



Two Iranian activists, lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and film director Jafar Panahi, are this year's joint winners of the European Parliament Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. They were chosen by President Schulz and political group leaders on Friday, 26 October.

"The award of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to the Iranians Nasrin Sotoudeh and Jafar Panahi is a message of solidarity and recognition to a woman and a man who have not been bowed by fear and intimidation and who have decided to put the fate of their country before their own. I sincerely hope they will be able to come in person to Strasbourg to the European Parliament to collect their prize in December", said President Schulz, announcing the winner after the meeting.

President Schulz will award the prize at a formal sitting of Parliament during the December plenary session, in Strasbourg.

Nasrin Sotoudeh

Nasrin Sotoudeh, born in 1963, is an Iranian lawyer and human rights advocate. She has represented opposition activists imprisoned following Iran's disputed June 2009 presidential elections, juveniles facing the death penalty, women and prisoners of conscience. She was arrested in September 2010 on charges of spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security and has been held in solitary confinement.

Sotoudeh has two children. She recently started a hunger strike in protest against the state's harassment of her family.

Jafar Panahi

Jafar Panahi, born in 1960, is an Iranian film director, screenwriter and film editor. He first achieved international recognition with his film *The White Balloon* that won the *Caméra d'Or* at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. His films often focus on the hardships faced by children, the impoverished and women in Iran.

Mr Panahi was arrested in March 2010 and later sentenced to six years in jail and a 20-year ban on directing any movies or leaving the country. His latest film "*This Is Not a Film*" was smuggled from Iran to the 2011 Cannes Film Festival on a USB stick hidden inside a cake.

Sotoudeh and Panahi were nominated by the Socialists and Democrats, Liberals and Democrats and Greens/European Free Alliance groups as well as by José Ignacio Salafranca, Elmar Brok and 11 other MEPs.

The two other finalists were Ales Bialiatski and Pussy Riot

Background

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honor of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded by the European Parliament every year since 1988 to individuals or organizations that have made an important contribution to the fight for human rights or democracy. The prize is accompanied by an award of €50,000.

Source: [European Parliament](#)