9 October, 2013

Conference of Presidents
European Parliament

Open letter in support of Edward Snowden's nomination for the Sakharov prize

Dear Presidents,

We write to you on behalf of 23 European non-governmental organisations protecting fundamental rights, including the freedom of expression and information, to lend our support to the selection of Edward Snowden for the Sakharov Prize.

Edward Snowden's recent disclosures have triggered a necessary and long-overdue public debate in the United States and beyond about the acceptable boundaries of surveillance in a democratic state and about the legitimacy and proportionality of counter-terrorism intelligence activities. The revelations also have prompted debates in the European Union.

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought was established to recognise individuals actively working to defend human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the right to freedom of expression. We believe that by his personal example, Snowden meets these criteria. His nomination to the Prize is in itself a contribution to the development of democracy and the rule of law in the European Union, in particular with regards to the protection of whistleblowers. It also sends a message of respect for international law. Awarding the Prize to Snowden would give a clear signal to the world that the EU values and protects those who are attacked for speaking out on violations of human rights. Daniel Ellsberg and earlier NSA whistleblowers have praised Snowden's actions. We are convinced that Andrei Sakharov would have done the same.

Sakharov – a nuclear physicist turned opponent of a repressive state – used his position in national security and defence to raise concerns about the preservation of human rights. Similarly, Snowden used his professional knowledge to draw attention to abuses of the fundamental rights of individuals and their effect on entire societies. In their transition from state servants to citizens' rights advocates, both men became dissidents, in the full knowledge of the likely cost of this action to them. It is the moral duty of the European Union to acknowledge a man who bravely stood up for our basic human rights, anticipating the cost that his action would have for his personal liberty.

We are fully aware that all shortlisted candidates fully deserve their nomination and we understand that the choice is difficult. However, not all candidates are in the same position. Other nominees have already been provided with many other awards and are less controversial, as their activism is directed against totalitarian regimes.

When deciding the winner of the Sakharov Prize, please remember that Snowden has shown to the world that blanket and unaccountable surveillance is not limited to dictatorships, but that democracies can also undermine citizens' fundamental freedoms. Please also keep in mind that one of the few things the European Union can do right now is to support Edward Snowden.

Snowden's actions represent a challenge to unfettered state power at the global level, and without regard to conventional and simple nationalist dynamics. An award would point the way towards safeguarding activism without borders in a networked world. So far Edward Snowden has received neither recognition for his courageous deeds nor support from the European Union collectively, from any individual Member State or from any single European institution.

As European citizens we believe that the Sakharov Prize would be the best way to change this undesirable state of affairs. Therefore we strongly encourage you to award the Sakharov Prize to Edward Snowden in honour of his courage and commitment to values that the Prize represents.

Sincerely yours,

Alternative Informatics Association, Turkey
ApTI, Romania
Arbeitskreis Vorratsdatenspeicherung, Germany
ARTICLE 19, International
Bits of Freedom, The Netherlands
Chaos Computer Club e.V., Germany
DFRI, Sweden
Digitalcourage, Germany
Digitale Gesellschaft e.V., Germany
Electronic Frontier Finland
European Digital Rights (EDRi)
Foundation for Information Policy Research, UK
Initiative für Netzfreiheit, Austria
Internet Society, Poland Chapter
IT-Political Association of Denmark
Iuridicum Remedium, Czech Republic
La Quadrature du Net, France
Modern Poland Foundation, Poland
Net Users' Rights Protection Association (NURPA), Belgium
Open Rights Group, UK
Panoptykon Foundation, Poland
Transnational Institute, The Netherlands
Vrijschrift, The Netherlands