

Oleg Sentsov receives the Sakharov Prize

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Ukrainian director **Oleg Sentsov** is this year's winner of the European Parliament Sakharov Prize ^[1] for Freedom of Thought. Announcing this year's laureate, EP president **Antonio Tajani** said: "Through his courage and determination, by putting his life in danger, filmmaker Oleg Sentsov has become a symbol of the struggle for the release of political prisoners being held in Russia and around the world. By awarding him the Sakharov Prize, the European Parliament is expressing its solidarity with him and his cause. We ask that he be released immediately. His struggle reminds us that it is our duty to defend human rights everywhere in the world and under all circumstances."

Film-industry professionals rushed to express their gratitude for this decision. European Film Academy ^[2] chairwoman **Agnieszka Holland** said, "We thank the European Parliament for this recognition of a man who not only believes in human rights, but also fights for them – even if it means personal damage to body and soul." EFA president **Wim Wenders** added, "We hope that this will lead to another wave of international protest and empathy which will in the end bring Oleg back home to his colleagues, his friends and family – including his two children."

Other film associations have also celebrated the awarding of the prize to Sentsov. FERA ^[3] chair **Dan Clifton** said, "His courage and fearlessness are an example to all of us, in defending the rights to freedom of expression, which are at the heart of cinema and of civilised societies across the world. As a community of European film directors, we again call for his immediate release by the Russian authorities."

Sentsov was sentenced to 20 years in prison by Russia for "plotting terrorist acts" against the Russian "de facto" rule in Crimea. Amnesty International has described the process as "an unfair trial before a military court". He has become a symbol for the approximately 70

Ukrainian citizens illegally arrested and given long prison sentences by the Russian occupying forces in the Crimean peninsula. Sentsov had been on hunger strike for 145 days, from mid-May until 6 October, when he ended it because of the threat of being force-fed.

The prize, consisting of a certificate and €50,000, will be awarded during a ceremony in the Parliament in Strasbourg on 12 December. Sentsov was chosen from a shortlist of three by the Parliament's political group leaders on 25 October.

[4] [4]

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Links

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

[2] <https://www.europeanfilmacademy.org/>

[3] <http://www.filmdirectors.eu/>

[4] <https://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=300>