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The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies nr 2 (4), 143-158

2013

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the constructive role of the Kurdish diaspora organisations (from 1978 to 2002) and their progress from exclusive nationalism to successively accommodating what has been called "post-national thinking". On the basis of Michael Keating and John McGarry's research, the author analyses how transnational integration and other challenges to the nation-state both encourage the revival of stateless nationalisms and simultaneously provide new means for its realization. The Kurdish diaspora organisations shown in this study represent a global-wide processes of change in the nature and form of political organisations that question the principles of centralised state supremacy and permanence of bonds between territories and people. The author demonstrates the transition in the policy of those organizations, which withdrew from the projects of complete Kurdish independence and instead included human right principles and cultural and political pluralism as important frames of reference for their strategies, activities, and relations. The author also presents the changes in the Middle East, including Turkey and Iraq, in relation to the Kurds and their political engagement.

Key words

Kurdish diaspora, Middle East, nationalism, integration, human rights, political pluralism

1. Introduction

The Kurds have been subject to two central portrayals that have rendered them into a condition of stasis: stateless, fractional victims of official nationalists and tribal-based or secessionist activists who threaten the sovereign order of nation states. Although these portrayals illustrate parts of the complex reality of the Kurds, they are also representing assumptions commonly held on stateless

nations of the modern era. These assumptions limit the understanding of how current minority political ideas and strategies may form part of global transformations of the nation state system.[1] Correspondingly, interest in how politically moderate Kurds accommodate structural changes and contribute constructively to non-violent political processes is almost non-existent, whilst the vocal and militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its related associations receive widespread attention. In a similar vein, the engagement of migrants and refugees – outcasts or displaced persons in the nation state era – in political activities in their homelands is treated with caution due to the modern state's problematic relationship with dual authority and divided loyalty.[2] It is suggested that diasporas are often interested in mobilising and organising activities transnationally only to promote their own nationalist goals in sharp contrast to cosmopolitan movements committed to human rights.[3] Moreover, it is suggested that diasporas are reluctant to compromise, and may fuel social tensions and violence by providing members with ideas and strategies removed from political reality. In effect, the factual and potentially constructive role of diaspora engagement with regard to fostering commitment to human rights, democracy, and contributions to peace and development in countries of origin is left rather unexplored.[4]

The aim of this article is to highlight the constructive role of diaspora transnational political engagements. This is done by outlining how nine Kurdish diaspora organisations (from 1978 to 2002) increasingly embarked on or sought to develop strategies, activities, and interactions of an interregional and multi-level character, and how they simultaneously progressed from exclusive nationalism to successively accommodating what has been called "post-national thinking"

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[1] M. Keating, J. McGarry, *Introduction* [in:] *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*, M. Keating, J. McGarry (eds.), Oxford 2001.

[2] E. Ostergaard Nielsen, *Diasporas in World Politics* [in:] *Non-State Actors in World Politics*, D. Josselin, W. Wallace (eds.), New York 2001.

[3] M. Kaldor, *Cosmopolitanism Versus Nationalism: The New Divide?* [in:] *Europe's New Nationalism. States and Minorities in Conflict*, R. Caplan, J. Feffer (eds.), New York 1996.

[4] N. Van Hear et.al., *The Contribution of UK-based Diasporas to Development and Poverty Reduction*. A report by the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Oxford University, Oxford 2004; A.-C. Emanuelsson, *Diaspora Global Politics. Kurdish Transnational Networks and Accommodation of Nationalism*, Ph.D. thesis, Department of Peace and Development, Göteborg University, Göteborg 2005; E. Ostergaard Nielsen, *Diasporas and Conflict Resolution – Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?*, paper presented at the Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Brief, 2006; *Diasporas in Conflict. Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?*, H. Smith, P. Stares (eds.), New York 2007.

in an emerging post-sovereign political order.[5] Theoretically, the paper builds on the thorough account of globalisation by David Held and Anthony McGrew, holding that an unprecedented global "stretching" and deepening of social, cultural, political, and economic relations have disrupted the principle of direct correspondence between society, economy, and polity.[6] This process of change embraces new actors and institutions at the supra- and sub-state levels and may encourage actors to accommodate and cooperate across boundaries, which in turn may promote the development of multi-level authorities and loyalties as well as multiple identities. In the case of migrant transnationalism, Steven Vertovec suggests that transnational practices among some groups of migrants involve fundamental modes of wider transformations.[7] In the political sphere, Vertovec considers that the mode of transformation specifically concerns reconfiguration of the nexus of "identities-borders-orders". Whilst Vertovec particularly focuses on questions of dual citizenship and nationality, he also raises the broader question: In what ways does migrant transnationalism contribute to significant shifts affecting the nation-state model? Focusing particularly on Turks and Kurds in Germany, Eva Ostergaard Nielsen outlines how certain diaspora organisations increasingly participate in multi-level interactions and advocate goals such as democracy and human rights, norms which acquire a supra-territorial rather than country-specific character.[8] The human rights regime softens the principle of state sovereignty because it "recognises individuals and groups as subjects" and increasingly embraces the view that "a legitimate state must be a democratic state".[9]

In order to capture how the Kurdish diaspora organisations (representing at once a migrant and non-migrant minority) constructively interact with new

[5] M. Keating, J. McGarry, op.cit.; M. Keating, *Plurinational Democracy. Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era*, Oxford 2001.

[6] D. Held, A. McGrew, *Global Transformations. Politics, Economics and Culture*, Cambridge 1999; D. Held, A. McGrew, *Introduction* [in:] *Governing Globalisation. Power, Authority and Global Governance*, D. Held, A. McGrew (eds.), Cambridge 2003.

[7] S. Vertovec, *Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation*, "International Migration Review" 2004, No. 3, Vol. 38, pp. 970–1001.

[8] E. Ostergaard Nielsen, *Diasporas…*, op.cit; E. Ostergaard Nielsen, *Working for a Solution through Europe: Kurdish Political Lobbying in Germany* [in:] *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*, N. Al-Ali, K. Koser (eds.), London 2002. Cf. J.A. Scholte, *The Globalization of World Politics* [in:] *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*, J. Baylis, S. Smith (eds.), Oxford 2001, p. 16.

[9] D. Held, A. McGrew, *Global Transformations*, op.cit., p. 65.

ideas, changing realities, and the challenges of contemporary world politics, this paper also draws upon Michael Keating and John McGarry's research. They analyse how transnational integration and other challenges to the nation-state both encourage the revival of stateless nationalisms and simultaneously provide new means for their accommodation. In concrete terms, they outline how several minority nationalist movements in Europe and Canada increasingly advocate a "civic" version of nationalism, individual and minority rights, immigrant rights, and cultural and political pluralism. In order to gain control over economic aspects, culture, and language – policy-related instruments in the emerging order – the same national minority groups advocate a post-sovereign concept of authority, favouring diffusion of authority across multiple levels and various forms of qualified, negotiated, and shared sovereignty. Whilst most of them still regard territory to be central to their nationalist goals and resist the idea of making nationality no more than a personal attribute, several groups also recognise and argue that individuals often have multiple identities and loyalties that more or less correspond to territories. Basically, these minority movements realise that the emerging complexity of global transformations offer them no single or permanent solution. Rather, they have realised that their complex situations need to be worked out continually through political compromises. When viewed this way, several national minority groups seem imaginative, innovative, flexible, and responsive, as well as inclusive and collaborative.

2. Background: Kurdish displacement and organisation

Two central issues have driven migration and flight among Kurds: the removal of the Kurdish issue from the international agenda in the 1920s and the subsequent transformation of the Ottoman and Persian Empires into nationalistic and undemocratic states that offered them no or severely limited rights. In addition, the southeastern region of Turkey is systematically neglected when it comes to economic modernisation and development.[10] Even though developments in the 1960s led to the 1970 Autonomy Agreement between the Iraqi regime and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the revival of Kurdish political organisation in Turkey, the subsequent decades provide evidence of increased repression, severe conflicts, internal divisions, and a dramatic increase in the number of Kurdish refugees worldwide.[11]

[10] N. Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, London 1992.

[11] D. McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, London 2000.

In Europe and the United States, the Kurdish population grew from a small number to about 500,000 in the mid-1980s, to more than one million by 2001.[12] Together with Kurdish migrant workers, Kurdish refugees from Turkey form the largest part of Kurds in Europe. Since political and economic factors are intertwined with Turkey's suppression of the Kurds, there is not a sharp distinction between Kurdish migrants and refugees from that country. Whilst many Kurdish migrants may have internalised Turkey's official doctrine that "every citizen of Turkey is a Turk", it is also highly possible that it was first in Europe that Kurds dared to emphasise their identity.[13] In the 1970s, a previously broadly based Kurdish student organisation in Europe split into several organisations. This change reflected the actual division of Kurdistan into four geographical areas and a new political offstage occupied by various Kurdish parties with different ideological tendencies and versions of Kurdish nationalism. The new diaspora organisations allied themselves with homeland political parties and agendas, and the relationship among them was characterised by conflict rather than co-operation.[14] Although the Kurdish organisations included in this study did not deliberately promote isolation – be it political, cultural, or social – of Kurds from the majority population in countries of settlement, they remained rather inwardly focused and oriented to a condition of exile with regard to their activities and goals. They perceived the French, Germans, Swedes, etc. as being detached from and ignorant about matters related to the realities facing the Kurds. Whilst they began in the second part of the 1980s embarking on a course of integration work and providing information to Europeans, the mobilisation of Kurdish immigrants and refugees to achieve the goal of Kurdish state- and nation-building remained the main strategy pursued in the 1980s.[15]

3. New possibilities: emerging transnational networks

By the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, several events created new possibilities for the Kurdish diaspora to involve old and new organisations in

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[12] O. Sheikhmous, *Kurdish Cultural and Political Activities Abroad*, paper presented at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, December 17–22, 1989 in West Berlin. L.I. Meho, *The Kurds in Kurdistan* [in:] *Kurdish Culture and Society. An Annotated Bibliography*, L.I. Meho, K.L. Maglaughlin (eds.), Westport 2001.

[13] M. Van Bruinessen, *Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question*, "Working Paper RCS" 2000, No. 22.

[14] O. Sheikhmous, op.cit.

[15] A.-C. Emanuelsson, op.cit.

transnational networks consisting of state- and non-state actors. The chemical bombing of Halabja did not elicit a concerted international response by the states of the world, but it contributed to the processes of internationalisation and transnationalisation of the Kurdish cause. A new situation for the Kurdish people and politics then ensued in terms of opportunities, recognition, and legitimacy. The tide began to turn despite the ambivalent and short-sighted strategies of involved states, continued state power and suppression of Kurds, the war over Kuwait (concomitant with the end of the Cold War), the establishment of a safe haven in northern Iraq, and the acceptance of Turkey as candidate for membership in the European Union.[16]

Starting in 1989, their focus on (overcoming) homeland-oriented political disagreements through national and political unity became only one aspect among many of increasingly expanded and specific agendas that address a range of issues, activities, and relationships. Subsequently, the contacts and networks of the organisations with other actors broadened and deepened. Most of the diaspora organisations in focus established contact with each other and met occasionally. The first international conferences on Kurdish human rights were arranged in Bremen and Paris by Kurdish diaspora organisations in co-operation with European activists, academics, and politicians.[17] Although some of the organisations developed stable relationships in the following years, others had an interest in doing so but were more involved in immediate causes related to dramatic events. During less dramatic periods, ideological differences, party linkages, distrust, and perhaps even personal dislike continued to curb cooperation among organisations and their leaders.

Some of the organisations were successful in building networks with local/national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), whilst others such as the International Association for Human Rights of the Kurds (IMK) in Bonn could be characterised as belonging to the global network of international NGOs concerned with issues such as human rights, development, and racial discrimination.[18] The organisations also embraced Europeans and Americans as employees, members, and advisors – a strategy that enabled them to increasingly influence processes that would otherwise be difficult for "ethnic organisations" to access.[19]

[16] Chair of the Kurdish Bureau for Liaison and Information in Brussels quoted in Ibidem, p. 125.

[17] Chair of the Kurdish Institute of Paris quoted in Ibidem, p. 163.

[18] Director of IMK quoted in Ibidem, p. 131.

[19] Director of the Washington Kurdish Institute quoted in Ibidem, p. 133.

Supporting and intermediary non-state partners was increasingly regarded by all Kurdish organisations as important entities with which to exchange ideas, experiences, and contacts. By the end of the 1990s, some Kurdish organisations even occasionally initiated co-operative efforts with Turkish diaspora organisations based on common values of pluralism in the countries of settlement, while others occasionally met with human rights organisations linked to the Arab Iraqi opposition.[20] Moreover, the organisations increasingly directed their attention to non-state actors such as journalists and lawyers. For example, the Kurdish Culture Centre (KCC) in London became a focal point for the media during the Gulf War, which laid the groundwork for a stable relationship between the organisation and certain journalists sympathetic to the Kurdish cause for years to come.

Through various publications, the Internet, increasingly at conferences, seminars, and multicultural events, and to some extent at informal meetings and hearings, the organisations also interacted with mainstream politicians within and outside governments and parliaments and with representatives of national and local authorities.[21] Whilst this is clear in the case of all organisations included in this study, differences existed in terms of crossing ideological boundaries, organisational stability, and the institutionalisation of regular contacts over time. To varying degrees, the events involved issues related to cultural pluralism and socio-economic integration in the countries of settlement as well as developments in Iraq and Turkey. Seen in this context, some organisations even labelled themselves as a type of "Kurdish Embassy". Moreover, some of the organisations functioned as intermediary links between European/American politicians and Kurdish political parties.[22] Importantly, this is not to say that the organisations experienced formal and open recognition and that no ambiguities existed in these relationships. However, the organisations seemed to regard all types of even limited support and informal and formal interactions as acts of "recognition" of the Kurdish reality regardless of whether they caused change in practical politics or not. This perspective could be explained partly by the fact that they started out facing a very low level of knowledge and interest among the Europeans/Americans. Simultaneously, the organisations expressed disappointment with regard to certain developments and complained about the "double

[20] Ibidem, pp. 205–206.

[21] Cf. E. Ostergaard Nielsen, *Working for…*, op.cit.

[22] Chair of the Washington Kurdish Institute quoted in A.-C. Emanuelsson, op.cit., p. 148.

standards" of Western politicians, for example the *ad hoc* politics in the years following the establishment of the safe haven in Iraq and the "dishonest" treatment of Abdullah Öcalan's application for asylum in Europe. Whilst most of the contact with European politicians was confined to the individual country of settlement, some of the organisations achieved relatively steady access to politicians across European and American borders and to representatives of regional and international institutions. This included access to meetings and hearings at European parliaments, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as representatives of UN-agencies. However, besides its persistent case work at the European Court of Human Rights, even the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) – the most successful organisation at the regional and international levels – expressed difficulties in getting access to political processes beyond the level of individual politicians.[23] Notable in this context is the fact that the organisations included in this study successively shifted focus in the 1990s from the UN to the EU in the case of Turkey and from the UN to specific governments/states in the case of Iraq. In particular the organisations in Paris and Washington were sceptical about the possibility of influencing the UN.[24]

Furthermore, the Kurdish organisations established contact with representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq (KRG) and with representatives of major Kurdish parties, including the PKK on occasion. In terms of the degree of contact, access varied from one organisation to another often depending on the level of political closeness to the relevant actor. For example, some organisations complained about lacking opportunities for increased engagement on the ground in Iraqi Kurdistan, whilst others expressed how civil society was flourishing within the framework of KRG. Through their support to indigenous NGOs and other non-state actors, however, the organisations were involved to some extent in the process of democratisation from within and below in Iraq and Turkey. They engaged in humanitarian relief, implemented projects addressing institutional and economic reconstruction, and documented human rights atrocities. They also invited local actors to visit Europe and the United States. Even with their constrained access, it is important to remember that they had previously been able to lobby only from a distance or through guerrilla movements. As highlighted by the Director of IMK, which cooperated with several

[23] Director of KHRP quoted in Ibidem, p. 153.

[24] Director of the Washington Kurdish Institute quoted in Ibidem, p. 191.

local associations to help achieve human rights: "If the international bodies cannot see any internal dynamics, they do not take the diaspora seriously".[25]

4. Accommodation of nationalism: Human rights, pluralism, and compromises

The changing situation in Kurdistan from the end of the 1980s not only affected the organisations in terms of broader networks, concerted actions, and a higher degree of structure, but also led to the emergence of new ideas and worldview. Important changes were simultaneously taking place in the lives and situations of members of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and the United States, which in turn influenced the perspectives and activities of the organisations in focus. The Secretary of the Federation of Kurdish Associations in Sweden (KRF) pointed to how the wider process of globalisation embraced and influenced various parts of the world, including with regard to the changing and widening worldview and lives of many Kurds in the diaspora.[26] Human rights principles became increasingly important frameworks in the 1990s and formed a foundation for activities carried by the diaspora organisations. The IMK demonstrated global awareness of a common humanity, especially with regard to all other minority peoples that live together with the Kurds.[27] This organisation also highlighted its own attempt to encourage the development of societies based on principles of mutual respect and equality and within the framework of the institutionalisation of fundamental freedoms and rights. By promoting the inclusion of the human rights of the Kurds in the same foundation of universal human rights – irrespective of area of settlement and wish to return to Kurdistan – the organisation hoped actively contributing to a wider global perspective on the Kurds. KHRP, another Kurdish organisation active in the 1990s, referred to all individuals living in the region of origin in its declaration of commitments.[28] Similar to IMK this organisation not only demanded human rights for Kurds as rights-holders but used human rights principles when outlining a better life in the region of origin for all people, irrespective of the group to which they belonged.

The older diaspora organisations often participated in the establishment of the new organisations and successively included human rights in their own

[25] Director of IMK quoted in Ibidem, p. 168.
[26] Secretary of KRF quoted in Ibidem, p. 206.
[27] Ibidem, p. 182.
[28] Ibidem, p. 183.

frames of reference throughout the 1990s.[29] For example, the Kurdish Institute of Paris (IKP) focused in the 1980s on "rescuing the Kurdish people" through collections and historical, cultural, and linguistic activities, but in the 1990s it published articles on human rights abuses and political matters, as well as important agreements resulting from regional and international forums on human rights.[30] Interestingly, the founder of the new Kurdish Library in Stockholm explained that the primary goal of his library was to encourage processes of freedom of expression and democracy among Kurds. Another example of this development is the way KRF developed a more focused stance in its demands. For example, in a letter to the Swedish Prime Minister, the organisation strictly compared Turkish law with the short- and long-term political elements of the EU's Copenhagen Criteria.[31]

Besides monitoring the states in the region of origin, the organisations brought to attention the responsibility of Western governments and regional and international institutions to fulfil their commitments to protect and promote human rights. Some organisations also pointed out the duty of Kurdish parties, diaspora organisations, and the KRG to recognise human rights and uphold democratic processes. In this context, both KRF and the Union of Associations from Kurdistan (KOMKAR) regarded the democratic nature of their own proceedings as instructive and as a measure of democratisation among Kurds. At the same time, all organisations expressed support for the establishment of rule of law and democratic systems throughout Kurdistan. They considered democratic structures and empowerment from below as necessary components of democratic systems. They regarded democracy as a proper means for the promotion of peaceful political processes and relationships among people with different opinions. In this context, they expressed their support for and strove toward pragmatism and realism as part of democratic processes, whether they were addressing issues in Kurdistan, in the country of settlement/asylum or internal organisational issues. They developed certain standards or measures of their work. For example, KHRP emphasised that its own perspectives and conclusions during fact-findings missions and trial observations were "reliable and impartial" and KRF expressed the importance of "reflecting over correspondence between goals and means and continuously evaluating the work

[29] Cf. E. Ostergaard Nielsen, *Working for…*, op.cit.
[30] A.-C. Emanuelsson, op.cit., p. 178.
[31] Ibidem, p. 181.

in relation to societal changes".[32] The Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI) emphasised dialogue and social peace building at the local level and approached the question of how to solve the Kurdish cause.[33]

Moreover, in different ways the organisations acted throughout the 1990s to stroke a reasonable balance between individual and group rights on the one hand and between group rights and territorial demands on the other. Initially, KHRP highlighted the territory of Kurdistan and IMK emphasised the right of the Kurds to form an independent state. In 1996, KHRP changed its name from the Kurdistan Human Rights Project to the Kurdish Human Rights Project in order to avoid connotations of linking a territory to the right of self-determination.[34] Whilst KHRP focused on "the human rights of all persons" in the countries of origin, IMK maintained the right of the Kurdish people although it similarly de-emphasised the territorial element of its demands and changed its name from the International Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan to the International Association for Human Rights of the Kurds. Moreover, IMK and KOMKAR began to express their activities in terms of "practical steps… necessary in order to level the path for a political solution".[35] One such step was to advocate and work for the establishment of rule of law and democracy in Turkey, including abolishment of emergency rules in Kurdistan, the use of military means, and the ban on Kurdish language and culture. From arguing that the Kurdish people are being denied its right of self-determination in its divided homeland what mattered most was equal rights, political dialogue, and peaceful co-existence of Turks and Kurds in Turkey. KOMKAR's and KRF's perspectives on the solution of the Kurdish question followed a similar path: In the short-term, Turkey must ensure the cultural and linguistic rights of the Kurds, and in the medium-term remove related restrictions in the southeastern parts of Turkey. In the long-term, the southeastern region must be called by its proper name (Kurdistan), the regional political parties must be legalised, and the Kurds recognised as a national minority people living within Turkey. Regarding the situation in Iraq, these three organisations expressed their support for KRG.[36]

Consequently, IMK, KOMKAR, and KRF went from proposing outright Kurdish independence in the region of origin to advocating political processes

[32] Ibidem, pp. 181–182.
[33] Ibidem, p. 185.
[34] Ibidem, p. 198.
[35] Ibidem, p. 194.
[36] Ibidem, pp. 193–197.

to achieve legal guarantees for human rights (for individuals, majorities, and minorities) and democracy within the borders of each state of origin. IKP, WKI, and the Kurdish Bureau for Liaison and Information framed their desired liberal democratic development in Kurdistan in terms of alternatives and reasonable options to Kurdish independence. IKP had already established contacts with Catalonia back in the 1980s, which provided ideas and first-hand experiences so that at a later stage it could develop a different path toward Kurdish self-determination than full independence. For example, IKP argued that Turkey must make the effort to recognise the same cultural and political rights belonging to the Kurds as the rights recognised for various peoples in multi-cultural countries with long-standing democratic traditions, such as Switzerland, Canada, and Belgium. In concluding that the Kurdish dream of independence is legitimate due to Kurdistan's size, cultural cohesion, and official recognition at Sèvres in 1920, the Chair of IKP proposed a compromise and more realistic path.[37] Rhetorically he then asked: "Why should not federations be good options for the Kurdish people?" Similarly the Kurdish Bureau for Liaison and Information expressed its support for a Turkish-Kurdish federation and for the federal solution suggested by KRG in Iraq. To the contrary, in the 1980s this organisation "struggled against occupation and oppression in all parts of Kurdistan and for a united and independent Kurdistan".[38] The Chair of WKI argued that it is important to consider the issue of what are the achievable solutions at the moment and he argued that the developments in Iraqi Kurdistan should be in focus.[39] Moreover, the organisation welcomed Turkey's adaptation of EU harmonisation laws and argued that democratic reforms in Turkey, together with the potential expansion of democracy from Iraqi Kurdistan to the rest of Iraq, would lead to two democracies side-by-side in a region otherwise characterised by dictatorship and instability. Whilst all organisations included the EU (the primary supra-state institution at the regional level) in their analyses of Kurdish prospects in Turkey, IKP took this notion one step further by focusing on processes of regionalisation and transnationalisation in Europe and beyond.[40] The Chair of IKP stated that "perhaps one day, in the framework of a democratic Near East, the inter-Kurdish frontiers will lose their present traffic character and these Kurds will be able to move freely, which would in turn enable them to co-operate and develop projects

[37] Quoted in Ibidem, p. 199.
[38] Ibidem, p. 107.
[39] Quoted in Ibidem, p. 200.
[40] Ibidem, p. 199.

across borders that are no longer perceived to dramatically demand bloody confrontations".[41] Thus, these organisations elaborated on fundamental changes in the context of the Kurds, providing a new basis for alternative options to the issue of Kurdish self-determination. Whilst the Kurdish organisations' focus on, or perhaps trust in, the UN (the primary supra-state institution of the world) diminished in the 1990s, a changing and widening worldview also emerged in the sense that they experienced and addressed such changes in the lives of fellow Kurds in the diaspora. For example, the overall motto of WKI was "For the Kurds worldwide" and IKP strove to "connect the Kurds all over the world." In addition, IKP regarded the diaspora as Kurdish, but also as "part of the cultural, human, and political landscape of Europe".[42] Although this organisation addressed certain difficulties within the Kurdish diaspora (such as unemployment, discrimination, and generational conflicts), it simultaneously argued that many Kurds were integrated with Europeans through marriage and social and political interactions and had adapted to European values such as cultural and political pluralism. In this context, KRF argued that many people in the diaspora had left the limited life of exile behind and were prepared to participate fully in their new societies. Making reference to WKI's efforts to organise Kurdish language courses, the Chair argued for the existence of multiple identities among diaspora Kurds in a similar way to the Jews and Greeks living in the diaspora.[43] As stated previously, in the 1980s the organisations sought support for the Kurdish language and culture from an inward and exile-orientated perspective, but in the 1990s increasingly framed their demands within the framework on pluralism and tolerance in multicultural Europe.[44] As part of this process, the organisations went from focusing on solely Kurdish events to participating in large cross-cultural festivals and panel debates that included not only Kurds and Europeans but also members of other immigrant groups. As argued earlier, the human rights foundation of the organisations contributed to the development of a wider global perspective on the situation of the Kurds and their fellow human beings. The common denominator among organisations was the situation of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination within host societies and the participants' shared positive attitude toward equality, dialogue, and peaceful solutions.

[41] Quoted in Ibidem, p. 200.
[42] Ibidem, p. 208.
[43] Quoted in Ibidem, p. 208.
[44] Ibidem, pp. 203–207.

5. Conclusions

The evidence presented in the preceding pages challenges perspectives that portray diasporas and stateless nations as exclusive nationalists and antagonists to constructive change. The Kurdish diaspora organisations included in this study are part of broader global processes of change in the nature and form of political organisation, challenging principles of firm congruence between territories and people as well as of centralised state supremacy. In order to foster future benefits for the Kurds, the organisations went from proposing outright Kurdish independence to increasingly accommodating human right principles and cultural and political pluralism as important frames of reference for their strategies, activities, and relationships. This provided the organisations with a broader perspective of both Kurds and fellow human beings. As part of this process, they integrated the need for continuous transnational interactions and compromises between groups and individuals across boundaries into their views of reality, whether they focused on the region of origin or region of settlement.

Importantly, for Kurdistan the organisations advocated peaceful political processes to achieve legal guarantees for democracy and human rights within the borders of each state, or for alternatives such as autonomy and federal solutions. Although the Kurdish region continued to play a critical role in their process of accommodating human rights and democracy, "post-national thinking" is a matter of perceiving states and micro-regions such as Kurdistan as different levels at which issues of concern should be considered. In the case of Turkey, the macro-regional level of Europe was regarded as a significant context for transformation, together with the level of the state and the micro-level of Kurdistan. In the case of Iraq, the Kurdish organisations placed their hope in the institutionalisation of human rights and democracy, together with a Kurdish autonomy or a federal Iraq. Elaborating on the additional consequences of such developments, one organisation expressed the hope that liberal democracy would eventually spread throughout the Middle East and eventually create a situation in which the commitment to borders and boundaries would diminish. Clearly, one can see influences from living in Europe in which border and political arrangements went through profound transformations during the last two decades. Indeed, although this paper seeks to capture the tendency of these organisations to seize opportunities to accommodate new ideas and relationships, it does not anticipate an uncomplicated and certain process.

This study also challenges perspectives confined to establishing significant differences and conflicts between diasporas and those who stayed behind.

Although Kurdish dispersion provided the organisations with new experiences as a result of integration, multiculturalism, discrimination, democratic structures, and organisation, it is important to emphasise that their perspectives also shifted in conjunction with changes in Kurdistan. Particularly, Kurdish *de facto* self-rule in Iraq and Turkey's preparation to join the EU contributed to greater pragmatism, professionalism, and specialisation amongst Kurdish organisations and activists. Moreover, these changes opened up new opportunities for the Kurdish organisations to act transnationally; to function as channels for other actors and distribute information, ideas and other resources across boundaries.

Concomitant with increased political opportunities and involvement, the Kurdish diaspora organisations faced constraints, ambiguities, and asymmetrical power structures. Although one can argue that the Kurds were still strongly dependent on powerful actors, it is important to note that they actively sought alternatives and adopted realistic, pragmatic positions as part of their search for institutional guarantees for political and cultural recognition of the Kurds. The fact that they no longer advocated a pan-Kurdistan or even multiple, independent "Kurdistans" need not be interpreted as an abandonment of a power struggle or surrender of the Kurds to the entrenched nation state system and the interest of states in keeping the state system in the Middle East intact. The Kurdish organisations did adapt to a new stance on human rights and self-determination that was more acceptable in the international arena.[45] However, this shift could be understood within the context of emerging changes in the nature and form of political organisation beyond exclusive nation states. It is not fruitful to simply argue that the Kurds accommodated state actors in a situation in which states were increasingly involved in global transformations that embraced interstate issues, but also that they had to consider transnational issues and relations.

The research period of this study ended just before the US-led coalition "war on terror" started in Iraq and the EU set a date for Turkey's accession negotiation process – events that have facilitated important transformations in Kurdistan and changed the situation for the Kurdish diaspora. The Kurds in Iraq have negotiated a new constitution for a federal and democratic Iraq and the KRG has embarked on considerable institutional, legislative, and other efforts related to the process of reconstruction, including inviting foreign investors, oil companies, and diplomats to the Kurdistan Region. Yet, much remains uncertain in parts of Iraq, from the security situation to the political compromises being forged among different parties and groups. It remains to be seen how committed the

[45] Ibidem, p. 144.

Obama administration is in relation to Kurdish political actors and their goals of achieving democracy within a federal Iraq. Continuously, the KRG has been ready for dialogues and compromises with Shia and Sunni politicians in Bagdad as long as the 2005 Iraqi Constitution is respected. The KRG has also shown tremendous patience in the process of confidence-building vis-à-vis Turkey, and today this country's head of state visit the Kurdistan Region occasionally and supports close partnership in terms of trade and investments including the building of a pipeline that will make the region economically independent from Baghdad.[46] Turkey have set out on the path to possibly join the plurinational and multicultural liberal democracies in Europe. However, questions concerning the speed of reforms required for membership in the EU, particularly in relation to the Kurdish issue, will certainly continue to worry the Kurds. In regard to diaspora engagement on the ground, one could expect increasing possibilities in Turkey, and the Kurds living in Turkey are persistently engaged in cross-border trade with the Kurdistan Region. The KRG show interest in taking advantage of the knowledge and experiences of Kurds in the diaspora. Correspondingly, a large number of Kurds living abroad have already returned temporarily or permanently to the Kurdistan Region, and many more are currently considering doing so in the coming years.[47] In this context, our understanding of the role of diasporas and their organisations could be further investigated.

[46] Interview with Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, "Time" December 21, 2012, http://world.time.com; Interview with Peter Galbraith, "Rudaw" January 1, 2013, http://www.rudaw.net; D. Hirst, *Statehood for Kurds?*, "Los Angeles Times" January 4, 2013, http://www.latimes.com.

[47] A.-C. Emanuelsson, *Transnational Dynamics of Return and the Potential Role of the Kurdish Diaspora in Developing the Kurdistan Region*, Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Special Series 08/31, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2008.