
FRANCE OFFERS TO MEDIATE BETWEEN IRAQ AND THE KRG

06.10.2017

TRT World (05 October 2017)

French President Emmanuel Macron has offered to mediate between the Iraqi government and Kurds seeking independence after a controversial referendum was held on Thursday.

Macron made the offer after meeting Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi in Paris in wide-ranging talks about French support for the fight against Daesh as well as rebuilding Iraq's economy.

Macron said France and others are worried about the Kurdish situation after last month's referendum, and said France supports the stability and territorial integrity of Iraq.

He insisted on the importance of "national reconciliation and inclusive governance" that includes Kurds, "with whom France maintains close ties."

Macron said dialogue "is the only path" and that "France is ready to contribute actively to mediation."

Avoiding clash with Kurds

Tensions have escalated between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdish region. The Shia-dominated legislature rejected the September 25 referendum, which was held in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region and areas captured by the Kurds since 2014 while battling Daesh.

The Kurds voted by more than 90 percent in support of independence.

Parliament has asked for harsh measures in response to the vote, including sending federal troops to retake the contested oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which is held by Kurdish forces, but claimed by Baghdad.

Iraq's prime minister said he did was opposed to an armed clash with Kurdish Iraqi authorities and urged Peshmerga forces in disputed areas to work with Iraqi security forces under the control of the central government.

"We do not want an armed confrontation, we don't want clashes, but the federal authority must prevail and nobody can infringe on federal authority," Abadi said in a statement alongside Macron.

"I call on the Peshmerga to remain an integral part of the Iraqi forces under the authority of the federal authorities, to guarantee the security of citizens so that we can rebuild these zones," he said, referring areas taken back from Daesh.

Abadi flew to Paris on Wednesday for a two-day visit in response to an invitation from Macron.

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