliance in the on-going war against ISIS. There was intense rivalry between the various Kurdish factions fight against ISIS in November 2015 during the defense of Sinjar, an Iraqi province that is home to the Kurdish Yezidi community. Moreover, once the fighting was in over Sinjar, the PKK, Barzani complained took all the credit for winning the ISIS (Deutsche Welle, 2015). The regional government, which is experiencing economic difficulties due to the recent decline in oil prices, still relies on the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline for oil exports. In spite of these difficult developments, Turkey is still the main economic gateway to the regional government to the outside world. Barzani is well aware that will be independence in the future will not be able to survive without the support of key regional actors, including Turkey. Current events in December 2015 in Bashiqa, a northern Iraqi city of Mosul, confirm this analysis (Kayhan, 2016).

When Turkey deployed about 150 troops and 25 tanks with the aim of training the Kurdish Peshmerga and Arab forces to fight ISIS, he accused Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi Turkey of interfering in the internal affairs of Iraq and demand the immediate withdrawal of Turkish. In the face of this crisis, Barzani, the Turkish side took over, saying that "according to our information, Turkey and Iraq agreed in advance to the deployment of Turkish soldiers near Mosul. Alliance was created to train and support volunteer soldiers will edit Mosul". Barzani added that "this issue has been blown out of proportion" (Al-Monitor, 2015).

Since the fall of Iraq's third largest city Mosul 2014 and seized by ISIS, the efforts to retake it under Iraq's government control is on-going and the national and international coalitions against ISIS established to defeat ISIS in the region. Then the Battle of retaking Mosul is a joint offensive by Iraqi government forces with Kurdish army Peshmerga, and international forces to retake the city of Mosul from ISIS (CNN, 2016). Sunni participation in the liberation of Mosul is being organized at the Nineveh Liberation Camp, on the suburbs of Erbil. The Liberation Camp is supported by Mosul's Governor, Atheel Nujayfi and comprises elements of the Iraqi police force and security services that fled Mosul back in June. The ousted Governor claims to have a force of 7,000 police officers ready to launch an offensive on the city. While their drive and determination are undeniable, reports suggest that they are under-equipped. The prospects of using such a force to spearhead an attack on Mosul could likely lead to a second shocking and embarrassing defeat for such troops, in under a year (Morris, 2015).

With no political solutions on the table it is also unlikely that the local Sunni populous would support such an operation. Fearful of Baghdad and the rise in power of Shi'a armed groups, there needs to be a clear political framework for increased Sunni participation and engagement. Without this, Iraq's Sunni communities will remain wary of their Shiite counterparts. If there is no popular support for the attacking force, the likelihood of post-conflict stability is doubtful. Thus, even substantial numbers of troops are highly unlikely to take back Mosul in a clean and effective manner. Cooperation is needed between the Iraqi Army, Peshmerga Forces, local tribal elements, the international coalition, and the local communities inside Mosul itself. Even then, such an operation would have to be vast. Mosul will not fall in the same way as it did in June 2014, when a few thousand Islamic State (ISIS) fighters took control of the city. The fight against Islamic State will be a slow and difficult process. While many admit it will take a multi-year effort to combat the Islamic State, each small step has to be carefully measured; patience is needed. The world is looking for a quick fix to a complex and dynamic situation. A spring push-back, with the Iraqi Army in the lead, looks to be ill-fated.

The operation follows the Mosul offensive in 2015 and 2016. The offensive began with Iraqi troops and Peshmerga fighters engaging ISIS on three fronts outside Mosul, going village to village in the surrounding area (BBC, 2016). More than 120 towns and villages were liberated from ISIS control

in the first two weeks of fighting. Iraqi Special Operations Forces entered the city on the eastern front. Met with fierce fighting, the Iraqi advance into the city was slowed by elaborate defenses including road blocks, booby traps, suicide bombers and snipers the battle for Raqqa will be every bit as challenging as the one for Mosul, with both cities carrying huge strategic and symbolic value to the jihadists and their self-declared caliphate covering territory in both Syria and Iraq (CNN, 2016).

The involvement of Turkey in the operation has considerably strained relations between Ankara and Baghdad. After Turkey said its troops fired artillery rounds at ISIS targets near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, following a request by Kurdish Peshmerga forces. Turkey has 1,500 to 2,000 soldiers in Iraq, including 500 Turkish soldiers deployed to a base near Bashiqa, where they trained 1,500 Iraqi Sunni volunteers, mainly Turkmens, and Arabs to reclaim Mosul (Mathieu, Kodmani, 2016). Turkey's participation is against the wishes of the Iraqi government, which has said the Turks are violating Iraq's sovereignty. Turkey has refused to withdraw its forces. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told the Turkish parliament that "we will play a role in the Mosul liberation operation and no one can prevent us from participating" and said their presence was to ensure that Mosul did not fall to Shi'a control and become a threat to Turkey (CNN, 2016). The United States (US) has reportedly attempted to persuade Iraq to cooperate with Turkey on the Mosul offensive. US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter visited Turkey on 21 October 2016, where an agreement was proposed allowing limited Turkish participation, pending Iraqi approval. Carter discussed Turkey's involvement in detail with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad on 22 October 2016 and with Masoud Barzani, the President of Regional Government, in Erbil on 23 October 2016 (The Washington Post, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion

This paper is focused on the relationship between Northern Iraq and Turkey relations considering the conditions of geography, politics and economics. At the beginning, it focuses on the geographical location of Northern Iraq which has been a factor of making tourism relations with Turkey. Ankara's relationship with the Iraqi Kurds does not need to be seen with such a pessimistic outlook. And despite the fact that relations between Turkey and regional government has reached a level it was unthinkable a few years ago, but it seems that the relationship contain balances inherent. The relationship between Turkey and regional government is already on its way towards the saturation point unless torn Iraq and Turkey responded formed an alliance with the regional government.

In the political view, Northern Iraq can but argued as the first very actively and dynamically participated in the relations and completion with his neighbors, considering types of relation and ideology and faiths of political parties. With the progress that the political relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq have seen, there were several earnings to boot. Despite Northern Iraq is not the end of a regional cooperation system of planning about the Kurds case, Northern Iraq declared that Kurds case is not the case of a military group in the mountains but it is a case of a nation in the Middle East. This shows that that region in his beginning till now was not frozen governorate, but it was in advance very active and effective.

Effective countries relation on Turkey – north Iraq region, although their effect is not in the same direction politically but are cooperated against the terrorist organization of ISIS and this by help of Iraqi army and Peshmerga (the north of Iraq's region's fighter) .and by helping the homeless who left their home in fear of the ISIS war, so the economic relations have seen changes after the Turkey and Russia renewed their relations. As the political observers say this will help in developing economical relation between turkey-north of Iraq's region, because according to the bond between a Turkish company and natural resources ministry of north of Iraqi region it was decided to finish natural gas's pipe between turkey and north of Iraq at the beginning of 2017. Which were satisfying turkey's needs of natural gas for 50 years, but now that project seems to be slowed down which is not a good factor on the region's economy especially for that bad economic situation sees nowadays.

Economically, Northern Iraq found in a list of countries that has oil and gas, which area effective principle to strengthen its relationship with Turkey. With increasing financial problems that Northern Iraq has nowadays, it should be paid attention to the economic progress resources, concerning different sectors, advanced them, especially oil and gas industry. Plans should be made for building different types of factories, such as

petrochemical factory, industry of agricultural products, agricultural instrument factory, knitting and sewing factory, producing instruments and tools for progressing construction buildings and road etc. Besides of that development of tourism sector, this is another important economic development resource.

The political, financial, and diplomatic seeks are reasons to review the Turkish political moves. Geographically, this country has an important position in the area and all the worlds have an eye open on it. After the visits of the Turkish politic men to Erbil, and the opposite, there must be an accurate agenda for this union. The Kurdish-Turkish strong relations are not temporary or for several days. Otherwise, it must be seen as a great game changer because it has the signs of a new Middle East. Turkey should develop its communications with the Northern Iraq so that the Kurdish-Turkish relationship will be the most precious strategic process of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Finally, with all these relations it is decided in February 2016 that Northern Iraq natural gas exported to Turkey. Exporting natural gas has a special importance to both Turkey and Northern Iraq. Thus, in light of the political and economic background of Turkish-Northern Iraq relations, and despite major challenges to the Turkey-regional Government partnership, it is likely that their cooperation will continue within the context of emerging regional dynamics. Finally, one should ask what should be done with the progress in all the types of relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq region, and performance of Turkish Consulate in Erbil the capital of the region. Northern Iraq is not an independent state and it cannot have its own consulate in the foreign countries, besides of that it owns Northern Iraq Foreign Relations Office, and many offices in different countries to make contacts easier with these countries.

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