

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought



The European Parliament is a dedicated supporter of human rights and democracy. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) fight against new and old attacks on essential liberties to protect fundamental rights of all people living in the EU and to defend democratic systems around the globe.

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought – awarded for the first time in 1988 to Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko – is the highest tribute paid by the European Union to human rights work.

The European Parliament awards the prize as a recognition to individuals, groups and organisations who have made an outstanding contribution to protecting the universal values of human rights, freedom of thought and democratic rule of law.

The prize is named after **Andrei Sakharov**, a Soviet nuclear physicist and a strong defender of democracy and human rights. He won the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to raise awareness to the dangers of the nuclear arms race.

2024 Sakharov Laureates

The **2024 Sakharov Prize** for Freedom of Thought was awarded to **María Corina Machado** as the leader of the democratic forces in Venezuela and President-elect **Edmundo González Urrutia**, representing all Venezuelans inside and outside the country fighting for the re-institution of freedom and democracy.

Machado won primary elections in 2023 to run as the candidate of the democratic opposition in the 2024 presidential elections, but after she was arbitrarily disqualified by the Venezuelan regime, González became the candidate. The lead-up to the July 2024 elections saw widespread repression, including disqualifications, arrests, and human rights violations.

Venezuela's incumbent president Nicolás Maduro declared victory in the elections but independent observers, including the UN, contested the results. The European Parliament recognised González as the legitimate president of Venezuela in a [resolution in September 2024](#).

Among protests and political repression, Machado went into hiding, fearing for her life. On 2 September 2024, a Venezuelan court issued an arrest warrant for González, drawing international condemnation. He moved to Spain where he was granted asylum.

Women's movements **Women Wage Peace** & **Women of the Sun** were together with **Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu**, academic and anti-corruption activist in Azerbaijan, among the finalists for the 2024 Sakharov prize. Women of the Sun as an independent Palestinian women's movement and Women Wage Peace as an Arab-Jewish movement created in 2014 announced a partnership in 2022. Their aim is to promote a non-violent, respectful, and mutually accepted solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

More reading:

- European Parliament website (all EU languages):
 - [Defending human rights beyond the EU](#)
 - [The Sakharov Prize](#)
 - [Andrei Sakharov - The inspiration for the prize](#)
 - [Sakharov Prize Laureates: 1988 - 2000; 2001 - 2010; 2011 - 2020; 2021 - 2030](#)
 - [Previous Sakharov laureates](#)
 - [Sakharov Prize 2024 goes to Venezuelan opposition leaders](#)
 - Factsheets on the European Union: [Human Rights and Democracy](#) (all EU languages)
 - What Europe does for me: [Human Rights Defenders](#) (all EU languages)
 - [The Sakharov Prize, the European Parliament and human rights worldwide](#). Online Europeana Exhibition (EN)
- European Parliament Research Service briefings:
- [EU support for human rights defenders around the world](#). 2022. (EN)
 - [Sakharov's legacy on the centenary of his birth](#). 2021. (EN)
 - [2023 Sakharov Prize laureate: Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran](#). 2023. (EN, FR, DE, ES, IT, PL + BG + Farsi)
 - [2022 Sakharov Prize laureate: The brave people of Ukraine](#). 2022. (EN, FR, DE, ES, IT, PL + BG, UK)
 - [Alexei Navalny: Anti-corruption campaigner, opposition leader and Kremlin victim](#). 2024. (EN)
 - [2021 Sakharov Prize laureate: Alexey Navalny](#). 2021. (EN, FR, DE, ES, IT, PL + RU)
 - [2020 Sakharov Prize laureate: The democratic opposition in Belarus](#). 2020. (EN, FR, DE, ES, IT, PL + BE)