

Turkmen Leader Bans Satellite Dishes

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has ordered the removal of satellite dishes from apartment blocks in a move that could restrict access to foreign television channels in the country.

Berdymukhammedov, whose word is final, instructed his government to install cable television to replace the dishes that crowd the walls and roofs of many buildings in Ashgabat.

"Numerous television aerials installed on the roofs and facades of houses reflect negatively on the capital's architectural appearance," Berdymukhammedov said in comments published this week by state newspaper Neitralny (Neutral) Turkmenistan.

Satellite dishes battle for roof space on three- and four-story apartment blocks in the older neighborhoods of Ashgabat, where residents say they can tune in to more than 700 channels.

Berdymukhammedov first proposed their removal in 2007, the first year of his presidency, although the project was shelved. Residents at the time expressed concern that access to foreign channels would be restricted.

Satellite television is one of the few means by which residents of Turkmenistan can access independent channels in a country dominated by state media.

A Communications Ministry official said cable television would be installed free of charge and that a basic package would include the channels already transmitted by four satellites.

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