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<http://www.rsf.org/turkmenistan-turkmen-president-lines-up-11-02-2012,41848.html>

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Turkmenistan

« Romps home »

## Turkmen president lines up reelection victory: « Long live one-party rule ! »

11 February 2012

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*Reporters Without Borders congratulates President [Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov](#) in advance on succeeding in his bid to be reelected tomorrow with 90 per cent of the votes.*

*"This victory translates the Turkmen people's full recognition of their undisputed leader, and the accomplishment of the promised democratic reforms," Reporters Without Borders said. "Invited to cast their ballots in the third presidential election in 20 years, voters have resolutely demonstrated their opposition to the spurious idea of a change of government through the polls. Long live one-party rule!"*

*Reporters Without Borders takes this opportunity to apologize to the entire Turkmen people for its mistake in ranking Turkmenistan 177th out of 179 countries in its [latest press freedom index](#).*

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This could be the front page of a Turkmen newspaper on the eve of Turkmen dictator Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov's programmed "reelection" tomorrow.



Первое нейтральное  
государство в мире,  
признанное ООН, -  
это наша Родина -  
Туркменистан!

# Нейтральный ТУРКМЕНИСТАН

Учредитель - Президент Туркменистана

Издается с ноября 1924 года (до 13 декабря 1995 года - «Туркменская искра») №9 (25152)

суббота, 11 февраля 2012 года

## « Репортеры без границ » : « Долгой жизни единой партии! »



« Репортеры без границ » заранее поздравляют президента Гурбангулу Бердимухаммедова, который завтра будет переизбран с 90% голосов.

« Эта триумфальная победа является признанием туркменского народа неоспоримого лидерства их правителя и окончания обещанных демократических реформ. Избиратели, приглашенные на третьи президентские выборы за последние 20 лет, продемонстрировали свое оппозиционное отношение к лживому

понятию смены власти. Долгой жизни единой партии! » - заявляют « Репортеры без границ ».

Организация ползается этим случаем, чтобы извиниться перед всем туркменским народом за то, что ошибочно поместили Туркменистан на 177 место из 179 в своем последнем « Индексе свободы слова ».

Berdymukhammedov has talked of reforms since taking over as president in December 2006, on his predecessor's death, but nothing has really changed in what is one of the world's most repressive countries.

At the same time that the authorities were cracking down on those who had managed to let the world know about a deadly explosion in an arms depot in a suburb of the capital, President Berdymukhammedov undertook to introduce pluralism and hold free elections, a first for this totalitarian regime.

Officially, the one-party system has been abandoned but no opposition party has been authorized. Government opponents in exile have not dared to return. The incumbent is running against seven complete unknowns, for the most part obscure provincial officials. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has already announced that it will not observe the election on the grounds that the conditions are totally unsatisfactory.

The most eccentric aspects of the reign of his predecessor, Saparmurad Niyazov, known as Turkmenbashi (Father of the Turkmen), have been scrapped, and the days and months are no longer named after members of the Niyazov family. But Berdymukhammedov has introduced his own personality cult and he is officially known as Arkadag (Protector).

His smiling portrait has replaced his predecessor's everywhere, his books are bestsellers and, on 8 February, a military unit and a museum were renamed after his father, for having brought up a son who is "infinitely loyal to the people." Several sources have said Berdymukhammedov is writing a new "holy book" to replace the Rukhnama, a collection of the late dictator's sayings that are part of the school curriculum at all levels.

Independent journalism is unthinkable in this environment. All the media are directly controlled by the state, which uses them to relay its propaganda and severely punishes any departure from the official line. Only a few media based abroad, such as [Radio Azatlyk](#) (RFE/RL's local service) *Khronika Turkmenistana*, *Gündoğar* and [Fergananews](#), broadcast uncensored news. But they are not available to most of the population, which can only access a completely sanitized [Intranet called Turkmenet](#).

The risks are enormous for independent journalists, who have to operate clandestinely. At least two journalists, **Sapardurdy Khadjiyev** and **Annakurban Amanklychev**, have been held for more than five years in a prison in a desert area near the western city of Turkmenbashi. Ogulsapar Muradova, a woman journalist who was arrested at the same time as them, died in detention in September 2006, almost certainly as a result of mistreatment.

A *Radio Azatlyk* correspondent, **Dovletmyrat Yazkulyev**, was sentenced to five years in prison on trumped-up charges last October before finally getting a presidential pardon a few weeks later. His crime was to have covered the explosion at the arms depot in the Ashgabat suburb of Abadan that killed many civilians.

The arms depot explosion shed light on the relative strengths of the forces at play in the new media battleground over news and information. Photos and video footage recorded by ordinary citizens on their mobile phones thwarted the government's attempts to censor this event but the authorities showed they were ready to react. Many netizens and bloggers were arrested, as well as Yazkulyev, and *Khroniki Turkmenistana*, a website that had posted images and information about the explosion, was hacked shortly afterwards. The hackers pirated the details of subscribers and posted the identity of contributors and commentators on the site.

President Berdymukhammedov has much to do if he really wants to give some substance to all his talk about democracy. Allowing independent media to operate and the immediate release of all the detained journalists and human rights activists are essential first steps for any evolution in the system of government. [The international community](#), which has eyes only for Turkmenistan's impressive natural gas deposits, should remind him of this at every opportunity.

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