

CANADA AND TURKMENISTAN: SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS

CANADIAN BURIED HILL ENERGY AND EX-PRIME MINISTER SUPPORT THE TURKMENISTAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH BUSINESS VENTURES

Buried Hill Energy is an Alberta-based oil and gas company. It was founded and continues to be led by a team of Canadian oil and gas specialists. The company prides on its "strong and long-term strategic relationships" in Turkmenistan, and supports its activities in Central Asia from its offices located in the country's capital Ashgabat. The company's website is laden with praise for Turkmenistan, and news articles supplied by the Turkmenistan State News Agency are regularly published there. This has most likely been done to win favour with the Turkmen regime, who have been courted in the past via translation of the *Ruhnama*.

In 2004 the former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien paid a visit to Turkmenistan on behalf of Buried Hill Energy as part of his new role as an attorney with the Calgary law firm Bennett Jones. He was accompanied at the meeting by his client, Buried Hill Energy's CEO Roger Haines. During his visit Chrétien spent an hour lobbying with Saparmurat Niyazov for oil concessions, which he received. Since Niyazov's death, the former Prime Minister has also held a meeting with Turkmenistan's current president, Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov, in order to discuss the progress of the agreements reached earlier.

Turkmenistan is one of the world's most dictatorial countries, and has been regularly rated as one of the world's worst three countries when it comes to human rights and freedom of speech. The country has also been ranked lowest in its region on Transparency International's "corruption perceptions index". In an article published by *The Ottawa Citizen* on 9 November 2005, former diplomat Harry Sterling commented on Chrétien's meeting with Niyazov by stating that as a former Prime Minister, Chrétien "should not be entering into business dealings with a leader who oppresses its own people – we're talking about the sort of person no one would want to be associated with if they had any standards." It should be noted that with the exception of a few cosmetic changes, no real political reforms have taken place in Turkmenistan during Berdymuhammedov's rule.

In an article published on 2 August 2007 in the *Dominion* newspaper, industry watchdog Karen Keenan of the Halifax Initiative stated that the Canadian government does not have any policy statement or regulatory oversight of how it expects Canadian companies to operate overseas. "The Canadian government provides a myriad of forms of support for these companies", says Keenan, "but we and many others are saying that the Canadian government shouldn't be promoting these companies; instead they should look at them and make sure they're following standards."

Shadow of the Holy Book has initiated wide-ranging public discussion in numerous countries on whether governments should exercise their right to issue ethical guidelines for companies, or should the responsibility be left to companies themselves. Companies often draw up comprehensive ethical guidelines for their actions, but in reality they are rarely obeyed. Buried Hill Energy, too, according to their own website, considers itself to possess a "high degree of operational integrity".

More information:

Buried Hill company website

<http://buriedhill.com/>

Canadians Run Amok in Azerbaijan

<http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/1293>

Dictator was lobbied by Chrétien

<http://www.tmrepublican.org/content.php?t=news&&pg=36>

Lost in Turkmenistan

http://www.watan.ru/eng/view.php?nomer=773&razd=new_nov_en&pg=47

Chretien's firm at work in pariah regime

<http://www.canada.com/ottawa/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=03590253-b70d-407e-8db4-1eb32cd21317>

Buried Hill Energy begins development of Turkmen Caspian shelf

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=12170&type=event&sort=date_desc

Turkmen leader receives Canadian former prime minister

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11107&type=event&highlight_words=canadian&sort=date_desc

Turkmen president invites Canadian businessmen to Caspian Sea

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=5400&type=event&highlight_words=canadian&sort=date_desc