



## A CONFEDERATIVE MODEL OF STATE STRUCTURE AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE IRAQI-KURDISH PROBLEM

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The article is devoted to the search for a possible resolution of the Kurdish question in modern Iraq. **Methods:** Author used the comparative, historical and legal methods to research the situations in the Kurdish question in modern Iraq and the Tatar problem in post-Soviet Russia. **Results:** Aside from general recommendations, the paper presents an approbation of a historical and legal approach to the analysis of the current political situations in various countries. The established questions were examined specifically from the point of relationships between the formal-legal schemes and the historical-political reality believing that this approach will allow formulating the most practical recommendations. **Conclusion:** The only commonality between the Iraqi Kurds and the Russian Tatars in the ethnopolitical processes of recent times is that they are the second largest and historically important national groups in their countries, and their relations with the title nation are not free from the factor of the burdened heredity of conflicts and other similar factors.

**Keywords:** State structure; Kurdish question; Political activity; Political and legal development.

## UM MODELO CONFEDERATIVO DE ESTRUTURA DE ESTADO COMO POSSÍVEL SOLUÇÃO PARA O PROBLEMA IRAQUE-CURDO

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** O artigo é dedicado à busca de uma possível solução para a questão curda no Iraque moderno. **Métodos:** O autor utilizou os métodos comparativo, histórico e jurídico para pesquisar as situações da questão curda no Iraque moderno e o problema tártaro na Rússia pós-soviética. **Resultados:** Além de recomendações gerais, o trabalho apresenta a aprovação de uma abordagem histórica e jurídica para a análise da situação política atual em vários países. As questões estabelecidas foram examinadas especificamente do ponto de vista das relações entre os esquemas jurídico-formais e a realidade histórico-política acreditando que esta abordagem permitirá formular as recomendações mais práticas. **Conclusão:** A única semelhança entre os curdos iraquianos e os tártaros russos nos processos etnopolíticos dos últimos tempos é que eles são o segundo maior e historicamente importante grupo nacional em seus países, e suas relações com a nação titulada não estão isentas do fator de a hereditariedade carregada de conflitos e outros fatores semelhantes.

**Palavras-chave:** Estrutura do Estado; questão curda; Atividade política; Desenvolvimento Político e Jurídico.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The end goal of any political activity is the establishment of a certain form of government, as well as the development and implementation of legal norms designed to secure the status quo in society and ensure its stability for as long as possible. Meanwhile, state-legal structures themselves are essentially formally virtual phenomena that, when applied to the factual reality, cause collisions, often acute and harsh and eventually causing serious problems for society and citizens in various countries. The common ground for many states is the inconsistency between the formally established state-legal reality and the real state of affairs both in the historical perspective and in the present moment.

Contemporary jurisprudence generally accepts the classification of states by the form of government (monarchy, republic), forms of state structure (unitary, federal, and confederative), and political regime (democracy or a wide variety of forms of authoritarian regimes ranging from soft authoritarianism to the totalitarian dictatorship of one leader or one political party). The subject matter of this article, in jurisprudential terms, is the relationship between the form of state structure and political regime.

One of the most common forms of state structure is a unitary state. It is characterized by a single form of state apparatus throughout the country. Parliament, head of state, and government extend their jurisdiction over the entire country, and their powers and competence are neither legally nor limited by the powers of any local bodies and the legal, while the law-enforcement primacy is unambiguously held only by the central authorities (Vengerov 2000). Administrative-territorial units in a unitary state may be founded on legal acts determining their legal status and issue normative acts in the sphere of economic and socio-cultural activity, the effect of which is limited in terms of territory and range of citizens to which they apply by the boundaries of the administrative unit. In addition, if there is an enforcement conflict between the central and regional regulations, the former prevail. In unitary states, there is an opportunity to create regions based on nationality. However, the national component, in this case, lies in the preservation of the national language and culture, as well as in providing the representatives of local national groups with an opportunity to receive state support in their native language. Of today's great powers, two, the PRC and France, are unitary.

A federation is a union of several state-territorial entities in one state, provided that each subject of the federation retains certain independence, often substantial, as part of a single whole. Some jurists define federation as a union of states, but this form of

association is nonetheless more akin to the concept of confederation. The specific feature of federations is the participation of territories in the generation and shaping of the national will, which is a prerequisite for the formation of central authority. It is delegated full sovereignty and its exercise, while civil society retains real opportunities to change this power through the democratic electoral process in case it proves incompetent in its activities (Toporin 2001). Characteristic examples of federations among the great powers are the Russian Federation, the United States, Great Britain, and Germany with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland being factually the closest to being considered a unitary state. Furthermore, in a federation, both federal and regional bodies have authority and wide jurisdiction, and their norms often differ considerably. Suffice it to recall the criminal legislation of the United States, which forms one of the key branches of law. For example, some states apply the death penalty, while others abolish it, and no federal rule exists on such a pressing issue.

Confederation in modern Russian law is defined as a union (association) of sovereign states created for certain political, economic, and other purposes, often for a specified period. This definition does not express the essence of the term and is largely due to the heritage of Soviet legal science, which included the union of sovereign states (former or newly created) in the concept of a federation. Meanwhile, the concept of confederation would be appropriate to consider as a practical synonym to a confederative state, the subjects of which have varying amounts of sovereign rights up to and including virtually full sovereignty. At the same time, a confederative state has common borders and a center entrusted with the most general matters and competencies in the fields of defense, international relations, and finance. What can be attributed to the above definition of confederation is currently being tested on the example of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which has not yet de facto become operational, or the well-known interstate alliances like the European Union, or the British and French commonwealth, which are interstate alliances with a softer level of consolidation. In addition, within these alliances, there may be a serious political divergence between member states (Song 2002).

Forms of government, state structure, and the political regime are not static, but dynamic and evolving structures. Political and social realities condition changes in the state structure: a unitary state can evolve into a federal state, a federation – into a unitary or confederal state, and a confederal state usually disintegrates into an alliance of states. Moreover, the social practice in different countries of the world demonstrates that if the form of state structure enshrined in the state law and the functioning of the

political regime have fundamental differences between them, the former turns into a legal fiction that does not in any way reflect the real state of affairs in the country and society, and even completely contradicts their structure. This issue will be addressed below, in the section devoted to the historical development of Russia and Iraq – the countries of residence of the Tatars and Kurds studied in a comparative context.

## **2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Given that the subject of this article is a comparative analysis of the ethnopolitical situation of Iraqi Kurds and Russian Tatars as the second-largest national groups after the titular nationality in their countries, and the ones most significant in terms of participation in the historical and social development of Iraq and Russia respectively, it seems important to analyze the evolution of the state system in these countries, since it exerts the key influence on the status of these national minorities (for the number of Tatars (Federal State Statistics Service 2010)).

A distinguishing characteristic of Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries was its active and successive progression along the way to becoming a massive Eurasian empire stretching from the Baltic to the Pacific. The final establishment of the Russian Empire in the format in which it approached the 1917 revolution was completed in the second half of the 19th century with the incorporation of the then-existing state formations in Central Asia. Russia, like its neighboring empires, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, was a “patchwork” (multinational state) incorporating into its composition, aside from the linguistically and culturally kindred native population of today’s Ukraine and Belorussia, also the population of the Caucasus, Poland, the Baltic states, Finland, and Central Asia, which differ dramatically from the titular nation in terms of origin and language. In terms of state structure, the Russian Empire was a hybrid state, somewhere between unitary and federal. Despite the multinational and multiconfessional nature of its population, the state was territorially organized and was divided into provinces. A notable exception was the Grand Duchy of Finland, which enjoyed wide autonomy, had Finnish as its official language, and had its currency, the Finnish mark, until the Revolution. Moreover, the Moslem states, Khiva Khanate and Bukhara Emirate were also incorporated into the Russian Empire with their pre-existing state structures.

The Russian Empire was an absolute monarchy relying on military-police force, which is understandable, as historical experience shows that the only support for any

vastly-occupied empire, especially one with a multinational composition, can come from the power structures. Up until the Imperial Manifesto of October 17, 1905, issued by Emperor Nicholas II under the pressure of revolutionary processes in the country, which guaranteed the citizens their basic rights and freedoms, there was a legally sanctioned national inequality in the country. It is true, however, that the strictly ethnic criterion was practically not used in legal practice and law enforcement in pre-revolutionary Russia. It was replaced by identification based on religious affiliation. Religions in the country were not equal, either; the Russian Orthodox Church held a privileged position in the status of the state religion, while other Christian confessions and other religions suffered serious restrictions and discrimination. For example, marriages between Orthodox Christians and representatives of other religions were impossible, and there were certain restrictions on inter-confessional unions within the Christian religion.

The revolution of 1917 proclaimed internationalism in interethnic terms and the right of nations to self-determination, up to and including secession. The latter was quickly taken advantage of by peoples historically gravitating toward Europe rather than Russia – the Poles, the Finns, and the peoples of the Baltics. During the civil war, which followed the revolution, centrifugal tendencies also appeared in other national regions of the former empire, accompanied by the establishment of independent states and state formations. soon these states fell under the onslaught of the military might of the Bolsheviks, but the new power was faced with a dilemma – the combination of the ideology of internationalism and the fundamental need to preserve the territory, even if slightly truncated, within the imperial boundaries. Thus, on December 30, 1922, based on the corresponding Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of a Union State, the USSR was created as a union of sovereign socialist republics comprising Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. It was planned to maintain treaty relations with the Khorezm and Bukhara People's Soviet republics. The Soviet Union emerged and was legally established as a union of sovereign states (the number of which reached 15 after the Second World War), that is, a classic confederative state whose members retained their formal right to secede from the union until the collapse of the USSR. The de jure confederal structure was also chosen because of the striving of the Bolshevik regime to incorporate into the then ruling elite the influential and nationalist circles of the ethnic states that had joined the Union.

Yet further history followed the path outlined in the first section of the article, namely



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the discrepancy, if not a direct contradiction between the state system enshrined in the Constitution and the real political regime, which until 1953 was an almost one-man dictatorship of Stalin and a small circle of the ruling elite and power structures, and from 1953 up to the collapse of the USSR – the rule of one party and one ideology. Furthermore, the role and position of the party as the core of the political structure of society was laid down in the last Constitution of 1977 (Art. 6 of the Constitution of the USSR). It also contained contradictory clauses about the sovereignty of the republics and its strengthening, their right to secede from the USSR (Art. 71, 75, 80) with the definition of the USSR as an “integral union multinational state” (Art. 69). Therefore, when at the end of the 1980s the well-known socio-political processes started in the country, their results from the legal standpoint were expected – the declared and operating constitutional norms were simply filled with real content (INTELLECT 2022).

In Iraq, a country where the Kurds come second in number and social and historical importance after the titular nation, the process of evolution of the state structure over the last century went somewhat differently. While Russia, and then the USSR and Russia of today are large multinational states of the imperial type, independent Iraq emerged as a result of the collapse of the multinational Ottoman Empire. The first treaty that defined the post-war world order, the Sèvres Treaty (1920), provided for the establishment of Kurdish statehood, but this provision was not present in the later Lausanne Agreements (1922-1923). The fact is that the principles of the Sykes-Picot Agreement concluded during the war, which underpinned the post-war arrangements, provided for the division of the region into many ethnically Arab states in the event of the already inevitable collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The reliance on the Arabs was based on the fact that they were the largest ethnic group in the Middle East. Its division into a multitude of states (which were factually under the protectorate of the Western powers) allowed controlling their foreign policy and economy, while the Arabs (or rather their clan-tribal elites) were given control over domestic affairs, with which they, according to Western countries, should have been able to cope with successfully given the local authoritarian administrative culture and rigid Shariah principles. Another factor in play was the emergence of republican Turkey in 1923 under the rule of Kemal Atatürk, who from the outset declared his commitment to the West, both in policy and in the principles of organization of the new Turkish society. The sovereignty of the Kurds, Assyrians, and some other peoples of the region was not envisaged, because it would have caused a negative reaction of the Arabs and Kemalist Turkey, on which the West sought to rely (Emelianov 2021).



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For this reason, the entire modern history of the Kurds is a confrontation and struggle with the regimes of the states within which the historical Kurdish territories found themselves. Iraq was no exception. Both the royal (1921-1958) and the republican-Baathist (1958-2003) Iraq pursued a policy of violence, and even genocide against the Kurds, the latter took place in the late 1980s (the so-called “Operation Anfal” of 1987-1988). In response, the Kurds had been waging a constant armed struggle against the Baghdad regime since 1961. Throughout all its history until 2003, Iraq was a unitary state under the political regime of the brutal and one-man dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, who ruled the country for nearly a quarter of a century (1979-2003). His policy produced a kind of burdened historical legacy in the Kurdish question, which, up to the present day, makes it difficult to resolve positively and sharply distinguishes the ethnopolitical relations between the peoples of Iraq and the corresponding sphere of Russian society in a negative way.

Toward self-determination and sovereignty: a comparative analysis of the ethnopolitical history of the Turkic-Tatar ethnos in the USSR and the Kurdish ethnos in the Republic of Iraq.

The turn of 1980-1990s was a turning point in the history of the USSR, Russia, and Iraq in terms of the evolution of the state system of these countries. The new course on “perestroika” and “glasnost” taken by the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was declared the core of the country’s political system by the last Constitution resulted in the fact that civic and social activism in the USSR took the shape of national movements (in many Soviet republics, the so-called “national” or “people’s” fronts were created, which, as is not clear, was not without indirect participation of the CPSU Republican structures), which advocated not only for the linguistic and cultural revival of the USSR peoples but directly called for secession from the Soviet Union. At the end of 1991, the USSR collapsed, but national separatism spilled over into Russia, which in the constitutional sense was a single state, a multinational federation, which was fraught with the most serious consequences for the political future of the country. One way or another, the collapse of the USSR and the national movements in the Russian Federation were exclusively internal processes and proceeded in a peaceful form (except events in Chechnya and Dagestan throughout the 1990s).

The situation of the Iraqi (and not only) Kurds is different. The entire history of their struggle for self-determination and the preservation of their national identity is a history of armed confrontation and decades of guerrilla warfare. In addition, the main driver of



the current phase of the Kurds' struggle for national self-determination, sovereignty, and eventual independence was the international situation in the region and external factors.

In March 1991, the Kurds, taking advantage of Iraq's defeat in the war with Kuwait, took control of their traditional territory. Almost all of Northern Iraq came under the control of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front, which united the main military and political structures of the Iraqi Kurds. Saddam Hussein's regime later gradually regained control of the situation in the country, including Northern Kurdistan, and began to conduct large-scale total repression against the Kurds, both the members of the rebel movement and the purely civilian population. During the campaign of repression, tens of thousands of Kurds were killed, and more than 2 million left their homes, becoming refugees or displaced persons.

Under these conditions, on April 5, 1991, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 688, which established a security zone over the Iraqi territories north of the 36th parallel, i.e., over the traditionally Kurdish lands. Flights for the Iraqi air force were banned there, Iraqi troops were later withdrawn, the work of federal agencies, special services, and police was stopped, and the provinces of Dohuk, Suleimaniya, and Erbil formed the so-called "Free Kurdistan". In 1992, elections were held in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the parliament and the government of the region were established. One of the first key documents adopted by the Kurdistan Parliament was the law of October 4, 1992, on resolving the Kurdish issue based on the principle of the federal structure of the Iraqi state. This form of statehood was laid at the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of Iraq was adopted in 2005 after the fall of the Saddam dictatorship (KRG Representation in Russian Federation 2022).

The ethnopolitical development of the Tatars, the second largest people in the Russian Federation after the Russians, has followed a somewhat different historical path. According to the 2010 census, there were 5 million 310,600 Tatars in Russia, mostly in the Volga-Ural region. Russian Tatars are divided into three territorial and ethnic groups – the Volga-Ural, Astrakhan, and Siberian. The internal dialectal and linguistic differences within the Tatars are not as profound as among the Kurds and are not a factor complicating intra-ethnic communication.

Starting from the middle of the 14th century, when the Tatar khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan were annexed to the Moscow state, the Tatars, unlike some Caucasian peoples, have never been in an armed confrontation with the Russian authorities, even though they differed from the Russians not only ethnolinguistically but also in terms of

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religion. The religious factor of commonality among the Kurds, Arabs, and Turks does not mitigate their relationships (both peoples are not seeking to ameliorate the interaction, which confirms the idea that at the level of mass consciousness, these relations are dominated by national, rather than religious components).

That being said, a nationalist movement was observed among Russian Tatars since the verge of the 19th and 20th centuries, however, it predominantly concerned national and religious education. It was in the Russian-Tatar environment that the so-called “Jadidism” (Muslim religious renewal) emerged, which still retains its significance for the Muslim world. On the eve of 1917, the Russian authorities of the time had some concern about the manifestations of pantatarism, which envisaged in its plans the unification and acquisition of state sovereignty by the Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire based on ethnolinguistic and religious (Islamic) community. The Ottoman Empire was claimed to be behind these plans. Yet by that time, the Sublime Porte had weakened considerably, and the differences among the Turkic peoples in the Russian Empire had become too great to strongly unite them or to form a single nation-state. Thus, pantatarism also remained in history as a “top-down” current far from political reality. In the course of the events of 1917-1922, the Tatar people obtained their statehood on the territory of the Middle Volga Region that had been its historical and cultural heartland for more than a millennium.

A clear commonality between Kurdish national group in Iraq and the Tatar national group in the Russian Federation is that both dramatically stepped up their efforts to achieve a greater level of national self-determination and state sovereignty after, respectively, the fall of the Baathist dictatorship and the collapse of the USSR. However, this is followed by a dissimilarity. The Kurdish national movement, unlike not only the Tatar movement in Russia, but also all the national-civil movements in the former Soviet Union, was and remains far from organizationally, politically, and ideologically unified it is even internally antagonistic. The divergences between the two leading Iraqi Kurdish political forces, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led in 1994-1998 to the intra-Kurdish civil war and are still evident today, making the sovereignty of the Iraqi Kurds even more challenging. Moreover, up until recent years, the Iraqi Kurds and the socio-economic development of the Kurdistan Region were affected by the war with Daesh (the so-called “Islamic State”, an organization banned on the territory of the Russian Federation).

A peculiarity of the Iraqi Kurds’ situation also lies in the fact that they operate within a state that has a weak constitutional and legal basis and is unable to properly carry



out the current political administration. The entire work of the parliament is essentially reduced to a tug-of-war between different parties, each of which lacks a significant majority necessary to make strategic decisions in politics and the economy for the future. For this reason, it was probably not in line with the traditional Arab culture to apply to this country a purely Western model of a parliamentary republic in the conditions of a still fragile and multidirectional system of parties. That is why many experts believe that in an Arab and generally Muslim country, only a strong (including personal) central authority can be effective, which is not necessarily synonymous with a totalitarian or authoritarian dictatorship.

The 2005 Constitution proclaimed Iraq a federal state, although the right to secede from the federation is not stipulated. The constitutional term “Iraqi” has a civil rather than an ethnic meaning, and is synonymous with “Iraqi citizen” of any nationality.

However, many provisions of the Basic Law of the Iraqi Republic have not yet been implemented in practice. Specifically, the “Council of the Union” or, as it is called in some texts, the “Federation Council” has not been formed yet, and its jurisdiction is not stipulated in detail in contrast to the “Council of Representatives” (the current parliament). Furthermore, Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, which determines the ownership of the disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil, has not been put to practice either.

Regarding the Kurds and Kurdistan, there are no unambiguous provisions clearly defining their status as a national autonomy within Iraq. The Constitution recognizes the incorporation of Kurdistan’s state institutions into the Iraqi legal space in the format in which they were established in 1992. However, Article 113(1) equates Kurdistan to a federal region without any special status of national autonomy. In addition, the ethnic nature of the Kurdish subject of the Iraqi federation indirectly confirms the provision on the recognition of the Kurdish language as the official language of Iraq along with Arabic, thereby de facto and de jure recognizing the Kurds and the state institutions created by them (World Constitutions 2022).

The ethnopolitical evolution of the Tatar ethnos in the first years of post-Soviet Russia proceeded under different conditions. The transformation of the political system in Russia was peaceful, and the Soviet law retained its legal capacity as it was being replaced by new norms formulated in the post-Soviet period.

Nevertheless, the situation escalated in two national republics (both of which are also Muslim in terms of religious affiliation) – Tatarstan and Chechnya. In Tatarstan, the demands for independence and sovereignty in 1991 were even stronger, and

Kazan demanded even more for itself than Grozny.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, nationalist organizations were formed in Tatarstan, which demanded secession from the RSFSR and the proclamation of independence – the so-called “All-Tatar Public Center” and party, and in 1992, after the proclamation of the Republic’s sovereignty, the clerical-nationalist Ittifak party was created. All these structures were chamber and consisted of representatives of the nationalistically-minded intelligentsia. However, when the Soviet Union collapsed, their ideas and the sentiments of the masses largely coincided.

It was in Tatarstan in 1990 that Boris Yeltsin, then head of the RSFSR, uttered his famous phrase “Take as much sovereignty as you want”. The result was not only an increase in separatist manifestations but also a wave of militant nationalism. The escalation reached demands of genocide or the expulsion of the non-Tatar population, including children from mixed marriages.

The involvement of the local party and state elite represented by the then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Tatar ASSR and the future first president of the republic, Mintimer Shaimiev, helped to prevent an extreme scenario. Being simultaneously connected with the local community and included in all-Russian ruling circles, The elite was able, through a certain amount of maneuvering, to find a compromise way to resolve the issue (Tartaria 2022).

Shaimiev’s team placed its bet on being ahead of the informal nationalists and on August 30, 1990, adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty of the TASSR, which de jure almost meant the proclamation of independence. At the same time, the Declaration made a reservation that for the transitional period, until the new Constitution of Tatarstan is adopted, the Constitution and other legislative acts of the USSR and RSFSR remain valid on its territory (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tatarstan 2012). This largely presented an attempt to create a sixteenth Union republic in the USSR, yet almost a year and a half later, the Union collapsed. The Constitution of Tatarstan adopted in 1992 reflected somewhat different realities. It proclaimed Tatarstan a part of the Russian Federation without formally emphasizing its sovereignty, but the provisions of Article 1 of the Republic’s Basic Law included the indication that relations between Tatarstan and the Russian Federation were also determined by the Treaty on the Division of Powers (Tatarstan was the only subject of the Russian Federation that had treaty relations with the federal center). The matter concerns the preservation of sovereignty within the Russian Federation, that is, a confederative element has been introduced into the federal structure of Russia by the

specific bilateral relations between Moscow and Kazan (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tatarstan 2012).

Over the past three decades, this has allowed the Tatar people and state to achieve true self-determination and nearly complete political and economic independence. In this case, only defense and the most general and fundamental issues of foreign policy, internal security, and finance remain in the center's charge.

This potential for a soft path to self-determination and possibly independence is also at the disposal of the Kurds. In particular, many Kurds occupy a certain position in Baghdad's political elite. The problem, however, is that the positions held by the Kurds (including the post of the President of Iraq) are rather formal, which makes it difficult for them to exert real influence on the actual conduct of domestic Iraqi politics, in contrast to the elite of late-Soviet Tatarstan. Yet the main obstacle lies in the disagreements between the two leading political forces, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which are still prominent at the current moment and seriously impede the progressive development of the Kurdish self-determination and national sovereignty process launched by the 2017 referendum.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

The above suggests a conclusion that the only commonality between the Iraqi Kurds and the Russian Tatars in the ethnopolitical processes of recent times is that they are the second largest and historically important national groups in their countries, and their relations with the title nation are not free from the factor of the burdened heredity of conflicts and other similar factors. In all other respects, the two ethnic groups are in completely different frames of reference.

The described conclusion is not fully accurate if the suggested range of legal and political factors is supplemented by another one, which may appear theoretical yet is objectively present and determines numerous processes in different countries and around them. Here we are referring to the geopolitical factor, which reveals many similarities between the Kurds and the Russian Tatars.

The state structures of both the Kurds and the Tatars are enclaved and confined within the continental space. Tatarstan is an enclave surrounded by Russian territory. Iraqi Kurdistan, despite not being an enclave politically and geographically, is also isolated inside the land, has no access to the sea, and is surrounded by countries, the ruling regimes of which are negative to the national aspirations of the Kurdish people.

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The world experience shows that such states, having gained formal independence, remain weak and completely dependent on the state surrounding the perimeter of their borders (for example, the enclaves of Swaziland and Lesotho, surrounded by the territory of South Africa), or being surrounded by not very friendly states, besides being weak in social and economic regards, can become centers of conflict (for example, Kosovo, in the Balkans). In addition, it is relevant to the content of the article to note that the criterion established in the USSR for the creation of a union republic was a population of at least 1 million people with at least 50% of it belonging to the titular nationality and the border geographic location. This criterion was adopted, among other things, so that the possible withdrawal from the USSR would be as painless as possible for the country as a whole.

The comparison of the Tatar-Russian and Kurdish historical and ethnopolitical experience appears to be useful, as the example of the recent history of Russia's leading national minority demonstrates how one can achieve almost complete independence de jure and complete independence de facto within a soft confederative model of relations with the mother state. The current leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan and the ruling Democratic Party in the region largely adhere to this approach. They are well aware of the fact that the process of achieving a high level of self-determination and national state sovereignty, which began with the referendum on September 25, 2017, will be protracted, especially in regard to socio-economic issues, and abrupt radical movements will not resolve the problem of Kurdish sovereignty and independence.

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