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Freedom of expression

The Sakharov Prize is a symbol of Parliament's commitment

The **Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought** was set up in 1988 and is awarded each year by the European Parliament. The prize is awarded for a particular achievement in one of the following fields:

- defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly the right to free expression;
- safeguarding the rights of minorities;
- respect for international law;
- development of democracy and implementation of the rule of law.

Parliament awards the human rights prize at a formal sitting held in Strasbourg on or around 10 December, the day on which the **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was signed in 1948.

Over the years, Greens have often supported candidates who also supported environmental progress in their fight for fundamental rights (like the Israeli nuclear hostage Mordechai Vanunu or Russian environmental journalist Grygory Pasko).

Last year, the Greens/EFA proposed the cyber-dissidents from China, Iran and Tunisia as candidates for the 2005 Sakharov prize. Even if the Green candidates did not get through, it made clear that the Internet should be seen as a potential catalyst for political and human rights reforms in a long list of regimes opposed to freedom of opinion and expression. A resolution on the freedom of expression on the internet was adopted by the European Parliament in July 2006. [See **Green/EFA motion for a resolution**]

This year, the Greens/EFA proposed "**All those fighting for the release of kidnapped hostages in Colombia**" as their candidate for the Sakharov Prize, represented by former Colombian Presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt (herself a hostage) and the *Pais Libre* Foundation (which campaigns on behalf of those held hostage and their families). This candidacy has been shortlisted and is among the three nominees for the 2006 award. The nomination of all those fighting for hostages in Colombia is aimed at drawing attention to the fact that 80% of the hostages being held captive in the world are in Colombia. There are more than 3,000 hostages in Colombia of which many are children. Some have been in captivity for more than 8 years; Ingrid Betancourt herself has been held for 4½ years.

For the Greens, "awarding them the Sakharov Prize would be more than a symbolic act: it is an expression of support for their continued struggle for the respect of rights and freedoms in Colombia".

The Conference of Presidents (the leaders of the 7 political groups) will declare the winner of the 2006 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought and human rights on Thursday 26 October. The winner will receive the award from President Borrell during the December plenary in Strasbourg.

SAKHAROV PRIZE for Freedom of Thought - List of prize winners

1988 Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko (posthumously)
1989 Alexander Dubcek
1990 Aung San Suu Ky
1991 Adem Demaçi
1992 Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo
1993 Oslobodjenje
1994 Taslima Nasreen
1995 Leyla Zana
1996 Wei Jingsheng
1997 Salima Ghezali
1998 Ibrahim Rugova
1999 José Alejandro 'Xanana' Gusmão
2000 ¡Basta Ya!
2001 Izzat Ghazzawi, Nurit Peled-Elhanan and Dom Zacarias Kamwenho
2002 Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas
2003 UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, and all UN staff
2004 Zhanna Litvina, President of the Belarus Association of Journalists
2005 Ladies in White, Hauwa Ibrahim and Reporters Without Borders

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