



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Sakharov Walk of Freedom in Brussels

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The European Parliament will inaugurate the "Sakharov Walk of Freedom" on the Solidarnosc Esplanade in Brussels on Tuesday 10 December at 14.30.

The "Sakharov Walk of Freedom" consists of 43 ceramic-based tiles arranged on the Solidarnosc Esplanade outside the European Parliament in Brussels, with short texts inscribed on them in English about all the Sakharov Prize laureates.

The Walk will link the European Parliament Atrium visitors' facilities with the Solidarnosc Esplanade and the Parliamentarium museum.

The tiles will be arranged chronologically, starting with the inauguration tile and then going from 1988, when the Sakharov Prize was first awarded, in a circle towards 2019.

The inauguration ceremony will be opened with a speech by European Parliament President David Sassoli, followed by a statement from Sakharov Prize laureate Lorent Saleh, who received the prize in 2017 as part of the democratic opposition of Venezuela. This will be followed by the unveiling of the inauguration tile, photo opportunities and a walk through the tiles by invited guests and VIPs.

It was on a bright September day in 2019 that Oleg Sentsov finally came back in Ukraine. He was among a group of 35 Ukrainian political prisoners and soldiers exchanged with 35 Russian detainees. In 2018, the European Parliament awarded the Ukrainian filmmaker with the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. "When you are alone and you don't feel supported it's hard. But I knew people were supporting me and that helped me to be strong. Thank you for that support." Oleg Sentsov spent most of his 5 years imprisoned in Russia in a penal colony deep inside the Arctic Circle, some 2,000 kilometres from Moscow.

Oleg Sentsov was arrested in 2014 after protesting, like thousands of Ukrainians, against Russia's annexation of his native Crimea on Independence Square in Kiev. "Following his arrest, Oleg was tortured. They told him, 'Confess and you will only get 7 or 8 years in prison. Admit it was you who carried out the arson attacks. Admit you were the mastermind behind the attacks on the monuments". In 2015, he was condemned to 20 years in prison for preparing a terrorist attack and arms trafficking. Grinning sarcastically in court, he hummed the Ukrainian national anthem. "I have been in your wonderful country for a year where I watch your television, your news bulletins are very good programmes, your propaganda is working well."

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Amnesty International denounced it as a show trial; his lawyer called it a mockery of due process. In September 2018, the once strapping filmmaker looked weak and undernourished. He was 139 days into a hunger strike. A few days later on 6 October, Oleg Sentsov was forced to end his strike. "145 days into his hunger strike his body was shutting down and doctors told him, 'either we tie you to your bed and force feed you through a tube or you decide to end your hunger strike and feed yourself of your own volition.'" Now a free man, Oleg Sentsov is calling for the liberation of the remaining political prisoners in Russia. "I don't want to look back at the past, I want to look at the present and into the future.

The problem now is our prisoners who are still behind bars."

Today, Oleg Sentsov continues to be positive about the future as a filmmaker and as a human rights activist. "I'm going to continue to make films, like before. I'm working on it and if everything goes well, we'll start shooting a film in a year. I am also going to be more engaged in civic activism, both officially and professionally."

Both Oleg Sentsov and the European Parliament have renewed their calls for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Russia and Crimea.

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