Parliament awards Sakharov Prize 2017 to Democratic Opposition in Venezuela

Venezuela's Democratic Opposition are this year's laureates of the European Parliament Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. The award ceremony will be held in Strasbourg on 13 December.

The Democratic Opposition in Venezuela have been announced as this year's Sakharov Prize laureate, following a decision by Parliament President Antonio Tajani and the political groups leaders on 26 October. The Democratic Opposition includes the country's national assembly (Julio Borges) and all political prisoners as listed by Foro Penal Venezolano represented by Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, Daniel Ceballos, Yon Goicoechea, Lorent Saleh, Alfredo Ramos and Andrea González.

When announcing this year's Sakharov laureates, Tajani said: “By awarding the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Democratic Opposition in Venezuela, we are reaffirming our unwavering support to the democratically-elected national assembly of Venezuela. We are also calling for the peaceful transition to democracy that the Venezuelan people are desperately calling for.

“This prize not only recognises the Democratic Opposition of Venezuela's courageous struggle, the European Parliament also wants to express its proximity to and pay tribute to the Venezuelan people: to all those who have been unjustly jailed for expressing their opinion, to those struggling to survive on a daily basis because of a brutal regime, to those families in mourning because they have lost loved ones in months of uninterrupted protests for freedom.”

Democratic Opposition in Venezuela

For the last several years, Venezuela has been in a political crisis. The ruling party has steadily limited the rule of law and in March 2017 the country's supreme court stripped the democratically-elected national assembly of legislative power.

The number of political prisoners now amounts to more than 600, according to the latest report by Foro Penal Venezolano (Venezuelan Penal Forum). They include prominent opposition
leaders Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, Daniel Ceballos, Yon Goicoechea, Lorent Saleh, Alfredo Ramos and Andrea González.

While Venezuela opposition leader Leopoldo López was temporarily granted house arrest in July after more than three years in detention, he was transferred back to prison in August 2017. Antonio Ledesma, another prominent opposition politician and the former mayor of Caracas, has been under house arrest since 2015, while fellow former mayors Alfredo Ramos, of Iribarren, and Daniel Ceballos, of San Cristobal, have also been imprisoned, as well as a student activist Lorent Saleh. Two Spanish citizens, Andrea Gonzalez and Yon Goicoechea, are also among the political prisoners.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 130 people have been killed in street protests, most of them in anti-government demonstrations and more than 500 people have been arbitrarily imprisoned.

Award ceremony

The prize, consisting of a certificate and €50,000, will be awarded during a ceremony in the Parliament in Strasbourg on 13 December.

The finalists

The Democratic Opposition in Venezuela were among the three finalists for the 2017 Sakharov Prize. Find out more about the other finalists Aura Lolita Chavez Ixcaquic and Dawit Isaak in this article. They will also be invited to December's award ceremony in Strasbourg.

About the Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honour of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, is awarded each year by the European Parliament. It was set up in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. Last year the prize was awarded to Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar.

Sakharov Prize: the process step by step

Find out more

Sakharov Prize website
Previous Sakharov Prize laureates
Audiovisual materials
Articles on the 2017 Sakharov Prize
Recent Parliament resolutions concerning Venezuela
Parliament urges Venezuela to restore democratic order and free all political prisoners (27 April 2017)
Venezuela: MEPs call for EU sanctions (14 September 2017)
Democratic Opposition in Venezuela are this year’s Sakharov Prize laureates ©EP/AP Images/Ariana Cubillos
SAKHAROV PRIZE
HOW IS THE LAUREATE CHOSEN?

The European Parliament awards the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to individuals or organisations who fight for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Minimum of MEPs or 1 political group

September

ASSESS NOMINATIONS

AFET

October

3 finalists voted by AFET and DEVE committees

DEVE

SHORTLIST

November

October

December

AWARD CEREMONY

Pitriary session in Strasbourg

LAUREATE

Selected by the Conference of Presidents

Check out how the winner of the Sakharov Prize is selected