

# [Baku-tblisi-ceyhan pipeline and the kurdish issue](https://assignbuster.com/baku-tblisi-ceyhan-pipeline-and-the-kurdish-issue/)

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Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan Pipeline and the Kurdish Issue The Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline links the Caspian sea to the Eastern Mediterranean, it runs 1, 768 km long and is the second longest oil pipeline in the former Soviet Union, extending through the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as Turkey. At its capacity it can pump up to 1 million barrels (160, 00 m3) of oil per day. The construction of the pipeline was a massive undertaking costing upwards of US$3. 9 billion.

This considered the pipeline was funded 70% by third parties (dominated by British Petroleum). Even well before it’s completion the BTC pipeline has had a remarkable effect on the world’s oil politics; some critics have gone as far to argue that it has directly affected the geopolitics of the Palestinian conflict. One can clearly see the important monetary reasons to this pipeline, however what will be dealt with more in this essay will be it’s contributions to world politics and the controversies that surround it.

The BTC pipeline is nothing short of an engineering feat, extending almost exactly 1, 768 km across extremely difficult terrain and diverse climatic and geological zones; techniques and chemical coatings which may have worked perfect for one region had to be changed for others. What sets the BTC pipeline apart though is how this ambitious undertaking affects the myriad communities and millions of citizens, making the pipeline not only an economic undertaking but also a socio-political issue.

The South Caucasus, formerly an underappreciated region of Russia, is now of extreme strategic significance; the US along with many other Western powers have vested interests in the affairs of these three nations through which the pipeline runs. The BTC pipeline bypasses the territory of the Russian Federation. It transits through the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia, both of which have become US " protectorates", firmly integrated into a military alliance with the US and NATO. It goes without saying that the pipeline is all about the oil, but it is equally about the social and civic development of the participating countries.

In order to properly discuss the social and environmental issues of the BTC project, one must first have an adequate frame of reference from which the project can be judged. There are many principles which one can use including those outlined by the World Bank. However for the purposes of this paper, the Equator Principles will be used. The EPs are a set of principles – outlined by Citigroup, ABN AMRO, Barclays and WestLB – are a voluntary set of principles for determining social and environmental risk in project financing.

The Principles, adopted by seventeen leading private banks, specify that said Banks would only provide loans to projects, which meet a number of conditions. These conditions include that projects comply with the InternationalFinanceCorporation (IFC) policies, that they follow the host country laws, among other specific requirements. A review in 2003 examined the BTC pipeline; this paper will examine the Turkish section of this review (while many of the same systemic failures were found just as well in Azerbaijan and Georgia).

Based on a rigorous study of the BTC project documents, and also on two international FACT finding Missions to the pipeline route, this review found that BTC project is in breach of five EP-referenced IFC standards on 127 accounts. These sections include: 53 counts in Environmental Assessment; 7 counts in Natural Habitats; 30 counts in Indigenous Peoples; 28 counts in Involuntary Resettlement; 9 counts in Cultural Property The study also found that the project was in breach of international standards such as World Bank standards, European Union Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment, European Bank ofReconstruction& Development.

This would be a massive undertaking to properly examine all of the claims made against the BTC project, so focus will instead be put in three areas: Natural Habitats, Indigenous Peoples, and Involuntary resettlement. In doing so this paper will examine the example given by the Kurdish community of Turkey. The Kurds are an example of a nation without a state; they are an ethno-linguistic group without any central state. They comprise 18% of the Turkish population (an estimated 14 million).

When establishing the pipeline, Turkey strategically rerouted the pipeline away from the heavily Kurdish areas and the South-East; that being said much of the pipeline still runs through areas that require heavily armed guarding. When looking at the EP section Impacts and indigenous peoples and communities (chapter 8), the project scored a non-compliance stating that “ the impacts on indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities not considered at all (notably the Kurds)”. The Kurds, an ethnic minority of the region, can apply for OD 4. 0 (Indigenous Peoples rights, section 8. 3), however when BTC co. overlooked this to speed the construction process along they broke not only the Equator principles but also the World Bank principles. Specifically the BTC project has failed to ensure that the Kurds benefited from this project, and failed to ensure that the Kurds were adequately informed about the project prior to it’s completion. Also the project did not even attempt to draw up an ethnic minorities’ development plan (which would include schooling funding among other social programs).

Operational Directive 4. 30, Involuntary Resettlement, sets out the requirements for resettlement and adequate compensation for land acquisition. Fact-finding missions outlined in the EP document emergency powers had been used to override OD 4. 30. In many cases displacement occurred before compensation was complete, and when compensation was given the rates were too low. None of the communities were informed of their rights in regards to the land expropriation. Much of the criticism coming from the consultation process of the BTC co. s interesting however, because the project did put in place comprehensive public consultation and disclosure processes commencing in mid-2001 with a process of stakeholder identification and preliminary consultation during project scoping; information briefs and consultations with local authorities and local NGOs followed very shortly after this. On the IFC website, the claim is made that they were informed that the members of the Kurdish communities all were fluent in Turkish. As a result of this mistreatment of the Kurdish communities, which the pipeline passes through, many Kurdish militant groups have taken to sabotaging the pipeline.

The Kurdish workers party (PKK) has publicly taken credit for much of this sabotage. However there was no mention of whether they adequately explain (in Turkish of Kurdish) their rights with regards to land expropriation. As a result one can see that BTC is making the bare minimum of effort required to the Kurdish communities; they claim that they are meeting with the members of the community and yet there still seems to be opposition with pipeline sabotage. Some have argued that this is just an attempt to discredit the Turkish state and bring attention to their nationalist causes in regards to Kurdistan. Regardless of hich, the BTC project has not adequately equipped these communities with the means to consult with these large firms. Much of the political tension arising from the pipeline is a direct result of the lack of environmentalaccountability. At 1 million barrels a day, the amount of CO2 produced in a year is equal to an entire power industry in the UK. The region of Turkey that the pipeline runs through historically is prone to major earthquakes, and there has not been adequate preparation for this. The BTC project is suffering these problems because of a complete disregard to these standards, but rather seemingly because of a rushed approach.

Couple the Kurdish issue with the evident disregard for any form of environmental accountability along with many other problems found in the two ex-soviet countries not mentioned in this paper and the project is simply not sustainable. If adequate structures are not put in place to allow for public dissent, the BTC is doomed to continually suffer sabotage to their pipelines. This is perhaps not such a problem from the perspective of BP, who clearly can afford this expense; it is however an embarrassing light to be shone on Turkey. If for no other reason, Turkey should be pressing for changes in the BTC structure.