

Oleg Sentsov

2018 Sakharov Prize laureate



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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THINK TANK – TOPICAL DIGEST

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The promotion and protection of human rights is a core and founding value of the EU. This year is one with double landmarks in the field of human rights, being the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the 30th anniversary of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize. Awarded annually since 1988, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is one of the actions through which the European Parliament supports human rights. The prize is awarded to individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to the fight for human rights across the globe, with the aim of drawing attention to human rights violations as well as supporting the laureates and their cause. This year's Sakharov prize laureate, Oleg Sentsov (born 1976), is a Ukrainian film-director, who was detained on 10 May 2014 in Simferopol, Crimea, and sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of plotting terrorist acts against Russian de facto rule in Crimea. Amnesty International described the court process as 'an unfair trial before a military court'. Sentsov was sentenced because he opposed the illegal and forced annexation of part of his country by its belligerent neighbour, which was a blatant violation both of international law, and of Russia's international and bilateral commitments. His conviction has become a powerful symbol of the fate of approximately 70 Ukrainian citizens illegally arrested and convicted to long prison sentences by the Russian occupying forces in the Crimean peninsula following its annexation. The following publications of the European Parliament's Research Service and its Policy Departments provide background information and analysis on the core principles of human rights.

The 2018 Sakharov Prize

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen and Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2018. Thirty years after it was first awarded, the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought retains all its symbolic meaning, as human rights continue to be embattled in many parts of the world and the courage of those who stand up for them deserves to be widely recognised. This note shows how, by awarding the 2018 prize to the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov – currently an inmate in a penal colony in Siberia – Parliament aims to increase the pressure on Russia to release Sentsov, and to draw attention to the struggle of all Ukrainian political prisoners currently behind bars in Russia and the annexed Crimean peninsula.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its relevance for the European Union

'At a glance' note by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2018 Seventy years after its adoption, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has achieved all the significance its drafters had hoped for. It has served as the foundation for the legal codification of human rights, at global, regional and national levels. Even if non-binding in nature, it has had a significant role in shaping many national constitutions, and many of its provisions have been incorporated into customary international law. This note shows the important role of the UDHR in guiding EU external policies and its use as a reference for EU legislation.

30 Years of the Sakharov Prize: The European Parliament upholding freedom of thought

Study by Päivi Vaniomäki and Étienne Deschamps, Historical Archives Unit, EPRS, May 2018

This study, produced from archival material held by Parliament, looks first at the process by which the Sakharov Prize was instituted by the Parliament in the 1980s, at the decision to name it after Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, and at the conditions established for its award. It then looks at the short-lists and winners over each of the past 30 years, and features photos of the award ceremonies.

Indivisibility of Human Rights: Unifying the two Covenants on Human Rights?

'At a glance' note by Joanna Apap, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2018

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), initially drafted in 1954 as a single document, are the foundation of the international human rights regime. However, in light of reforms seeking to address fragmentation and become more transparent and accountable, more and more stakeholders are raising the question of whether it is time to step over the Cold War ideological rift and to codify the two covenants into a single document.

EU policies – Delivering for citizens: Human Rights

Briefing by Martina Prpic, Rosamund Shreeves and Ionel Zamfir European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2018

The pivotal role of human rights, and their moral, legal and political significance in the international arena, are indisputable 70 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first international document to set common standards for all states. However, despite a lot of progress in many areas in terms of recognition, codification and implementation, human rights have more recently come under increased attack from various angles. Illiberal forces aspiring to power, and entrenched authoritarian regimes, often attempt to undermine human rights and those who defend them. This briefing seeks to set out the EU's approach in order to strengthen its role and image as a normative power that will inspire others through its example.

EU support for human rights defenders around the world

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2018

Human rights defenders (HRD) operate in an increasingly restrictive environment and face a growing number of threats. The European Parliament has been a long-time advocate for a comprehensive EU policy on HRD and has actively contributed to its shaping. This briefing summarises EU policy on HRD and provides examples of EU action. It also elaborates on the European Parliament's role through the award of the Sakharov Prize.

EU policies – Delivering for citizens: EU support for democracy and peace in the world

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, October 2018

From the outset, the European Union has been an integration project directed at preserving peace among its Member States – a fundamental objective that it has succeeded in achieving for over 60 years. Strengthening peace and democracy globally has never been an easy task, however, and today's geopolitical context poses new challenges. The proliferation and increasing gravity and duration of conflicts – some in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, the emergence of new threats, such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and the crisis of liberal systems have driven the EU to widen and intensify its efforts. They have also led to a new vision for action, revolving around the concept of 'resilient societies' based on the mutually reinforcing pillars of peace and democracy, and a special emphasis on fragile states. This briefing explores citizens' expectations with regard to the EU in its role as promotor of peace and democracy externally.

Towards a binding international treaty on business and human rights

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, October 2018

To prevent human rights abuses by transnational corporations, the UN established an intergovernmental working group in 2014, to draft a binding treaty on human rights and business. After warning of the danger of undermining the UN Guiding Principles at the outset, the EU is now a strong advocate for a treaty encompassing all businesses, not only transnational ones. However, the treaty remains controversial. This briefing gives an overview of the debate and discusses the proposed treaty and stakeholders' positions.

International Criminal Court: Achievements and challenges 20 years after the adoption of the Rome Statute

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2018

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has conducted investigations and trials in connection with some of the world's most brutal conflicts, and has not shied away from investigating even at the highest level of power. However, the Court has encountered difficulties and inherent limitations: atrocities committed by groups such as ISIL/Da'esh have been out of its reach, and the unwillingness of some states to join or cooperate have put strain on its authority. This briefing outlines the Court's structure, its main challenges and the EU's support.

Sakharov Prize: Voices of humanity

'At a glance' note by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2018

The EU is committed to protecting human rights through its external policy, in line with the Treaty on European Union. Supporting human rights defenders is an important part of this policy, as the EU recognises that they play a key role in standing up for fundamental rights and protecting people whose human rights have been violated. The EU helps them by making political statements and démarches, providing emergency aid and encouraging third countries to create a friendly environment for them.

Targeted sanctions against individuals on grounds of grave human rights violations – impact, trends and prospects at EU level

Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for External Policies, April 2018

Rather than affecting a state as a whole, sanctions nowadays often target individuals identified as responsible for human rights abuses. But how effective are individual sanctions? This study presents the most recent developments in international sanctions practice and provides recommendations on how to improve the tool at EU level. It discusses risks and benefits of adopting global Magnitsky-type legislation, which could allow for the designation of human rights abusers worldwide.

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

'At a glance' note by Joanna Apap, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2018

In the 12 years of its existence, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has actively defended human rights worldwide. Its robust mandate and set of unique mechanisms, such as universal periodic review and special procedures, provide a system for prevention, technical assistance and capacity-building, as well as a mechanism to respond to cases of grave violations of human rights. This note outlines the UNHRC's mandate, structure and functioning.

One step forward and two steps back for human rights in the world

'At a glance' note by Joanna Apap, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2018

The European Parliament's resolution on human rights and democracy 2017 calls upon the EU to place human rights at the core of its external relations. It acknowledges progress made regarding the empowerment of women but warns of sexual and gender-based violence as a result of conflict and migration. New challenges for human rights also arise due to technological developments, as well as terrorism involving psychological intimidation through the destruction of heritage sites.

Expansion of the concept of human rights: Impact on rights promotion and protection

Workshop report by European Parliament's Policy Department for External Policies, March 2018

Does a broadened human rights concept strengthen or undermine existing human rights standards? The workshop organised by the DROI sub-committee on 24 January 2018 brought together academics, NGO representatives and the EEAS to discuss risks and benefits of a broadened human rights concept. This report summarises participants' contributions and provides two briefings on the issue by participants Rosa Freedman (University of Reading) and Malcolm Langford (University of Oslo).

Further reading

[Major sporting events versus human rights: Parliament's position on the 1978 FIFA World Cup in Argentina and the 1980 Moscow Olympics](#)

Briefing by Christian Salm, Historical Archives Unit, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2018

[Human rights in EU trade policy: Unilateral measures applied by the EU](#)

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2018

[Freedom of conscience around the world](#)

Briefing by Philippe Perchoc, European Parliamentary Research Service, April 2018

[The 2017 Sakharov Prize](#)

'At a glance' note by Enrique Gomez and Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2017

[The political crisis in Venezuela](#)

Briefing by Enrique Gomez, European Parliamentary Research Service December 2017

[Sakharov Prize Finalists 2017](#)

Briefing by European Parliament's Policy Department for External Policies, December 2017

[Democracy support in EU external policy](#)

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2018

[Arbitrary detention of women and children for immigration-related purposes](#)

Briefing by Joanna Apap, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2016

[Towards a comprehensive EU protection system for minorities](#)

Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, August 2017

[Sakharov Prize 2016: Fighting conflict-related sexual violence](#)

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2016

[The 2015 Sakharov Prize](#)

At a Glance by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2015

[Sakharov Prize 2014: Tending the scars of sexual violence in Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

'At a glance' note by Marta Latek, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2014

[The European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, 1988-2013 - A Quarter Century's Engagement in Human Rights](#)

Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for External Policies, December 2013

You can access this Topical Digest at

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD_Sakharov_Prize_2018.pdf & <https://epthinktank.eu/high-level-conferences>

or by scanning the QR code.

More information on the Europarl website:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize/en/home/the-prize.html>

