How would you define the current political relations between Erbil and Washington D.C.? There is a very positive perception of Kurdistan among Americans today, among the Administration, Congress and the public. The fact that the Peshmerga are so effective and courageous against ISIS and that Kurdistan has embraced vast numbers of displaced people, especially the minorities, has helped to foster a great deal of respect for the people and leadership of Kurdistan. There are many high-level political meetings and visits on both sides, which help to keep this momentum going.

What are your Representation’s top priorities to further strengthen and elevate the bilateral ties? Our immediate goals are to continue to strengthen the partnership with the United States in the fields of security and humanitarian assistance. We are grateful to the United States for the leadership it has shown in the fight against ISIS and for providing humanitarian aid. The economy faced several shocks in 2014 which we are trying to recover from. The United States and other countries could help the KRG by providing technical assistance as we try to revive the economy. Kurdistan is still lacking in a vibrant banking and insurance sector which is another area that needs support and expertise.

There is interest in doing business in Kurdistan. We have had meetings and discussions with the US Chamber of Commerce and the US-Kurdistan Business Council as well as with individual investors and companies. Already there are American companies working in Kurdistan, for example, in energy and hospitality. There are many other sectors that American businesses could consider, including healthcare, agriculture and education.

Have you noticed any misconceptions among the US business community regarding the security situation in the Kurdistan Region? What is your key message to the US business community? It’s generally understood that Kurdistan is stable and that the Peshmerga, with the support of US and Coalition airstrikes, are keeping ISIS out of Kurdistani territory. But capital is coward and the way to encourage the business community to engage with Kurdistan is by providing information about our laws, regulations and business opportunities as well as putting into context news about events in Kurdistan and Iraq. It also helps to connect businesses to each other by bringing KRG delegations to Kurdistan. If there is one message to the US business community it’s that Kurdistan remains open for business and a warm welcome awaits our American friends.
The number of British businesses is immense and we hope they will be able to take advantage of it.

Have you noticed any misconceptions among the UK business community regarding the security situation in the Kurdistan Region?

What is your key message to the UK business community?

Security is the top priority of the KRG so the Kurdistan Region remains the safest and most prosperous throughout Iraq and the region. It is already a safe haven for 1.8 million Syrian refugees and internally displaced people from the rest of Iraq. Our Peshmerga forces have heroically defended and maintained the security of Kurdistan, fighting the most brutal terrorist organization, ISIS, on behalf of the world. We recognize there are misconceptions in the UK business community and elsewhere about security, but as we have seen throughout the years that this is changing as more British companies bear the difficulties of the employees and our infrastructure, healthcare, education, agriculture, tourism, industry and oil and gas sector. The 'UK is our partner of choice', and we envisage an increase in the number of British companies across all sectors of Kurdistan's economy, with agriculture, industry and tourism being priorities in the KRG’s economic development plan, Kurdistan 2020 vision. The scope of opportunities for British businesses is immense and we hope they will be able to take advantage of it.

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Democracy & Economic Development in the Kurdistan Region

ECONOMY

Dr. Anwar Anaid — University of Kurdistan-Hewler

It would be safe to say that there exists a strong international con- 

sensus as to the benefits of democracy, meaning that talking about the 

negative aspects of the introduction of democratic polities to a given 

territory grinds somewhat against the grain of acceptable discourse. The 

problems faced by Kurdistan with respect to the introduction of democratic polities stem from political parties seeking immediate gain by fulfilling 

their constituents’ short-term, mate-

rial demands, at the expense of the long-
term development-focused planning. We see in this an example of what is, 

particularly for young democracies, a typical problem.

Democracy has flourished in the Kurdistan region. However, the 
socio-economic context of the region means that the introduction of democ-

racy has created several obstacles for developmental policy:
• The people of the Kurdistan Region depend heavily on the regional government for their livelihood.
• Decades of wars and negligence have depleted human capital and have created an unhealthy dependency cul-

ture in the region.
• The combination of the heavy reliance of the populace on the state and political pragmatism encourages politicians to focus overly 

on present concerns. This leads to a short-term popular political approach to public policy making at the expense of the comprehensive long-term economic development plans.
• Long-term economic development requires a serious investment in the areas of critical importance such as 
education, infrastructure and health. However, an estimated 70 percent of the KRG’s budget is spent pay-
ning the salaries of a large number of public employees. This has diverted much-needed capital away from the key sectors.
• The negative impact of popu-

lar democratic politics on the long-
term economic development of the Kurdistan Region needs to be addressed. To do so, the exercising of democratic rights needs to take place within a societal context that place-

es importance on long-term nation-
al development. The KRG needs to 
establish a political framework prior-
rizing long-term development. The KRG needs to:
• Devise a long-term developmental plan that is endorsed by all political parties, under an agreed national development strategy.
• Promote productivity, efficiency and transparency in all branches of the government based on a comprehen-

sive developmental agenda that has the support of all political parties; 
• Carefully study government inter-

vention in the economy particularly with respect to its negative impact on the functioning of market forc-

es and long-term socio-economic development.
• Clarify the nature and model of eco-

nomic development that the KRG is pursuing and establish political and social apparatus that comple-
mplete these.

In the last few years, thanks to its generous legal framework regulating investment, the KRG has, to some extent, been able to promote the private sector in the Kurdistan Region. What is needed now is government policies aimed at improving the quality of education in the Region. Quality education, which, crucially, provides skills that complement the developmental needs of the Kurdistan Region, is required to develop a skilled labor force in the Region.

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Notes from Westminster

DIPLOMACY

Gary Kent — Director, All Party Parliamentary Group

British foreign policy has been relatively passive for over a decade and 

the heavy reliance of the populous government to provide employment in the market, reducing pressure on the government for their livelihood. This has diverted investment, the KRG has, to some extent, been able to promote the private sector in the Kurdistan Region. What is needed now is government policies aimed at improving the quality of education in the Region. Quality education, which, crucially, provides skills that complement the developmental needs of the Kurdistan Region, is required to develop a skilled labor force in the Region.

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During the heinous takeover of large swaths of land in Iraq to ISIS terrorists during 2014, Duhok governorate has since been faced with large numbers of refugees and IDPs having sought protection in the relative safety that is Kurdistan. The impact on various communities in Duhok was significant, whereby the existing vulnerable groups were fraught with more pressure than before. The Duhok governorate, with a population of more than 1.4 million people, was faced with an influx of 650,000 IDPs and refugees, totaling more than a 46% increase in resident population.

There became an immediate need to mitigate inevitable strains correlated to the influx of IDPs while also maintaining a higher standard for displaced persons. Rwanga Foundation was compelled to act by creating a setting where displaced families would have more than a bare shelter to their name. Rwanga used the term “community” to inspire brighter ideas for how people are better enabled to regain a sense of normalcy and ownership after traumatic events.

Rwanga Foundation filled the need at a crucial time. June-July 2014 to alleviate the pressures placed on Duhok governorate, including the city of Duhok. There are a total of 1,150 schools in Duhok, while 640 schools were occupied in some capacity by IDPs and refugees prior to the start of school in autumn of 2014. Rwanga Foundation’s decision, in accordance with the local governorate administration, enabled 14,400 Yazidis to leave public and private spaces, and into a community especially suited to the needs of IDPs and refugees.

Rwanga Community is situated on a rural plot of land which contains substantial and continuous undeveloped and semi-arable land. This aspect creates a strong potential in the future for a level of sustainability within the parameters of the community; IDPs and residents with existing agricultural skills and knowledge, together with NGOs/IOs, will have the ability to benefit and utilize the community’s land resources.

Generally, in order to enable effective camp management and therefore create measurable impact, a range of organizations offering services and programs to the population need to be present. Therefore Rwanga Community is advanced by, and hosts, a number of organizations including Action Contre la Faim (ACF), German Church Aid (GCA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, UNICEF, KRK Health Directorate, KURDS, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Human Rights Watch, and WADI.

Rwanga Community currently offers two schools, KidZone (including a library, arts studio, library, music room and computer lab), two parks, a center for women and health center with surgery and labor facilities. The above mentioned assets allow those to form a caring environment that provides important services and benefits for residents.

Both GIZ and UNICEF have established separate schools in the community—permanent 18-classroom school with prefabricated units and another multi-classroom school respectively. Other main elements of the community contributed by partner organizations include the community center for women and a health center, which were also funded by GIZ.

Working in sync are Rwanga’s independent contributions and projects inside the community aim to create an inspiring place where youth have a manifold of recreational and creative activities. From sport facilities to an arts studio, there is a short walk away from each other, centralized within the community’s planning.

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Ensuring the Protection of Minorities within the Kurdistan Region

The Kurdistan Region should be proud of its perception as a guardian of minorities, providing at risk groups with security and shelter. However, more should be done to protect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in the Kurdistan Region, writes Samuel Morris, MERI Research Fellow.

Turkish, Iranian, Syriac, Assyrian and Aramaic-speaking communities, as well as other groups such as the Yazidis, Kaka’i’s, Chaldean Christians, and Shabaks, are all culturally and religiously diverse within the Kurdistan Region. This diversity, points out one observer, creates an environment in which there is a need for constant vigilance to ensure that the human rights of every group are respected and protected.

Kurdistan’s history of intra-communal conflict has resulted in significant violence and human loss, and in many cases, forced displacement. The impact of this conflict on the region’s internal security situation is a major concern.

In this context, the protection of minorities is a crucial component of the region’s overall security strategy. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has taken steps to address this issue, including the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Council for Minorities (KRCM). This council is tasked with ensuring that the rights of minority groups are protected and that their needs are met.

The KRG has also taken steps to address the issue of forced displacement, which has been a significant problem in the region. The KRG has established a number of camps for displaced persons, and has taken steps to ensure that these camps are safe and secure.

Despite these efforts, however, there is still much work to be done to ensure that the rights of minorities are protected in the Kurdistan Region. The KRG must continue to work to address the challenges posed by this issue, and to ensure that all groups within the region are treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve.
Social Security Exemptions for Oil Companies Operating in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

LEGAL VIEWPOINT

Alain M. Hannouche — Hannouche Associates

Companies operating in federal Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region must register all local and foreign employees with the Directorate of Labor and Social Security. The Pension and Social Security Law (19/1971) applies in both regions and regulates the different issues faced by employers and employees regarding their rights and obligations towards each other on the one hand and obligations towards the relevant governmental authorities on the other hand.

Social security registration and contributions

All employers must register their employees with the Directorate of Labor and Social Security as of the first day of employment. Any change in the number of employees must be recorded and documented simultaneously with payment of monthly contributions, where new and departing employees are registered along with the respective start or end date of their employment. The Ministry of Interior imposes strict requirements on visa permits for unskilled workers. Employers must sign a social security registration pledge in order to complete the respective formalities. Therefore, companies must show their willingness and capabilities to provide a social security contribution, which often proves to be a major issue that often proves to be a major issue when dealing with officials.

Foreign employees of all companies can be exempted from social security registration and contributions if they demonstrate that they are registered with social security or any equivalent government programme in their home country. In accordance with Directive 13904/2013 — issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources, the government authority overseeing and regulating the activities of oil companies in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region — a special exemption regime applies to foreign employees of oil companies.

The issued directive provides easiness to register the employee with the Directorate of Labor and Social Security. The employee must either have private insurance coverage or be registered with a government program that is similar to social security. Supporting documents must be translated into Kurdish and submitted to the Directorate of Labor and Social Security. An exemption will be granted only if the directorate determines that the presented coverage is more beneficial to the employee than Iraqi social security.

According to the Law, projects which qualify for an investment license (and which have obtained the requisite approvals) should benefit from:

- Exemption from the following taxes:
  - All non-custom taxes and duties for a period of ten years from the date production commences or the date services are offered
  - Custom duties on imports of spare parts up to 15% of project cost
  - Custom duties, taxes, import licenses on imported vehicles, equipment, instruments, etc. provided they are imported within two years of approval by the Investment Commission Chairman
  - Custom duties and taxes on imports of forests, carpets, furniture and other renovation items
  - Custom duties for five years on imports of raw materials for production. Employment of foreign workers provided no capable Iraqis are available.

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- Custom duties for five years on imports of raw materials for production.

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Law No 4 of 2006, Law of Investment in the Kurdistan Region (the “Investment Law”) provides for tax incentives and exemptions for foreign investors in the Kurdistan Region, who are involved in certain qualifying projects. The Investment Law sets out specific projects which are considered to qualify for an investment license. In general, projects involving vital sectors, such as electricity, agriculture, health, and environment, infrastructure and education, etc. qualify as eligible projects.

A foreign investor shall be entitled to send his capital back abroad upon winding up or disposal of the Project without prejudice to applicable laws and regulations regarding taxes and customs.

Comment

Although the general legal framework organizing the relationship between employees and the Directorate of Labor and Social Security is well systematized, exemptions are still granted on a discretionary basis. Therefore, despite the clear and flexible directives communicated by the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Directorate of Labor and Social Security can still interpret and apply the directives at its discretion, which often proves to be a significant final hurdle when seeking exemptions.

Focus: Investment Law

For more details, please visit: www.carduchi.com
How would you characterize the insurance industry in the Kurdistan Region? Insurance is just starting to receive interest in the KRG, as well as in Iraq. This is mostly from foreign companies who are investing and/or operating in the market. These companies, who are familiar with insurance, are well aware of their needs, and often request contracts with the same benefits and costs, as they would find abroad. However, insurance and reinsurance companies are not always ready to service them. This means that many contracts are underwritten by insurance companies not located in Iraq. There will be no serious developments in this sector until Iraq and Kurdish investors and entrepreneurs start purchasing insurance.

How will that happen? There are many ways to help the expansion of the insurance industry. The relevant legislative authority can work to cultivate a more receptive environment. Capital requirements must be the same for all. A distinction must be made between capital and technical reserves. Obtaining a license to operate in the sector has become expensive, which is good, because it limits competition. However, measures must be implemented to help ensure that operators receive a fair return on their investment. Legislation to regulate the setting up of brokerage firms, investment in the training of potential insurers, and, of course, a level of minimum compulsory protection are required. The authorities must also protect local companies and make sure that all local risks are protected by local companies.

There was talk of the introduction of compulsory motor insurance. What stage is this at now? This would be of great benefit to the KRG and hopefully will be introduced soon. For one thing, the KRG has a high level of road accidents. However, importance must also be given to development. Kurdistan is in a phase of reconstruction. We see brand new developments across the region: factories, malls, hotels, residences, hospitals, etc. This means that billions of dollars have been invested in the construction and manufacturing sectors. These huge sums have not yet been amortized. Any catastrophe, fire, earthquake or damage to machinery, for example, would have immense repercussions. If money is not available for repairs or replacement, hundreds of workers would be unable to work. Compulsory insurance must start by covering these areas and ensuring worker safety.

Will this raise the cost of production? Only marginally. Premiums are calculated against the probability of the risk in question. Insurance is all about volume. The larger the insured population, the smaller the premium. If we want reasonable premiums, we must advocate for higher penetration in all classes of business. Today, premiums are calculated by underwriters who know that insurance is solicited only by expat managers, or when the risk is very high. When insurance becomes more universal, risk is more diversified, and the probability of claims being made is lower and thus premium rates become lower.

Why would the state interfere? This would be all for the benefit of private investors and private insurance companies. It is a good thing when the government contributes to creating wealth and taxing it! However, on a more immediate level, as we have already said, insurance protects the workforce. Liability insurance is made to protect others, third parties, such as visitors, clients and neighbors. Access to compensation will provide all employees, including construction workers and factory workers. It will protect their health as well as their wages. Insurance protects employers from various risks; it benefits the entire community.

From a wide range of professions work within the insurance industry. We are most familiar with the salesperson or broker who sells a policy. However, behind them are the underwriters who devise the policies, the surveyors who assess the risks, the back office that issues and produces policies, and of course, accountants and cashiers, among many others. In the case of a claim, there are claims officers, loss adjustors, legal advisors, to name but a few. The expansion of the industry will create hundreds of jobs, which will also create wealth. Insurance is crucial to providing a low-risk, wealthy environment.
EIA continued to see growth in passenger numbers in 2014, showing a near 31% increase year on year to 1,566,000 passengers compared with 1,193,783 in 2013.

Annual Cargo Tonnes at EIA

Month by month comparison — Arriving & Departing Passengers at EIA 2014

Annual Cargo Tonnes Month by Month Comparison

Passenger Growth at EIA
### New Records Set in Oil Production & Exports

The oil & gas industry continues to form the bedrock of the Kurdistan Region’s economy, and the last year has been one of groundbreaking accomplishments for Kurdistan’s energy industry. The Kurdistan Region exported over 34 million barrels of oil in 2014. In total, more than $2.87 billion-worth of oil has been sold to customers around the world. The KRG has set a production goal of 2 million bpd by 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTHLY OIL EXPORTS (BBLS)</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exported to Ceyhan</td>
<td>12,620,452</td>
<td>12,740,711</td>
<td>12,020,683</td>
<td>10,958,817</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Average Daily Exported to Ceyhan*  
- Exported from NOC Operated Fields  
- Exported from KRG Operated Fields

### Sustainable Growth in Kurdistan’s Energy Industry

**Shwan Zulal — Director, Carduchi Consulting**

The current state of the KRG’s energy industry is a far cry from its early days in 2007-8 and the speed with which the industry has developed has been breathtaking. The Region has attracted many of the big international players in energy and the prospect of the region producing 1 million bpd has attracted many investors. The building up of the industry has been impressive but recently sustaining this speed of development has not been easy.

Two years ago the main issue for Kurdish oil was finding a route to get it to market. The issue of how to get Kurdish crude to market has now almost been resolved. However, in the process other issues have arisen, such as, the war with ISIS, the pipeline security, crippling public sector salaries and low oil prices.

ISIS being on the border has not helped confidence from a security point of view, however, ISIS has not particularly affected the region’s oil industry, from an operational perspective. Turkey-PKK fight may cause pipeline security issues but may very well be only a temporary issue.

The above factors have all contributed to a slowdown in the pace of development, however, a lack of regular payments to oil companies and low oil prices have been the main factors causing the slowdown in the industry. Low oil prices have affected operations elsewhere in the world, so this is not unique to Kurdistan. Low oil prices coupled with liquidity and a financial crisis in Kurdistan have however exacerbated the problem.

Despite a promising start in 2015, with the announcement of a deal with Baghdad favorable to the Kurds, this has been largely ignored and Baghdad did not commit to its end of the bargain. Meanwhile, the KRG has managed to increase exports and find buyers on the international market. Oil was sold on forward sale contracts and in the second half of the year, the Kurdish Region was expecting to receive around $50 million a month to cover its expenses and pay oil companies around $100 million a month. The plan looked great and the promise of payment was very good for the industry, however, in August 2015 oil prices took another dive and this has affected Kurdish’s total receivables.

Despite all the issues, investors are still bullish toward the Kurdish oil industry’s prospects but the KRG has some serious choices to make if it is to overcome its recent problems.

Civil servants’ salaries make up the majority of government expenditure and the government has been trying to reform the public sector. There has, however, been little appetite on the part of the major political parties to move on the issue.

To maintain the momentum in the Kurdish oil industry, regular payments to the IOCs are essential. Production is still increasing but without new capital entering new development projects, the current rapid expansion will come to a halt.

The KRG has little power over oil prices and regional instability but the Kurdish government can start by reforming the public sector and reducing the huge burden on the region’s finances. Overdue reforms are gathering pace and the main political parties are slowly coming around to the idea. Although the problem has been identified, the reforms will not be as quick as some are hoping but will surely start soon.

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**Did You Know?**

- The KRG plans to increase its oil exports to Turkey up to 900,000 bpd by the end of 2016.
- Gas Reserves: 5.7 trillion cubic meters (3% of the world’s total reserves)
- The KRG & Turkey energy agreement aims to deliver 2 million barrels of Kurdish oil per day to world markets and 10 billion cubic meters of gas to Turkey per year.

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Commitment to changing people’s lives for the better

Dr. Honar Issa — Member of the Board of Trustees, American University Duhok Kurdistan

I t goes without saying that 9 an educational system is the bedrock of any developed country. Efforts to nurture education demand a commitment to human development. Despite the fact that Kurdistan has grown exponentially over the last decade and has made great strides in its development, compared to Southern Iraq, certain educational issues have not been addressed properly. For one thing, there has clearly not been a systematic approach to rationalizing the educational system in Kurdistan. After a safe haven was created in Kurdistan by the coalition forces in 1991, Kurdistan obtained de facto semi-autonomy that made it possible for the Kurdish people to attain self-rule within the region. Kurdistan became isolated from the international community due to the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the 1991 invasion of Kuwait. However, Kurdistan began establishing public universities to educate its young people. Although these institutions did not have any exchange programs with international institutions for more than a decade, they endeavored to keep their doors open to students and managed to offer academic programs, albeit with a somewhat outdated curriculum. Their contribution to the community was limited by the facilities and capacities that they possessed at the time.

The liberation of Iraq and Kurdistan in 2003 created a lot of opportunities for establishing private universities in the region. It has been shown in many regions around the globe that the emergence of private educational institutions has brought significant changes in the quality of education. What distinguishes private educational institutions from their public counterparts is that they bring accountability, credibility and flexibility to education and research and consequently they attract people of high caliber.

Unfortunately, most of the private universities in the region lack the credibility to assure quality education and are not recognized by international forums to cover their operational costs. They are not run by academics, but rather businessmen who seek a quick return on their investment. At the same time, public universities have so far failed to attract the high quality faculty and administrative staff members needed to create a conducive environment for the development of higher education. One of the reasons for this is that public universities offer a very low salary scale, one that has not attracted high quality staff members.

Among those few private universities in Kurdistan that strive to provide high quality education is the American University Duhok Kurdistan (AUDK). It is a nascent university which is less than one year old. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees (BOT), the founder and the president of the university is His Excellency Masoud Barzani who, after conducting a study on what Kurdistan needs, decided to make AUDK into a leading institution in the region by offering state-of-the-art programs. As an academic figure and a leader, Chairman Barzani has decided to make AUDK a model for private institutions to show his concern for promoting a high quality system of education in the region. AUDK has enjoyed an outstanding start as a center of education and research. The university currently offers five programs; Computer Science, Design, Management and Finance, Media Studies, and Politics and Public Policy. Within these five programs, there are 20 majors that are not offered by any other institution in the region. These include Digital Forensic Science, Fashion Design, Digital Animation, Logistic and Supply Chain Management, Hospital and Healthcare Management, Insurance and Risk Management, and Security and Strategic Studies. The BOT has recently appointed Professor Michael Liedholm as the new president of AUDK. Professor Liedholm has an outstanding academic record and strong leadership skills. He is currently drawing up a long-term strategic plan to ensure the success of the university. That plan will involve future expansions, self-sufficiency and sustainability, as well as the initiating of procedures needed to gain accreditation.

One of the primary goals of AUDK is to gain accreditation from a reputable accrediting body in the institutional community due to the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the 1991 invasion of Kuwait. However, Kurdistan obtained de facto semi-autonomy that made it possible for the Kurdish people to attain self-rule within the region. Kurdistan became isolated from the international community due to the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the 1991 invasion of Kuwait. However, Kurdistan obtained de facto semi-autonomy that made it possible for the Kurdish people to attain self-rule within the region. Kurdistan became isolated from the international community due to the sanc-

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U.S. This will be an arduous process but it will guarantee high quality education at AUDK. The university plans to establish more programs in the future including Nursing, Medical Science, Engineering, Education and Liberal Arts, and Art and Cinema. These will meet the learning needs and aspirations of students to develop their intellectual abilities. The programs will also reflect the market demands.

In accordance with its commitment to changing people’s lives for the better, AUDK offers diverse programs to the community. It has recently established the Center for Peace and Human Security which aims to address the issues of the local community and to approach them academically. AUDK is the first institution in the region that offers a “Peace and Community” course as part of the general education that students take during their first two semesters. This was decided after conducting a study on what courses should be developed to serve the community. Of equal importance in terms of social impact is AUDK’s positive contribution to the economy and the development of the community by offering professional development programs for professions such as teachers, nurses, managers and professionals, as well as providing them with English as a Second Language programs.

Thanks to the vision of H.E. Masoud Barzani, AUDK has recently introduced the “Mustafa Barzani Honors Scholarship”, the “Chairman Barzani Honors Scholarship” and the “President’s Merit Scholarship”. These scholarship programs will be awarded to the top students in the region as part of the strategic plan to attract the highest quality students to AUDK.

The BOT has established the AUDK Foundation, which will allow the university to build warm, long-lasting relationships with a wide range of stakeholders on the local, regional, national and international levels. The philosophy behind this Foundation is to engage the community and its individuals in supporting the development of the university and establishing it as one of the premier teaching and research institutions in the Middle East and beyond.

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Keeping an eye on Kurdistan’s Agriculture Industry

The Kurdistan Region has huge potential of becoming an agricultural hub in the Middle East. There are strong indicators that agriculture industry will play a prominent role in shaping the future of the Kurdistan Region.

The KRG’s Goals:
- Food security
- Self-sufficiency
- Economic prosperity for farmers
- Becoming a major producer and exporter of wheat, vegetables, fruit, meat, dairy, and poultry to the region.

Wheat Production

Wheat remains one of the biggest crops in the Kurdistan Region.

Production
912,000 tons
(As of July 2015)
730,000 (2014)
584,000 (2013)

Production growth
The area of land harvested for wheat has increased by 80% in the last decade

Revenue
$587 million
(As of July 2015)
$428 million (2014)

Potato Production

140,000 tons
(2015)
11,000 tons (2008)

Exports
$60 million

Growth Potential
The Kurdistan Region has high potential due to growing population coupled with urbanization. Kurdistan boasts a combined 1.5 million hectares of irrigated lands, a diversified population of livestock, and strong environmental and natural conditions that allows for the development of a variety of agriculture products. Currently, agriculture industry contributes to 10% of the total GDP.

Investment
Agriculture industry is one of the prioritized sectors for investment by the KRG. The KRG offers incentives for efficient & large-scale investments since 2006. Between 2006-2014, the KRG has invested $704 million in agriculture industry. Around $1 billion will be spent for the development of the industry over next 5 years.

Employment
Agriculture industry is a major source of employment in the Kurdistan Region. Some 10% of the population live in rural areas and rely on subsistence agriculture.

Regulatory Environment
The KRG has increased regulatory control for quality and performance.

Annual Subvention
The KRG offers farmers’ subsidies estimated at $250 million a year.

Investment Tip:
Silos & Warehouses
The KRG’s development plan prioritises the construction of new wheat and barley silos. At the moment, Kurdistan has only 7 silos & warehouses, and the storage capacity is about 385,000 tons. However, the KRG has concrete plans to increase that capacity to 1 million tons in the short term.
Erbil Rotana supporting the community throughout the first half of 2015

Within its framework of social and humanitarian activities, and in line of its company values and belief in charitable deeds, and eco-friendly practices which were vastly successful in the first half of 2015, Erbil Rotana will continue to implement a wide range of charitable practices and raise awareness within the Kurdish society right all year round.

Erbil Rotana have been very active in terms of the Corporate Social Responsibility activities by conducting many initiatives during the first half of this year as we united with millions of people around the world who switched their lights off for an hour to raise awareness towards global warming.

We participated in the Earth Day activities by holding a competition between all the hotel departments via transforming recyclable materials into artworks which were displayed at the lobby and we invited all our guests to join us judging which department made the best project. Furthermore we organized Iftar at the Elderly house of Erbil compiling the hotel management team and colleagues, to share the Holy Month true spirit and practices with the elderly.

Commenting on these initiatives, Ghassan Dalai, The General Manager of Erbil Rotana, said: “These activities highlight Rotana’s adherence to its values and its goals through not only social responsibility, but also through our commitment to establish long-term bonds and our permanent pursuit to find creative and innovative ways, to help the community and our society.”

We ensure our brand is delivered with consistency and integrity, Rotana L.I.F.E where L stands for long-term, I for innovation, F for friendly and E for ethical.

In addition to that, our team of 150 colleagues have aligned their goal of delivering the highest standard possible. Erbil is a very young city and we came to provide the best we can. Moreover, our careers website www.rotanacareers.com has generated a great database of potential candidates which has helped us in the process, our HR networking and research in addition to the Learning & Development department has also played a role in employee morale and career development and sustainability. We mention our true company values, and with those we ensure our brand is delivered with consistency and integrity, we call this the Rotana L.I.F.E where L stands for long-term, I for innovation, F for friendly and E for ethical.

Another area we have focused on is to reward our clients’ loyalty through the Rotana Rewards Programme (www.rotanaworld.com). We have set up ways to recognize repeated customers so we can make them feel really part of this hotel, as a team and as a family. From the very first day we wanted to make every guest feel at home and we did it with genuine service and building strong relationships with them on an emotional and personal level, not just as their preferred accommodation for what the hotel has to provide. Our facilities and rooms are certainly important, but the relationships are key. I believe we have achieved that which eventually resulted in winning the World Travel Award of Iraq’s Leading Hotel for 4 consecutive years in 2012; 2013 & 2014; we promise to keep this reputation for the future.

To add on we have our strategically located outbound sales offices all over the world which is benefiting us with both exposure and also rooms business.

What are your targets in the short term?

During the last period the hotel has seen a new trend and different category of clients, such as the long-stay guests from the Diplomatic sector in Erbil. Also new emerging markets from Eastern Europe and the Gulf region have been witnessed coming through online bookings which we can see evolving more by using the same channel of booking.

We will continue to focus on key factors and indications by offering customized packages and offers across all market segments such as the domestic/regional travelers during weekends, holidays and sometimes even during the week.

Locally, Erbil Rotana is known to be the place for culinary indulgence. As such we will continue to surprise our loyal guests with new and interesting theme nights, promotions and enticing offers at any of our 5 outlets each with its delectable variety of cuisine. Being the first Spa concept to open, Zen the spa, will continue to provide the best treatments in town and massage services which you will find in no other place in Erbil, an advantage and privilege for our guests.

We will continue to focus on MICE business and groups given that in addition to the existing day-light and fully equipped meetings & events venues with flexible seating plans, the Grand ballroom has a capacity of 1000 inviters and can be divided into 2 sections for local conferences and seminars. All our updated offers are also available on our website www.rotanatimes.com.

Are you planning any major changes in 2016?

In 2016, we are planning to launch a three years renovation plan for our hotel. We are expanding the Gym facilities to accommodate up to 100 persons as well as upgrading the hotel Gymnasium equipment's and enhancing our Zen the spa facilities. Moreover, we are adding a new Pop concept in the hotel and bringing in a new Sky lounge on the top of our hotel ballroom.

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