ARF LEADERS ATTEND KURDISH CONVENTION

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By Armenian Weekly Staff, 17 June 2010

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Attending the opening session of the conference were Jalal Talabani, Iraq's president and PUK secretary general; Masoud Barzani, an Iraqi Kurdistan leader and chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party; Nouri al Malaki, Iraq's prime minister; as well as representatives of political parties, diplomats, and delegations to the convention.

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Dr. Mikirdits Mikirditsian and ARF political director Giro Manoyan represented the ARF.
In his remarks, Talabani welcomed the ARF's participation in the meeting. In turn, Mikirditsian said, "The common experience of our two nations indicates clearly that each time we were opposing each other we have both suffered severely, and each time we have cooperated we have been able to defend our rights at least partially."

"The lack of continuity in a common policy has had catastrophic consequences; Armenians have been subjected to genocide, which is until this date denied recognition by its main perpetrator, whereas Kurds have postponed indefinitely the realization of their right to statehood. This very autonomous region of Kurdistan within Iraq has given at last a hope for real self-government," Mikirditsian said.

He stressed that "the tragic lessons taught by modern history have to guide us in our future relations. Unity is in fact a precondition for strength. Strength is an instrument of war but at the same time an instrument of peace. On the other side peace is a stable condition only if it is based on justice. Let us agree, that our common space has been and is an arena where social, political, and historical injustices are still awaiting a solution."

Manoyan: Iraqi Kurdistan will be a catalyst

Armenian Weekly editor Khatchig Mouradian asked Manoyan about his impressions of Iraqi Kurdistan and the visit. Excerpts:

"We were one of the four or five international party delegations, along with the delegations from the Social Democratic Party of Sweden, the Socialist Party of France, the Democratic Society Party from Turkey, and the president of the Socialist International Women," Manoyan said. "At the opening session of the Congress, there were many diplomats representing diverse countries, from Iran to the United States. The 3rd Congress coincided with the 35th anniversary of the founding of the PUK. The congress was held in Suleimanieh, a city of over 750,000 people and the power base of the PUK. There is only one Armenian family left there. All during our visit, the PUK treated us and the other delegations as VIPs. For example, at the dinner of the first evening, we were seated at President Talabani's table."

Erbil and oil diplomacy

"To visit the region we had flown to Erbil (or Hewler, in Kurdish), the booming capital of the Kurdistan region. Here is the seat of the region's government, which is led by Prime Minister Barham Salih, one of the leaders of the PUK. However, the president of the Kurdistan region is Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iraq), which holds the majority in the region's legislature. Because there are Armenians living in different parts of the Kurdistan region, they have a member of the regional legislature. Those who saw Dubai 25-30 years ago say that is how Erbil looks now: expanding horizontally and vertically, with very many foreign companies investing in the region or taking up the offers by the region's government for massive construction and development, thanks to the oil that is the main—if not the only—revenue of the region. Turkey is used as the only transportation route for oil. So, it is not surprising that, when we were in Erbil, President Barzani paid a five-day official visit to Turkey and met with the president, the prime minister, and the foreign minister, as well as Turkish business circles."

The Armenian connection

"Ankawa is a growing suburb of Erbil. Ankawa's population is predominantly Assyrian/Chaldean. Ankawa is becoming the home of Armenian families moving there from other parts of Iraq. Now there are around 150 Armenian families there and they have started organizing community life. We, along with the Iraqi Armenian community leaders visiting Baghdad, met with some of them.

I think the Kurdistan autonomous region of Iraq is a region not to be disregarded by Armenians and Armenia, because besides the business opportunities it represents, I believe it will be one of the catalysts in the region, which really is in Armenia's neighborhood.