

Sakharov Prize

You may recall that there was a dreadful incident in Iraq. The United Nations had its headquarters there and a bomb exploded and killed a large number of very senior personnel, some of them very close career-long friends and allies of Kofi Annan. So this solemn moment had meanings at all sorts of levels for Kofi Annan – the institutional meaning, the personal meaning, the friends who were gone. Some United Nations personnel who had been injured in that place came there in wheelchairs and we celebrated them also. So it was a very special moment of embrace for a valued system of multilateralism and engagement that is deeply embedded, I think, in the psyche of the European institutions and in the European Parliament.

Among others I remember from the Sakharov Prize is Oswaldo Payá from Cuba, who unhappily has died in recent months in an accident. But the great strength of the Sakharov Prize is to pick the unknown persons who fight the good fight in great, great difficulty and who are brought out and we shine a light on them. They do not seek the reward of fame or gratification but it may be for them an additional protection because their integrity frequently puts them at high risk.