ARAB AND TURKMEN EXPRESS SKEPTICISM AS REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

-

08.09.2017

NRT, 08 September 2017

 Referendum campaigning has begun in parts of the Kurdistan Region and the disputed oil-producing region of Kirkuk.

In the ethnically mixed region of Kirkuk, which is claimed by both the central government in Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), young Kurdish people put up posters in the streets saying "Yes to Kurdish Independence".

The oil-producing region will vote in a referendum on Kurdish independence on September 25, after the majority of the provincial council voted in favour of taking part, a move that could increase tension with Arab and Turkmen residents.

"Throughout history Kirkuk has been a Turkmen city though there are other components who coexisted in it including Kurds, Arabs and Christians. Involving it in this ethnic project would probably cause tension and conflict, God forbid. Therefore, we call for keeping Kirkuk and other disputed areas away from such projects," Omar Hussein Hassan, civil activist and Turkmen resident of Kirkuk said.

A total of 22 members of Kirkuk Provincial Council voted in favor of Kirkuks involvement in the referendum. Turkmen and Arab blocs, however, boycotted the session.

"We are with the Kurdish people's right to self-determination, but the situation in Kirkuk is a different issue. Any project needs to be agreed on by the Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds and Christian populations of the city. No project can succeed without agreement. Therefore, we need an open and genuine dialogue among these parties to make any project in Kirkuk a success," Former Deputy Governor of Kirkuk, Ismael al-Hadid said.

In contrast to the mood in Kirkuk, an atmosphere of jubilation prevailed in the Kurdish northern city of Dohuk, where a group of young people wearing shirts with the map of the so-called "Greater Kurdistan" distributed Kurdish flags and leaflets to motorists, and streets were decorated with Kurdish flags.

The United States and Western nations fear the referendum could lead to conflicts with Baghdad and neighboring Turkey and Iran, which host sizeable Kurdish populations, diverting attention from the fight against Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

Kaynak/Source: