The Shift from Paradiplomacy to Protodiplomacy: A Comparative Study of Catalonia and Kurdistan

Margaretha Novianti Adistia¹, Muhammad Anugrah Firdiansyah¹, Rizka Yeza Utami¹, Nofi Yanti¹, Muhammad Faiz Krisnadi²

¹International Relations, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jakarta, Indonesia
²Master's in International Affairs, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore
*Corresponding author, e-mail: margarethaadistia@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article explored the transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy in Catalonia and Kurdistan, two regions at the forefront of this shift. Catalonia has greater autonomy in matters such as governance and economy, while Kurdistan has more limited autonomy in matters such as security and governance. As such, this research showed that paradiplomacy could serve as a means to increase regional engagement in international politics. This research provided an in-depth analysis of how the South Sulawesi Provincial Government's paradiplomacy initiative impacts the export of agricultural products to Egypt. Through a comparative analysis of Catalonia and Kurdistan, this study elucidated the motivations, consequences, and challenges associated with this transition. It emphasized the significance of effective paradiplomacy practices between central and local governments. Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan exemplified modern paradiplomacy, showcasing their capabilities on an international stage. The research identified high Iraqi Kurdish nationalism as a key driver of the shift towards protodiplomacy in Kurdistan. It also highlighted the internal structural factors within Iraq that propelled Iraqi Kurdistan's diplomatic efforts, culminating in a referendum that marked a peak in separatist interest. This research underscored the dynamic nature of protodiplomacy, highlighting the motivations behind subnational diplomatic endeavors and the transformative implications for central-local government relations.

Keywords: Paradiplomacy, Protodiplomacy, Catalonia, Kurdistan, Diplomatic Transformation

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi transisi dari paradiplomasi ke protodiplomasi di Catalonia dan Kurdistan, dua wilayah yang berada di garis depan dalam pergeseran ini. Catalonia memiliki otonomi yang lebih besar dalam hal-hal seperti pemerintahan dan ekonomi, sementara Kurdistan memiliki otonomi yang lebih terbatas dalam hal-hal seperti keamanan dan pemerintahan. Melalui analisis komparatif terhadap Catalonia dan Kurdistan, penelitian ini menjelaskan motivasi, konsekuensi, dan tantangan yang terkait dengan transisi ini. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya praktik paradiplomasi yang efektif antara pemerintah pusat dan daerah. Catalonia dan Kurdistan Irak merupakan contoh paradiplomasi modern, yang menunjukkan kemampuan mereka di panggung internasional. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi nasionalisme Kurdi Irak yang tinggi sebagai pendorong utama pergeseran ke arah protodiplomasi di Kurdistan. Penelitian ini juga menyoroti faktor-faktor struktural internal di Irak yang mendorong upaya diplomasi Kurdistan Irak, yang berpuncak pada referendum yang menandai puncak kepentingan separatis. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi sifat dinamis dari protodiplomasi, menyoroti motivasi di balik upaya diplomasi subnasional dan implikasi transformatif bagi hubungan pemerintah pusat-daerah.

Kata Kunci: Paradiplomasi, Protodiplomasi, Catalonia, Kurdistan, Transformasi Diplomatik
1. Introduction

Traditional notions of diplomacy have experienced substantial transformations in the ever-evolving landscape of international relations. One such transformation is the advent of paradiplomacy, wherein subnational actors engage in international relations independently of the central government. Paradiplomacy has been pivotal in enabling regions to assert their interests and connect with the global community. This research investigates the transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy through a comparative analysis of Catalonia and Kurdistan, two regions at the forefront of this shift. In recent years, protodiplomacy has emerged, marking a shift away from traditional paradiplomatic practices. Protodiplomacy involves the direct participation of subnational entities in diplomatic actions akin to those of recognized nation-states, contrasting with paradiplomacy's semi-diplomatic role. Protodiplomacy's official and proactive approach is gaining acceptance in certain areas, disrupting traditional diplomatic hierarchies and altering the global diplomatic environment. As paradiplomacy increasingly transitions to protodiplomacy, the dynamics of international relations are profoundly impacted. This study aims to illuminate this transition and examine the motivations, consequences, and challenges associated with it through a comparative analysis of Catalonia and Kurdistan.

Catalonia's paradiplomacy, and its efforts towards protodiplomacy, are particularly noteworthy. Catalonia is a distinct region with a strong cultural and linguistic identity and is among the most industrialized and independent-minded regions globally. Many Catalans consider themselves a separate nation from Spain, stemming from a distinct historical trajectory since the early Middle Ages. The 2010 ruling by Spain's constitutional court, which curtailed Catalonia's claim to nationhood, significantly intensified separatist sentiments (BBC, 2023). The subsequent economic crisis further bolstered support for independence, with many Catalans feeling economically exploited by Madrid. Catalonia's non-binding 2014 referendum on independence saw 80% of voters favoring independence, and a second referendum in 2017 led to a political crisis as the Catalan parliament declared independence, prompting Madrid to impose direct rule over the region (BBC, 2023). The unique position of Catalonia and its failed protodiplomacy efforts make it an intriguing case for examining how paradiplomacy can evolve into protodiplomacy.

Similarly, the outcome of the Kurdistan referendum, which showed overwhelming support for independence, has significant implications. Iraqi Kurdistan's role as an internationalist force and disruptor in the regional order has grown, particularly in the aftermath of ISIS's defeat and the expansion of Iranian influence (Comerford, 2017). Supporting Kurdish forces in Syria can contribute to resolving regional crises and strengthening democratic institutions in neighboring countries (Gurses & Romano, 2016). Therefore, examining Kurdistan’s foreign relations and its quest for independence is crucial for understanding its transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy.

Paradiplomacy plays a crucial role for both subnational players and the state actors overseeing the territory. Regions, being most attuned to their own needs and potentials, can effectively engage in international collaboration, indirectly serving national interests. However, when regional actors are granted extensive autonomy in paradiplomatic
activities, the potential arises for these activities to transform into protodiplomacy, driven by the region's ambitions for greater independence. Protodiplomacy often emerges in areas with strong aspirations for statehood. However, it seldom achieves significant international support for secession, often leading to international isolation instead. The transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy can be observed when autonomous regions leverage paradiplomacy as a tool for secessionist movements. Kurdistan's shift towards protodiplomacy exemplifies this trend. Studying paradiplomacy introduces new actors and issues into international negotiations, expanding the scope of international relations and reflecting the growing influence of subnational entities.

Both Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan have undergone significant transformations in their diplomatic efforts, moving from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy. Initially, both regions engaged in paradiplomacy, asserting limited foreign participation within the constraints of central government authority. However, a combination of circumstances and motivations has driven significant developments in both regions, pushing them towards more assertive protodiplomacy practices. This shift has allowed Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan to broaden their diplomatic practices, asserting a more independent and proactive role in international affairs.

Understanding the dynamics of paradiplomacy and its interplay with protodiplomacy is crucial for comprehending the changing nature of diplomacy and its impact on regional and global events. Paradiplomacy's role in fostering regional development and international collaboration, alongside the challenges of implementing diplomatic programs, has led to the rise of protodiplomacy in certain areas. This highlights the importance of regional branding and effective promotion of subnational entities on the global stage.

This article focuses on providing a detailed comparative analysis of the paradiplomatic and protodiplomatic practices of Catalonia and Kurdistan, aiming to uncover the underlying motivations and strategic decisions that drive these regions towards greater international engagement. By examining specific instances of paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy in both regions, this study seeks to understand how these practices influence regional autonomy and international recognition. Additionally, the article discusses the broader implications of such diplomatic shifts for central-local government relations and the evolving landscape of global diplomacy. Through this comparative lens, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between regional ambitions and international diplomatic frameworks.

1.1. The Shift of Paradiplomacy to Protodiplomacy

Traditional notions of diplomacy have experienced substantial transformations in the ever-evolving landscape of international relations. One such transformation is the advent of paradiplomacy, wherein subnational actors engage in international relations independently of the central government. Paradiplomacy has been pivotal in enabling regions to assert their interests and connect with the global community. This research investigates the transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy through a comparative analysis of Catalonia and Kurdistan, two regions at the forefront of this shift.
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2. Theory

2.1. Paradiplomacy

Paradiplomacy refers to the international operations and interactions carried out by subnational institutions such as regional governments, municipal governments, provinces, or states that are not officially recognized as sovereign states (Rahmawati, 2022). Through paradiplomacy, these subnational entities collaborate with foreign governments, international organizations, and other non-state actors on issues such as trade, investment, culture, education, and other areas of mutual interest. This involvement provides subnational groups with a direct role in foreign affairs, challenging the traditional monopoly on diplomacy held by central governments (Fathun, 2022). Paradiplomacy has grown in popularity in recent years due to globalization, decentralization, and the increased influence of regional actors in international relations (Kuznetsov, 2014). It allows subnational entities to promote their interests, attract foreign direct investment, foster cultural and educational exchanges, and participate in international networks and forums.

Subnational entities' foreign operations significantly influence global interactions within the realm of paradiplomacy. Schiavon (2018) presents a comprehensive
framework categorizing paradiplomacy into four distinct types, each offering insights into the varying levels of involvement and authority subnational governments possess in international relations. Understanding these categories is crucial for grasping the complex dynamics of diplomacy between central governments and subnational institutions. Schiavon proposes four categories of paradiplomacy:

1. **Exclusive**: In this model, the central government retains complete control over foreign policy formulation and implementation, with sub-state governments (such as regions or provinces) having no constitutional authority to engage in international affairs. Sub-state governments lack the power to conduct diplomacy or establish direct links with other governments or international organizations.

2. **Consultative**: Sub-state administrations, while lacking explicit constitutional powers in foreign affairs, are consulted by the central government during foreign policy formulation and implementation. Although the central government holds final decision-making authority, sub-state governments can offer advice, share opinions, and contribute to foreign policy discussions.

3. **Complementary**: In this model, the central government oversees foreign policy formulation and implementation, but sub-state governments have constitutional authority to engage in international relations within specific policy areas. Sub-state governments can undertake diplomatic actions within their established policy domains, complementing the central government's overall foreign policy. Coordination between the central and sub-state governments is essential for maintaining coherence and preventing conflicts.

4. **Inclusive**: The most advanced level of sub-state involvement in international affairs, where sub-state governments not only have constitutional powers in international relations but also actively participate in national foreign policy formulation and implementation. They are authorized to conduct diplomatic activities, forge direct links with foreign entities, and represent their interests on the global stage. Inclusive paradiplomacy recognizes sub-state administrations as active stakeholders in shaping the nation's foreign policy.

These categories provide a framework for understanding the various levels of involvement and authority that sub-state governments possess in international affairs, ranging from none to active participation. It is crucial to note that the specific powers and responsibilities of sub-state administrations vary depending on the country and its constitutional framework.

Despite its global relevance, paradiplomacy is a form of political agency driven by both instrumental and normative factors. Subnational entities assert their interests and seek greater autonomy if not outright independence. However, paradiplomacy can be contentious, particularly when viewed as a precursor to secessionism. In such cases, paradiplomacy transitions into protodiplomacy, with subnational entities engaging in increasingly assertive and separatist diplomatic actions. Distinguishing between paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy can be subjective, as both are ideal types.

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Paradiplomacy requires cooperation and constitutional loyalty between different levels of government, whereas protodiplomacy often exacerbates tensions between central governments and subnational actors. The extent of protodiplomacy depends on specific circumstances, typically resulting in a practical compromise between the contending parties. This compromise highlights the contestable nature of state sovereignty, reflecting a paradoxical desire for independence coupled with a reluctance to pursue radical secessionist actions.

The concept of protodiplomacy can also apply to de facto states or quasi-states seeking international recognition, such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the diplomatic visibility and profile of these entities are often influenced by the involvement of powerful external actors. Additionally, international support for protodiplomacy can sometimes exacerbate conflicts rather than mediate them (Cornago, 2018). Despite its seemingly marginal position, protodiplomacy underscores an important dimension of international relations often overlooked by conventional diplomatic studies. Traditional approaches to diplomacy frequently neglect the complexities of domestic political life within states, assuming the existence of a perfect and timeless political community—the state. However, the interplay between domestic complexity and diplomacy is crucial for understanding and managing contestation dynamics before they escalate into intractable conflicts.

The transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy and the associated practices present an opportunity for chanceries worldwide to detect and potentially manage social and political contestation dynamics before they become critical and unmanageable. By examining the delicate shift from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy, this research illuminates the complexities of subnational diplomacy and its implications for international relations. The concept of protodiplomacy extends beyond Catalonia and Kurdistan and is applicable also to de facto states or quasi-states seeking international recognition. These entities often gain diplomatic visibility and profile through the involvement of powerful external actors. However, it is important to note that international support for protodiplomacy may sometimes worsen conflicts rather than mediate them.

This theoretical framework will be applied to examine the cases of Catalonia and Kurdistan in this study. By categorizing their paradiplomatic and protodiplomatic activities within Schiavon's typologies, we can better understand the levels of authority and involvement these regions have achieved in their international engagements. This framework will also help dissect the motivations and outcomes of their transitions from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy. Ultimately, this approach provides a structured method to analyze the complexities and nuances of subnational diplomatic efforts and their broader implications for international relations and state sovereignty.

2.2. Protodiplomacy

Despite its global relevance, paradiplomacy is a form of political agency that is motivated by both instrumental and normative factors. Subnational entities assert their interests and seek greater autonomy if not independence. However, paradiplomacy can be contentious, especially when it is regarded as laying the groundwork for secessionism. Paradiplomacy becomes protodiplomacy in such instances, with subnational entities engaged in
increasingly assertive and separatist diplomatic actions. Distinguishing between paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy is subjective, as both are ideal types. Paradiplomacy requires cooperation and constitutional loyalty between different levels of government, while protodiplomacy tends to exacerbate tensions between central governments and subnational actors. The limits of protodiplomacy depend on the specific circumstances, often resulting in a practical compromise between the contending parties. This compromise reaffirms the contestable nature of state sovereignty and reflects the paradoxical expression of both a desire for independence and a reluctance to take radical secessionist actions. The concept of protodiplomacy can also be applied to de facto states or quasi-states seeking international recognition, such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the visibility and diplomatic profile of these entities are often shaped by the involvement of powerful external actors. Additionally, international support for protodiplomacy can sometimes exacerbate conflicts rather than mediate them (Cornago, 2018).

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3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative methodology to investigate the shift from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy in the regions of Catalonia and Kurdistan. The research focused on the descriptive analysis of this transition, utilizing a wide range of secondary data sources. These sources included books, magazines, newspapers, and online journals and articles. The literature review involved an extensive examination of published works across various formats, such as academic books, peer-reviewed journals, official documents, news articles, and internet-based resources, all relevant to the study’s subject.

Primary data sources complemented the secondary data, incorporating insights from in-person and online interviews with key informants, as well as information obtained from official websites. These interviews provided a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, and outcomes associated with the region's diplomatic efforts.
The combination of secondary and primary data enriched the analysis, offering a comprehensive view of the intricate dynamics between central and subnational governments in their international engagements.

The qualitative nature of this research allowed for an in-depth exploration of the underlying factors driving the transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy. It also facilitated a detailed comparative analysis of Catalonia and Kurdistan, highlighting the unique and shared aspects of their diplomatic endeavors. By employing a robust methodological framework, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of subnational diplomacy and its implications for international relations and state sovereignty.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Geopolitical and Cultural Contexts of Catalonia and Kurdistan

Catalonia and Kurdistan are two distinct regions, each possessing a unique geopolitical and cultural context that shapes their engagement in international relations, particularly through paradiplomacy. Paradiplomacy refers to the practice of sub-national units like regions or cities conducting foreign relations activities, primarily focusing on cultural promotion, economic partnerships, and political advocacy.

Catalonia, located in northeastern Spain, has a rich cultural identity distinct from the rest of Spain, with its own language (Catalan) and a history of self-governance that dates back to the medieval era. This autonomous community, which includes the provinces of Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona, is bordered by France and Andorra to the north and the Mediterranean Sea to the east. As one of the wealthiest regions in Spain, Catalonia contributes significantly to the national economy, a factor that fuels its pursuit for greater autonomy (Rahmawati, 2022). Since the late 20th century, Catalonia has been active in paradiplomatic activities, which have been geared towards fostering cultural ties and economic collaboration with various European regions and cities, as well as with international organizations. These activities not only aim to promote its distinct cultural identity but also to bolster economic relationships that could support its autonomy aspirations. In contrast, Kurdistan represents a geo-cultural region that spans multiple countries, including parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, predominantly inhabited by Kurds. This region is characterized by a strong sense of Kurdish identity, shared through language and cultural practices, and a history marked by persistent struggles for autonomy and recognition. Within Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) governs the northern part of the country and has managed to leverage its semi-autonomous status to engage in paradiplomacy since the early 21st century.

The motivations behind Kurdistan's paradiplomatic efforts are both economic and political, aimed at securing economic investment, humanitarian aid, and political support for its ongoing quest for greater autonomy and recognition (Cornago, 2018). These efforts primarily target countries in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, showcasing how Kurdistan uses its cultural and political identity to forge international alliances and support networks. The paradiplomatic activities of both Catalonia and Kurdistan highlight the role of cultural and economic factors in shaping regional strategies for international engagement. While both regions pursue greater autonomy, their methods and areas of
focus in paradiplomacy reflect their unique geopolitical contexts and aspirations. Catalonia's approach is largely centered around using its economic strength and cultural uniqueness to enhance its profile and influence within Europe. In contrast, Kurdistan's efforts are more focused on securing practical support that would facilitate its political and economic stability within a more volatile regional environment.

These cases exemplify how regions with distinct identities and aspirations can utilize paradiplomacy as a strategic tool in international relations. They also underscore the importance of understanding the cultural, economic, and political backgrounds of such regions to appreciate their international actions and strategies fully. By engaging in paradiplomacy, both Catalonia and Kurdistan not only work towards fulfilling their regional aspirations but also contribute to the broader dialogue on decentralization and regional influence in global affairs.

4.2. Comparative Context of Catalonia and Kurdistan

In the process of shifting from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy, Catalonia and Kurdistan share several notable similarities, reflecting broader trends in subnational diplomacy. Both regions possess distinct identities that set them apart from their respective countries. Catalonia’s unique cultural identity and language, Catalan, sharply contrast with the broader Spanish context. This distinctiveness fuels its aspirations for greater autonomy and drives its diplomatic efforts (Rahmawati, 2022). Similarly, Kurdistan’s ethnic identity, which spans several countries, including Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria, emphasizes its cultural uniqueness and political aspirations. The Kurdish identity, characterized by a shared language and historical experiences, underpins the Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) foreign relations strategies (Cornago, 2018).

Economically, both regions feel neglected by their central governments, which further propels their protodiplomatic activities. Catalonia, a significant economic contributor to Spain, perceives a lack of fair treatment and rewards from Madrid. This perception of economic injustice has fueled its push for greater autonomy and international recognition (Fathun, 2022). The region's economic grievances are intertwined with its cultural and political aspirations, creating a potent mix that drives its protodiplomatic efforts. Catalonia's economic strength is seen as a lever to gain international support and foster relationships that could bolster its quest for autonomy.

Kurdistan’s economic motivations for engaging in protodiplomacy are similarly strong. The KRG views its foreign relations activities as vital for improving the regional economy and securing international diplomatic recognition. The economic underdevelopment and historical marginalization of Kurdish regions by central governments have spurred the KRG to seek external economic partnerships and investments. This drive for economic improvement is coupled with a hidden motivation: seeking diplomatic recognition and support for Kurdish independence (Kuznetsov, 2014). The historical repression experienced by Iraqi Kurds, including the prohibition of the Kurdish language in educational institutions under Saddam Hussein’s regime, has deepened their distrust of the central government and reinforced their nationalist
sentiments. This historical context has been a significant factor in transforming Kurdistan’s paradiplomacy into protodiplomacy.

Catalonia and Kurdistan also use protodiplomacy to promote their distinct cultural identities on the international stage. For Catalonia, protodiplomacy allows it to assert its presence internationally, highlighting its cultural uniqueness and political aspirations. By engaging in cultural promotion and establishing informal relations with other regions and cities, Catalonia seeks to gain symbolic recognition and support for its self-determination efforts (Schiavon, 2018). This international engagement is seen as a way to bypass the constraints imposed by the Spanish government and to garner international sympathy and support. Kurdistan’s protodiplomacy similarly emphasizes promoting its unique identity and advocating for self-determination. The KRG has established diplomatic relations with various countries and participated in international forums to advance Kurdish interests. This international engagement is crucial for building a case for Kurdish independence and for securing support from the global community. The KRG's efforts to establish representative offices and diplomatic missions underscore its commitment to gaining international recognition (Bingol, 2016). Despite these similarities, Catalonia and Kurdistan also exhibit significant differences in their protodiplomatic practices, primarily stemming from their political contexts and geopolitical challenges. Catalonia's protodiplomacy focuses on redefining its political status within Spain, aiming for greater autonomy or independence. This pursuit was met with strong opposition and legal challenges from the Spanish government, which did not recognize Catalonia's right to engage in independent diplomatic activities. This opposition has resulted in significant hurdles for Catalonia's protodiplomacy, limiting its ability to achieve broad international recognition and formal diplomatic status (Rahmawati, 2022).

In contrast, Kurdistan’s protodiplomacy is driven by the desire to establish an independent Kurdish state across multiple countries. This ambition faces complex geopolitical challenges due to the Kurdish population being spread across Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria, each with its own political dynamics. The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, marked by ongoing conflicts and shifting alliances, adds layers of complexity to Kurdistan’s protodiplomacy (Cornago, 2018). Furthermore, the KRG operates within the framework of the Iraqi constitution, which provides a certain degree of autonomy, unlike Catalonia’s activities, which face outright legal hurdles under the Spanish constitution. The extent to which Catalonia and Kurdistan have succeeded in their protodiplomacy practices varies. Catalonia has achieved some informal recognition and symbolic support through its diplomatic efforts. However, it has faced significant opposition from the Spanish government, and its protodiplomacy has not resulted in substantial changes in political status or independence. The lack of broad international recognition remains a significant challenge for Catalonia (Schiavon, 2018).

Kurdistan, on the other hand, has made more tangible progress in its protodiplomacy. The KRG has established formal diplomatic relations with various countries, maintained representative offices, and participated in international forums. Kurdistan has gained international support, particularly in the context of the fight against ISIS and the provision of humanitarian aid. However, Kurdistan still faces challenges, such as geopolitical tensions and limited formal recognition as an independent state. The complex regional dynamics and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East continue to impact the prospects for Kurdish protodiplomacy (Bingol, 2016).
In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Catalonia and Kurdistan highlights both the similarities and differences in their transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy. Both regions use protodiplomacy to assert their distinct identities and seek greater autonomy or independence. However, their political contexts, economic motivations, and geopolitical challenges shape their protodiplomatic efforts differently. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the broader implications of subnational diplomacy in international relations.

5. Discussion

Catalonia, by virtue of its political situation, does seek protodiplomacy because of its aspirations for greater autonomy or independence from Spain. Catalonia has a distinct cultural identity, language (Catalan), and history of self-government. The region feels that it should have more control over its political and economic affairs than it does as a region. Protodiplomacy allows Catalonia to assert its presence on the international stage, which creates advantages for the development and growth of the region, as Catalonia's protodiplomacy practices can promote its culture and seek support for self-determination as a self-governing region.

Meanwhile, Kurdistan is a region primarily inhabited by the Kurdish people, who are spread across parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The Kurds, the largest ethnic group without a state, have faced historical challenges in achieving political autonomy and cultural recognition. The Kurds use protodiplomacy to promote their unique identity, advocate for self-determination, and gain international support for their cause, which has many similarities to the reasons why Catalonia practices protodiplomacy. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has established diplomatic relations with various countries and participated in international forums to advance Kurdish interests.

Although Catalonia and Kurdistan are both engaged in protodiplomacy practices, some clear differences can be seen through their motivations and objectives from their political context, geopolitical situation, cultural identity, and legal framework as follows;

1. Political context and conditions: Catalonia's pursuit of protodiplomacy centers primarily on its relationship with Spain. The region seeks to redefine its political status within the Spanish state, with the aim of gaining greater autonomy or even independence. In contrast, Kurdistan's protodiplomacy efforts are driven by the desire to establish an independent and recognized Kurdish state in the region, which includes several countries.

2. Geopolitical Challenges: Catalonia's protodiplomacy faces opposition and legal challenges from the Spanish government, which does not recognize Catalonia's right to engage in diplomatic activities independently. In comparison, the Kurds face various geopolitical complexities and conflicts due to their population spread across multiple countries, each with its own political dynamics and issues.

3. Cultural Identity: Both Catalonia and Kurdistan have distinct cultural and linguistic identities. Protodiplomacy allows them to promote and preserve their cultural
heritage, emphasizing their unique characteristics to gain international support and recognition.

4. Legal Framework: While Kurdistan's protodiplomacy efforts operate within the framework of the Iraqi constitution, Catalonia's activities face legal hurdles as the Spanish government considers them unconstitutional. Catalonia's protodiplomacy efforts are further complicated by its position as a region within a recognized state.

The extent to which Catalonia and Kurdistan have succeeded and failed in their protodiplomacy practices. The assessment of how far Catalonia and Kurdistan have succeeded or failed in their protodiplomacy practices may vary depending on the point of view and criteria, but how they have conducted protodiplomacy has different results. The following is an overview of how Catalonia and Kurdistan have achieved and the challenges of practicing protodiplomacy, following Catalonia's and Kurdistan's protodiplomacy:

Protodiplomacy of Catalonia:

1. Achievements: Catalonia has made efforts to establish diplomatic representation abroad, engage in cultural promotion, and seek international support for its political aspirations. Catalonia has managed to establish informal relations with several regions and cities, gaining symbolic recognition and support from certain entities (Bingol, 2016).

2. Challenges/Failures: Catalonia has faced significant obstacles in its practice of protodiplomacy. The Spanish government has actively opposed Catalonia's efforts, deeming them unconstitutional. Catalonia has struggled to gain broad international recognition and formal diplomatic status. Its protodiplomacy has not resulted in substantial changes in political status or independence from Spain (Bingol, 2016).

Protodiplomacy of Kurdistan:

1. Achievements: The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has made important progress in its protodiplomacy efforts. The KRG has established formal diplomatic relations with various countries, maintaining representative offices and diplomatic missions. International Support: Kurdistan has gained support and recognition from various governments and international organizations, particularly in the context of the fight against ISIS and the provision of humanitarian aid. In terms of economic engagement, Kurdistan has attracted foreign investment and trade partnerships, improving its economic relations with other regions and countries (Bingol, 2016).

2. Challenges/Failures: Despite its achievements, Kurdistan's protodiplomacy faces ongoing challenges and limitations. The complexity of the geopolitical landscape and tensions with the central governments of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria pose obstacles to the realization of Kurdish self-determination and the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Limited Formal Recognition: Although several countries have recognized Kurdistan's autonomy and engaged in diplomatic relations, Kurdistan has yet to gain universal recognition as an independent state. Regional dynamics and conflicts in the Middle East, including territorial disputes...
and security concerns, impact the prospects for Kurdish protodiplomacy practices (Bingol, 2016).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan reveals that both regions engage in similar paradiplomatic activities, which have evolved into protodiplomacy. The motivations behind Iraqi Kurdistan's paradiplomacy are deeply rooted in regional factors, including the level of involvement, media engagement, participation strategies, and specific diplomatic approaches. These factors are essential for understanding the transition from paradiplomacy to protodiplomacy in Kurdistan.

Catalonia, while geographically and politically distinct from Iraqi Kurdistan, shares a parallel trajectory in its pursuit of international recognition and greater autonomy. The Generalitat, Catalonia's autonomous government, actively engages in paradiplomacy by fostering bilateral relations with foreign entities to bolster its economy and cultural identity. This mirrors the efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in seeking diplomatic and economic partnerships to support its regional ambitions.

Both Catalonia and Kurdistan utilize protodiplomacy to assert their presence on the international stage and gather support for their self-determination aspirations. Catalonia’s protodiplomacy primarily focuses on redefining its relationship with Spain, driven by its unique cultural identity, political context, and legal framework. Conversely, Kurdistan’s efforts are directed towards establishing an independent Kurdish state, navigating the geopolitical complexities and conflicts inherent in being a population spread across multiple countries.

The use of protodiplomacy by both Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan underscores their proactive approaches to international relations. By engaging in diplomatic activities, establishing relationships with foreign governments and organizations, and asserting their distinct identities, both regions aim to enhance their autonomy and influence within the global arena. Their strategies reflect a broader trend in subnational diplomacy, where regions with distinct cultural and political identities seek greater recognition and autonomy through innovative diplomatic efforts.

Ultimately, the cases of Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan illustrate the dynamic nature of subnational diplomacy and its impact on international relations. As these regions continue to navigate their respective geopolitical landscapes, their protodiplomacy efforts will likely play a crucial role in shaping their futures and influencing the broader discourse on autonomy and statehood in the international community.

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