
KIRKUK SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN KURDISH REFERENDUM, SAYS TURKEY

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ERBİL, Kurdistan Region □ Turkey's primary objection to the Kurdistan Region's September 25 referendum on independence is the inclusion of Kirkuk in the vote, a top Turkish official said.

"What really concerned us was that Kurdish leaders want to include Kirkuk in this process while according to the Iraqi constitution Kirkuk is an Iraqi city and is not within Kurdish boundaries," Ibrahim Kalin, spokesperson for the Turkish presidency said in a press conference on Wednesday.

"If any attempts will be made to forcefully include Kirkuk in the referendum question, problems will be made for Kirkuk and its surrounding areas."

Kurdish President Masoud Barzani held a meeting with political parties in the Kurdistan Region on June 7, after which it was announced the Region would hold an independence referendum on September 25 that would also include "the Kurdistan areas outside the region's administration," claimed by both Erbil and Baghdad, most notably the city of Kirkuk.

Kalin said his country "will closely and intensively monitor the situation of Kirkuk. We hope they regret and decide to overturn the decision."

Kirkuk has a diverse population, including Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen.

Commenting on rumors about the closure of its borders with the Kurdistan Region if the referendum is held, Kalin said Turkey will not make any "unilateral decisions" without first discussing the referendum process with Kurdish officials.

"They have to regret this decision, he said. Undoubtedly, without talks with Kurdish officials of the internal authority of northern Iraq, we will not express any stance or make any unilateral decision, but we will make decisions through dialogue."

Kalin echoed the sentiment of his president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said yesterday that the planned September 25 vote was a "threat" to the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Erdogan, who is also the leader of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), discussed the planned referendum in his party's meeting on Tuesday.

Arabs in Mosul and Turkmen and in Kirkuk live together with Kurds, Erdogan said, adding that what Kurds are moving to is not for anyone's benefit.

He said his countrys stance is clear on the process as the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement following the declaration of the Kurdish referendum date.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry has described the referendum decision as a grave mistake.

The statement from Ankara also argued that the decision to raise the flag of Kurdistan in Kirkuk in March is what has initiated the referendum process.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim also said over the weekend that holding the referendum is irresponsible, and that the region had enough problems.

"We believe that this decision is wrong and lacks responsibility... It will be followed by problems," said Yildirim.

Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has said that reactions from neighboring countries and some members of the international community to the Kurdish referendum were normal.

A multi-party committee will visit foreign neighbouring countries to discuss Kurdish intentions before the planned vote.

Kaynak/Source: