Dear Members of the European Parliament,

Dear Colleagues,

**The EPP Group has nominated Alexei Navalny, a Russian political opposition activist and critic of corruption and nepotism, for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. With this letter, we appeal to you to support the candidature of Alexei Navalny and point out the significance of such decision. We are absolutely sure, that giving an award to Alexei Navalny would play a very important role in supporting the opposition in Russia and their fight for democracy and human rights.**

**Alexei Navalny, born 4 June 1976, who first became known as anti-corruption lawyer, is renowned for his activities since 2008, when he started blogging about corruption and malpractice in the state apparatus and state-controlled corporations, revealing lavish lifestyles of political and economic elite in Russia.** He is the founder of the **Anti-Corruption Foundation,** established in 2011, which conducts meticulous investigations and exposes corruption and nepotism cases, which the elite finds hard to refute. The activities of the Foundation are funded exclusively by private donations of Russian citizens. Alexei Navalny focuses on social media, such as **YouTube channel** through which he exposes the corruption of high-ranking government officials. It is one of the most viewed political content social media channels in Russia, with **over 3 million subscribers**. In 2013 Alexei Navalny ran as a candidate in Moscow city mayor elections and came out the second. The authorities have barred him from running in the 2018 Presidential elections. Alexei Navalny is recognized domestically and internationally as the most prominent leader of real opposition in Russia.

Due to his critics towards Putin's entourage and ruling party "United Russia", **Alexei Navalny** **faces constant pressure from the authorities**. He has spent a total of close to 300 days in jail since 2011, mostly serving short terms for alleged infractions of laws governing public demonstrations.

·         In 2011 Alexei Navalny was arrested and imprisoned for the first time, after his speech at one of the largest anti-government rallies in front of the State Duma.

·         In 2013 Alexei Navalny was detained, charged with embezzlement and on 18 July sentenced to 5 years in prison, but released free the next day after a huge protest rally in Moscow; in October 2013 the sentence was substituted for a suspended sentence. In 2014 Alexei Navalny served a year under house arrest because of Yves Rocher case investigation. Alexei Navalny and his brother were sentenced in this case 3,5 years of suspended sentence for Alexey Navalny and 3,5 years in prison for his brother Oleg. **Sentences in both cases where recognized as unfair and politically motivated by the ECHR**;

·         In 2017, he published a report linking Prime Minister Medvedev to a wealthy property empire. This sparked anti-corruption rallies in many Russian cities.  Police has arrested over 1,000 demonstrators, Alexei Navalny included. In 2017 Navalny was attacked with an antiseptic green dye that damaged vision in one of his eyes.

·         Alexei Navalny was jailed five times in 2018 and 2019 for organising public protests, most recently in July 2019, during the protests after Russian authorities banned a number of independent and opposition candidates from taking part in Moscow City Council elections. He was sentenced to 30 days in prison for allegedly violating the country's protest laws. In serving the sentence, Alexei Navalny was hospitalized after suffering from an acute allergic reaction after possible exposure to an unidentified toxic agent.

**We invite you to support the candidacy of Alexei Navalny for the Sakharov Prize, to demonstrate the European Parliament's position in support of right to freedom of speech and association, free and fair elections, fight with corruption and for the rule of law in Russia - the basic rights and values which are embodied and supported by the EP.**

The long track of activities of Alexei Navalny and wide-spread public support, despite repressions of authorities against him personally, against his relatives, his supporters and colleagues, demonstrate his commitment to these values.

The European Parliament thus will also send a **signal to the civil society in Russia**, that it hears the voice of younger generation of Russians, who want change and alternatives to corrupt ruling elites and seeks to achieve this by peaceful and democratic means. By voting for the candidature of Alexei Navalny, the Members will be voting **for the future with more democracy, more freedom and more justice in Russia.** We will demonstrate that not only politically active fearless part of Russian society, but also **Members of the European Parliament sincerely believe that positive change is possible in Russia**.

Russian nation is still struggling to become a truly democratic European-type country. Unfortunately, for the time being the policy of authorities, despite efforts of the opposition, is moving to the opposite direction.

Today, the European Parliament has the opportunity to demonstrate that it **stands in solidarity with the whole opposition in Russia** in their struggle for basic human and democracy rights. Awarding Alexei Navalny would mean awarding not a single individual, but, **symbolically, the whole struggling opposition**. The European Parliament could thus show, that it considers the **future of democracy in Russia** as one of the most important challenges not only to Russia, but also to the EU.

It should be noted that since 2000, the European Parliament on many different occasions has expressed its ever-deeper concern with the worsening human rights and political rights situation in Russia. There were many statements of solidarity with those who are fighting for democracy in Russia. This is the time, when the European Parliament has an opportunity to demonstrate its support for political opposition fighting for those values with a very real action.

We need to remember that **Andrei Sakharov himself was foremost a fighter for democracy and human rights in Russia.**

It is a very important moment when awarding the Sakharov Prize to opposition in Russia can **make a change in history**.

Sincerely,

Andrius Kubilius, MEP

Rasa Juknevičienė, MEP