

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS AT THE INSTITUTE OF
ORIENTAL STUDIES, NAS RA**

ON THE IRAQI KURDISTAN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

On 27 October, 2017 a roundtable discussion on the independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan was organized at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

In the opening speech the director of IOS, academician Ruben Safrastyan emphasized the importance of the topic for Armenia as well as in the geopolitical context and represented his evaluation of the current situation.

The keynote speaker was Mushegh Ghahriyan, a researcher at the Department of International Relation of IOS. He represented the political and economic situation in Iraqi Kurdistan prior of the referendum, the reasons triggering the Kurdish leadership to hold a referendum. M. Ghahriyan also summed up the stance of Turkey, Iran, USA and EU on this issue and represented 3 possible scenarios about the development of situation.

A question-and-answer and discussion followed M. Ghahriyan's speech, where Professor Vahan Bayburdyan and other researchers of IOS Tatevik Manukyan, Levon Hovsepyan, Arax Pashayan, Armen Manvelyan, Zvart Hovsepyan expressed their viewpoints, appraisals and notices.

After the discussion, assessing the approaches and opinions represented during the roundtable, R. Safrastyan noted, "I can emphasize impartially, that they are not only interesting, but also well-grounded. Particularly, the report of the keynote speaker is balanced, conclusions are a result of serious research.

This discussion proved that our specialists are capable of studying the issues from different angles. In this regard the presence and remarks of Professor Vahan Bayburdyan were very

important taking into account decades of experience he gained during both scientific and diplomatic work.

I have already formulated my approaches to this issue and stated it publicly. I am sure that the independence referendum must be observed as a step in the long path of the establishment of Kurdish state and the significance of it must not be overestimated.

At the same time I think that the Kurdish factor will become more significant and there is a potential of further escalation in the geopolitical rivalry in the Middle East between global and regional actors. In my opinion, to some extent it is similar to the geopolitical struggle between the British Empire and Russian Empire in the 19th century, which is often is described as The Great Game.

The escalation of geopolitical conflict will affect the Kurdish factor and the developments around it will become more interesting for scientists and at the same time difficult to predict. I think that we will have further discussions on this topic”.