

**RFE/RL's Turkmen Service Statement
Turkmenistan: Ignoring
Freedom of the Press
Astana, Kazakhstan, November 26, 2010**

The following statement of the Turkmen Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) is about Turkmenistan's violations of press freedom and harassment against RFE journalists.

Radio Azatlyk is the only independent source for news and information in the Turkmen language, with special emphasis given to topics such as democracy and human rights. Radio Azatlyk is broadcast on MW, SW, Satellite six hours daily, and the Internet (www.azathabar.com) from its Prague based headquarters, with no bureau in Turkmenistan. RFE/RL is an international broadcaster, supported by U.S. Congress.

RFE/RL's Turkmen Service is unable to operate legally in Turkmenistan, as all media in the country are state-controlled and there is no press freedom. Turkmen authorities have been ignoring RFE/RL's requests to open a dialogue on how we may build a cooperative relationship to support democratic developments and free media.

On November 3, 1995, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan gave the President of RFE/RL permission to establish a bureau in Ashgabat. Unfortunately, this project was never allowed to proceed.

In televised remarks during a cabinet meeting in July 2010, President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov announced plans to allow the creation of private media outlets in the country saying that, "proposals for the founding of private newspapers and magazines can be prepared and work on this matter can be accelerated." With President Berdimukhamedov's reform efforts, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service believes, now is the time to establish a media operation in Ashgabat, and that doing so would benefit both sides.

Consistent with its OSCE commitments and own stated intentions, the Turkmen government should stop persecuting independent journalists in the country. Turkmenistan poses a strong challenge to the journalists working for Radio Azatlyk. For many years the authorities have closely monitored journalists' communication channels such as telephone lines and the Internet. A small network of local correspondents contributing reports for Radio Azatlyk in Turkmenistan and their family members are routinely under surveillance by the national secret services. Even ordinary citizens who tell their stories to the journalists of Radio Azatlyk are harassed and persecuted. RFE/RL Turkmen Service's journalists and their family members are blacklisted and banned from traveling abroad.

Turkmenistan's commitment to freedom of press is stipulated in the country's supreme law – the Constitution of Turkmenistan as well as in a number of international agreements, which Turkmenistan has ratified.

RFE/RL's Turkmen Service calls on the OSCE to urge the Turkmen government to allow free media and recognize Radio Azatlyk by permitting a bureau in Ashgabat. In addition, the OSCE must protest the use of threats, intimidation and harassment of journalists and their family members to silence free speech and prevent journalists from doing their jobs. Finally, the OSCE must obtain assurances from Turkmen authorities that Radio Azatlyk's correspondents may engage in journalism without danger or fear.

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