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Navalny Calls Sakharov Prize an 'Honor,' Thanks European Parliament

By AFP

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The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought went to Navalny after he was passed over for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. **EPA / TASS**

Jailed Kremlin critic and anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny said Thursday that his Sakharov prize — the EU's top human rights award — is an "honor."

"This is not only an honor, but also a great responsibility," Navalny, whose social media accounts are run by his team, said on Twitter.

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"I am just one of those many who fight corruption because I consider it not only as the cause of poverty and degradation of states, but also as the main threat to human rights," the 45-year-old opposition politician said.

"I am very grateful to the European Parliament for appreciating our work so highly. We will continue to do our best."

The European Parliament on Wednesday gave its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in a move backed by parliament's main political groups after Navalny was nominated but passed over for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

Navalny "has shown great courage in his attempts to restore the freedom of choice to the Russian people," said European Parliament vice president Heidi Hautala, announcing the prize.

Earlier Thursday the Kremlin said it had no respect for the European Parliament's decision.

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"We respect this body, but no one can make us respect such decisions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He said the decision "significantly devalues the meaning" of words like freedom of thought.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's best-known domestic opponent last year survived a poisoning attack with Novichok nerve agent that he blames on the Kremlin.

After returning to Russia in January from Germany, where he was treated, he was arrested and convicted on old embezzlement charges. He is now serving a two-and-a-half-year prison sentence in a penal colony outside Moscow.

Earlier this year Navalny published a column published in The Guardian and Le Monde newspapers urging Western governments to tackle graft, calling it a global problem.

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