

The legal status of the Kurds in the Middle East: The twenty-first century policies of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq towards the Kurds

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as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

In November 2010

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Signature

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Abstract

The process of decolonisation has led to the emergence of a number of ethnically complex states in the Middle East. The present thesis addresses the Kurdish minority in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran, investigates and analyses the nature and structure of these four states. The nature of the four states is complex in terms of their population; each one contains more than one faith, ethnicity, and language. One ethnicity, faith or sect may dominate the state which may not necessarily reflect the majority of the population, for example, the minority of Alawis dominating Syria, or the constitution, penal code and political system may be biased to a majority sect (Shia in Iran). The present study investigates, compares and contrasts the twenty-first century policies of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq towards the Kurds, it examines whether the concept of equal citizenship does exist or not in the four states.

The minority rights including the Kurds are the key to pluralism and peace in the Middle East. Over the last 50 years, many Middle Eastern and North African minorities have been oppressed or have struggled to survive, national groups (Berbers, Kurds, Turkmens, etc.), religious communities (Christians, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, etc) or both (Armenians, Jews, etc.). Sects, such as Shia in the Gulf States and Sunnis in Iran have not been successfully integrated within Islam itself.

The central argument the present thesis seeks to examine is how equal citizenship (equal access for political, educational, social and economic institutions of the country) can be delivered for the Kurds in the four countries. In order to achieve this, the legal status of the Kurds needs to be changed via reforming and amending the constitution and penal codes of the four states. Recognition of the legal rights of the Kurds and abolishing the discriminatory laws are the cornerstone of a healthy civil society and the key to pluralism and peace in the region.

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