# [Press release – 2018 Sakharov laureate Oleg Sentsov receives his award](#)



He was able to receive the [2018 prize for Freedom of Thought](#) in person after being released from prison on 7 September 2019 as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Russia and Ukraine. He was imprisoned for protesting against Russia's annexation of his native Crimea on Independence Square in Kyiv.

Awarding the prize, EP President David Sassoli said: "You have clearly stood by your principles and convictions, Mr. Sentsov, for which you have paid the very high price of freedom. No person should ever pay for that."

President Sassoli praised the courage of freedom fighters who speak up when human rights are being violated. "Mr Sentsov has been released but many others, including bloggers and journalists like Stanyslav Aseev, are still held hostage in Eastern Ukraine. We call for them to be freed."

[LInk to President Sassolil's full speech](#)

Receiving the prize, Oleg Sentsov said: "(…) It is a huge honour and a huge responsibility to receive this prize. I accept and take this prize not as a personal honour, but as a prize to all Ukrainian political prisoners that have been in Russian prisons and to all that are still there." He praised the EU and its democratic values and criticised Russia's "militarist" practices.

**About Oleg Sentsov**

Sentsov is a Ukrainian film director, sentenced to 20 years in prison for "plotting terrorist acts" against the Russian de facto rule in Crimea. Amnesty International has described the court 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 occupation forces in the Crimean peninsula.

Sentsov was on hunger strike from mid-May until 6 October 2018, when he ended the strike under threat of being force-fed.

Watch our [video](#) to find out more about Oleg Sentsov.

***More on the Sakharov Prize***

*The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honour of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded annually since 1988 to individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.*