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Sakharov Prize 2014

Greens/EFA nominate Leyla Yunus - Defending human rights in Azerbaijan



The Greens/EFA group has agreed to nominate [Leyla Yunus](#), a leading human rights figure in Azerbaijan, for this year's Sakharov Prize. The nomination for the EU's annual award for 'freedom of thought' recognises her tireless work for human rights in Azerbaijan, all the while facing immense pressure and harassment from the authorities. Leyla is the director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, a human rights group formed in 1995 that has focused on combating politically motivated prosecutions, corruption, violence against women, and unlawful house evictions. The organisation has also been involved in projects aimed at improving people-to-people dialogue between intellectuals and community leaders in Azerbaijan and Armenia, against the background of the unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the autonomous enclave in Azerbaijan primarily populated by ethnic Armenians. As the regime has tightened its grip on Azerbaijan's civil society, Leyla and her colleagues have for a long time stood up to repression and threats, fully aware of the risks. She has been subject to ongoing harassment from the authorities, who most recently arrested her, together with her husband, Arif Yunus, on politically motivated charges. She is currently in pretrial custody. The arrest came only one day after she wrote an open letter to President Ilham Aliyev, criticizing him for targeting human rights activists and bloggers, and "urging him not to go down in history as 'a tyrant and a dictator.'" Azerbaijan is a member of the Council of Europe, and therefore bound by the European Convention on Human Rights. In May 2014, Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of the organisation. However, despite this, the Azerbaijani authorities have recently unleashed an unprecedented wave of repression, targeting opposition politicians, journalists, civil society representatives, and human rights defenders. Azerbaijan is a founding member of the Eastern Partnership

and a close partner of the EU. The EU and Azerbaijan are about to finalise a Strategic Modernisation Agreement aimed at deepening the bilateral relations. The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought was set up in 1988 and is awarded each year by the European Parliament. It is named after Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov. 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

More details available at

- [Leyla Yunis Wikipedia page](#)
- [European Parliament Sakharov Prize page](#)

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