

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/turkmenistan-rfe-rl-correspondent-on-trial-in-05-10-2011,41119.html>

Europe & ex-USSR - Turkmenistan

Sham trial

Five-year sentence for RFE/RL correspondent

5 October 2011

Reporters Without Borders is appalled by the five-year jail sentence that **Dovletmyrat Yazkulyev**, a reporter for the Turkmen-language service of *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, received today from a court in Kahka (in Akhal province) at the end of a trial that began yesterday evening (see below).

"We are dismayed and shocked," Reporters Without Borders said. "Yazkulyev's fate was decided in just a few hours and in violation of all normal judicial procedures. It is still too soon to say with certainty whether lawyers and journalists attended today's hearing of whether they were banned, as they were yesterday.

"Either way, the judges participating in this sham trial have unfortunately demonstrated that the reign of the arbitrary continues unchecked in Turkmenistan, in marked contrast to President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov's promises of democratization, which he reiterated yet again yesterday."

Yazkulyev now has 10 days to file an appeal before the relevant regional court. Reporters Without Borders urges this court to quash his conviction and order his release.

05.10.2011 - RFE/RL correspondent on trial in Ashgabat on trumped-up charge

Reporters Without Borders is extremely worried to learn that **Dovletmyrat Yazkulyev** (Довлетмурад Язгулиев), a reporter for *Radio Azatlyk*, the Turkmen-language service of Prague-based *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, went on trial yesterday in Ashgabat on a clearly trumped-up charge of encouraging a relative's suicide attempt.

"A prosecution is far from being a trivial matter for an independent journalist in [Turkmenistan](#)," Reporters Without Borders said. "Given the criminalization of journalism, the judicial system's complete lack of independence and the terrible prison conditions, we fear the worst. It is clear from the absurd charge that has been brought against Yazkulyev that he is being made to pay for his outspoken reporting for *Radio Azatlyk* and in his blogs."

Yazkulyev was one of the first people to cover the [deadly explosion](#) at an arms depot in the Ashgabat suburb of Abadan on 7 July. Despite the government's denials, news of the accident spread rapidly thanks to amateur video and the accounts posted online by [netizens](#). The authorities lost no time in cracking down on bloggers, journalists and ordinary residents in Abadan, using [arrests](#), searches, threats, interrogations and seizures of telephones and computer material.

On 14 July, [Yazkulyev was summoned](#) to the police station in Annau, the small town where he lives. An official from the National Security Ministry warned him of "possible judicial consequences" if he did not stop "disseminating defamatory information" and refrain from "provocation."

Radio Azatlyk director **Oguljamal Yazliyeva** told Reporters Without Borders: "He is a

correspondent who is always ready to speak out and often tackles sensitive subjects such as the human rights situation and corruption. His latest reports were about cases of torture and police violence, for which he had interviewed people in the region where he is from."

Yazkuliyeu was arrested on 27 September on a charge of inciting suicide under [article 106.2 of the criminal code](#), which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison, and is being held in Yazkuliyeu prison, near the capital.

Relatives told *Radio Azatlyk* that they were forced to sign statements falsely accusing Yazkuliyeu of having encouraged his sister-in-law's attempt to commit suicide on 17 September. After realizing how their statements could be used against him, they tried to formally retract them on 27 September, but without success.

The media were not allowed to attend the first hearing of his trial yesterday, which was held in the evening after an unexplained delay. He was not represented by a lawyer at the hearing.

"This is not the first time that the authorities take advantage of family problems to put pressure on journalists," Yazliyeva added. "It is even standard procedure. This was the grounds used for confining [Amangelen Shapudakov](#) to a psychiatric hospital in March for giving us an interview."

The fact Yazkuliyeu was immediately detained after the decision to charge him supports the assumption that this is a political trial. *Radio Azatlyk's* reporters are regularly targeted in Turkmenistan, one of the world's most closed countries. One of them, [Ogulsapar Muradova](#), died under torture in detention in September 2006. Two other Turkmen journalists, **Annakurban Amanklychev** and **Sapardurdy Khadjiyev**, are currently serving eight-year jail sentences for helping with a report for the French current affairs TV programme "Envoyé Spécial."

"The start of this trial on the very day that the campaign for next February's presidential election officially got under way bodes ill for the 'democratization' promised by the government," Reporters Without Borders added. "A free and fair election is inconceivable without a free press and an independent judicial system."

Turkmenistan is ranked 176th out of 178 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

(Photo: *Radio Azatlyk*)
