

Exploitation of natural resources and ecological destruction in Kurdistan

December 2010

Tatort Kurdistan Campaign, <http://tatortkurdistan.blogspot.de>

The „importance“ of Kurdistan for the regional occupying forces Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria results also from its rich natural resources and geostrategic location. The interest of exploiting Kurdistan exists also by the western imperialist states – particularly USA, UK and Germany – which are historically the main responsible powers for the quartering of Kurdistan.

Kurdistan is a Middle East country and lies between the three historical dominant „nations“ of the Turks, Persians and Arabs. Kurdistan is a 550.000 km² geography oriented along the high Zagros and East Taurus Mountain Chains, and connects Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Iran and Caucasus. If there would have been a Kurdish indepenency, the Republic of Turkey would not have no borders with the other three states which would decrease the importance of the Turkish state. The semi-arid Kurdistan has enough precipitation which enables rainfall agriculture in all parts. On that basis it has a relatively rich biodiversity and nature – with a forestation rate of 20-25 % – which means many rich natural resources. These geographical, climate and natural situation was a reason for occupations through the whole history and is it still till today.

The geostrategic significance and the natural resources are a „richness“, but they were and are the reasons for the continuous occupation and suppression of the Kurds. In the 20th century this suppression increased and led also to systematic massacres, displacement, assimilation of people and exploitation of natural resources. Without the occupation and exploitation of Kurdistan, the Republic of Turkey could not achieve the current economic and political role.

More precisely said, Kurdistan is economically interesting for the regional occupaters and imperialist states particularly because of its oil, gas and water resources. Despite of these three resources there are metals, coal, chrome, gold, limestone, forest products and agricultural products are in the interest of exploitation.

The biggest oil resources are mainly in Iraqi (South) Kurdistan. The oil fields of Kirkuk account for almost 40% of the Iraqi states oil resources. This oil richness and the cultural diversity are the main reasons why today Kirkuk is the most politically tense city of Iraq. Syria and Turkey have not much oil, but almost all their oil fields are in the Kurdistan regions. The oil resources in Iranian Kurdistan are significantly larger, although it is not as much like as in Iraqi Kurdistan. In Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan are some serious gas fields. The new gas fields in Chemchamal in Iraqi Kurdistan are in planning phase to be exploited soon, it is foreseen to fit the planned Nabucco gas pipeline of the European Union (EU). If the exploitation starts, the Nabucco pipeline would not have any more the problem of charging the capacity. This is a good example how important Kurdistan becomes in the contest of several planned oil and gas pipelines from Middle East, Caucasus and the Caspian Regio to Europe. The competition among many players (Turkey, Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Aserbaidshan, USA etc) could have important negative impacts on the very fragile political situation in and around Kurdistan. Efforts for peace and more democracy can be affected negatively.

More important than gas are the water resources of Kurdistan where several important rivers originate. The reason for that are the East Taurus and Zagros Mountains where the precipitation (up to 1500 mm annually) is stored in the winter for a big part as snow and also in the forests of Kurdistan. Particularly Euphrates and Tigris make Turkish Kurdistan very important for the Turkish state. With constructed and planned dams on these two rivers Turkey can use water as a weapon and also good against Iraq and Syria. In a same, but more limited situation is Iran towards Iraq through the construction of many dams on some middle big rivers. For the aim to be a regional power water can be a very crucial means for Turkey. The construction of dams mean for Kurdistan – also for non-Kurdish regions of course – displacement and impoverishment. Up to date 170.000 Kurds have been displaced by Turkish dams, twice as much are threatened. As on

all river stretches dams are planned, there is a very high destruction of the river ecosystems which are the most biodiverse regions in Kurdistan. This leads also to serious change of the climate in the affected regions with unforeseeable impacts for communities agriculture and health and surrounding nature. Additionally with the flooding of the valleys, oldest human settlements are under destruction. The most known threatened archaeological site in Upper Mesopotamia is the 12.000 years old city of Hasankeyf. In Iranian Kurdistan is a similar destruction ongoing in the river valleys.

Despite of that due to more intensive use of the groundwater in the last years there is a significant reduce in the groundwater level. Particularly companies and big farmers in drier areas are increasingly digging deep wells to reach water. This is done without any control by authorities which do not care about that.

Additionally to that the Turkish state develops in the plain regions through irrigated agriculture for export. This destroys the biodiversity and the existence of small landowners in many regions. Further the small landowners are threatened by the agriculture policy of the EU which rejects subsistence agriculture.

Despite of natural resources the human power for Turkey, Iran and Syria is important as the worker class is composed above average by Kurds. Particularly Turkey's economy benefits from the poor Kurds who are 50 % of the worker class and work for low salaries.

There can be also ecological destruction by the occupying forces without any direct economic benefit. For twenty years the Turkish Army kindles forests systematically against the fighters of PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Except the Kurds nobody in the Turkish society protests that. Or the Turkish state started to build eleven dams directly at the Iraqi border in order to limit the movement of PKK guerillas. These „security“ dams have no economic objective. This shows that for the Turkish state there is no serious interest to stop the armed conflict in Kurdistan.

In the last years in many locations in Turkish Kurdistan gold has been found, whose exploitation is connected with serious problems for ecology and local population. The soil and groundwater will be decontaminated by the use of potassium cyanide, and the population has no any benefit from that exploitation. For instance in the province of Maras are two mega limestone exploitation centres (one of the biggest complexes in the world) have been constructed. Companies devastate the ecology, soil and water resources of a whole province.

All this exploitation happens through the decision of the central governments in all four states. The affected people and their local authorities have in no way the opportunity for participation in the decision and management.

All the mentioned projects to exploit the natural resources are realized by Turkish and international companies in consortia. International companies are ready to invest billions of Euros for many infrastructure and energy projects in and through Kurdistan. Here we see also the international interest by imperialist states for Kurdistan. Only the ongoing armed conflict among freedom fighters and occupiers is limiting the investments in many parts of Kurdistan. Furthermore always more people resist and say no to that ecological and social destruction.

We need a democratic and social management of the natural resources which must find a equilibrium between the needs of people and the ecology which is the fundament of our existence. Benefit seeking companies and authoritarian-corrupted governments take too much from the nature which can not balance it. We need small projects not controlled by big private companies and rather implemented by local communities without any privatization forms. This means also limiting the occupation of Kurdistan by regional states and the developing of autonomous and democratic structures which the people of Kurdistan describe as „democratic autonomy“.