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Sakharov Prize

EU Parliament to award Sakharov Prize to Russian human rights defenders

Today, the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents selected **Oleg Orlov, Sergei Kovalev and Lyudmila Alexeyeva** for the institution's 2009 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, in the name of human rights organisation 'Memorial' and all human rights defenders in Russia.

Greens/EFA Co-president **Rebecca Harms** commented:

"I am delighted that this year's Sakharov Prize will be awarded to Greens/EFA nominees Oleg Orlov, Sergei Kovalev and Lyudmila Alexeyeva, as well as Memorial and all human rights defenders in Russia.

Parliament's group presidents have united unanimously in favour of these candidates. Twenty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, this historic moment sends a strong signal to EU leaders meeting in Brussels next week to also speak with one voice on the critical question of human rights in Russia. I also hope that this year's Sakharov Prize will boost the EU's resolve to prioritise the human rights issue at next month's EU-Russia summit.

Finnish Green MEP **Heidi Hautala**, chair of the European Parliament's human rights subcommittee, commented:

"I hope that this year's Sakharov Prize will give recognition to human rights activists in Russia, who often work in intolerably difficult and dangerous conditions.

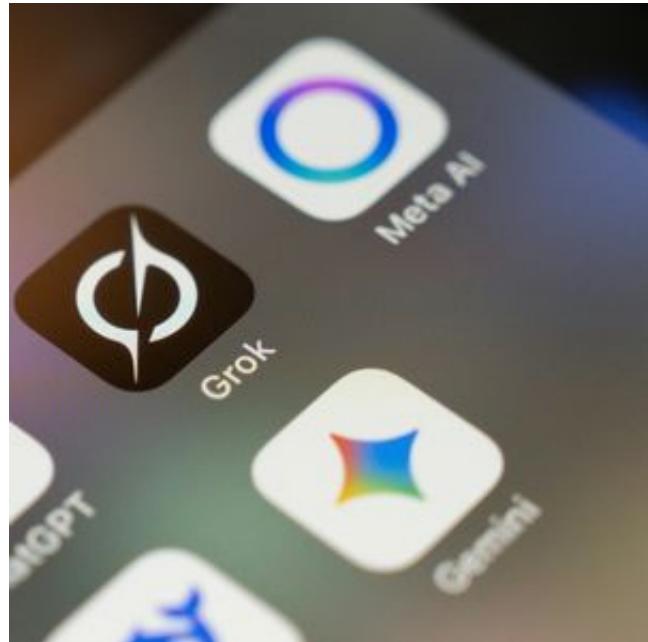
At this time, we think of Anna Politkovskaya, Natalia Estemirova and others who have been brutally murdered for their selfless and dedicated defence of human rights and freedom of expression. Natalia Estemirova's murder on 15 July was a reminder to the international community about the total lack of protection which human rights defenders face in Russia on a daily basis.

Today's Sakharov Prize decision sends a clear message to the Russian federation to finally deal with those who commit crimes against human rights defenders with impunity. Twenty years after the death of Andrei Sakharov it is timely that a Russian recipient is finally awarded for the first time."

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