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## Hostages in Columbia

### The European Parliament demands the release of hostages in Columbia

Before the votes in the European Parliament on Wednesday 12 March 2008, a declaration in support of the hostages held by the FARC was presented by EP President Hans-Gert Poettering.

During the last Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament, the Greens/EFA Group asked for the possibility for each political group to react in plenary after the speech of the Mr. Poettering. This proposal was rejected.

After the speech, Greens/EFA MEPs accompanied by other MEPs from other political groups held up posters of **Ingrid Betancourt**.

The Greens/EFA group hopes that this message from the European Parliament succeeds in reaching the FARC who are asked to free all of their hostages and find a humanitarian solution to the problem.

For Green/EFA members of the EP, the only solution that will save the political hostages would be a call to the FARC asking for the immediate release of political hostages, to open dialogue by exchanging combatants with the government and a firm commitment to stopping the practice of taking hostages, something that would mean they will no longer be on the European list of terrorists groups.

In 2006, the Greens/EFA proposed **Ingrid Betancourt** (and all those fighting for the release of the kidnapped hostages in Colombia) as their candidate for the Sakharov Prize. The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is awarded each year by the European Parliament.

The European Parliament Sakharov prize symbolises European support for those who put their life and liberty at stake for the sake of speaking out. It is an instrument for the diplomacy of the European Parliament to promote democracy abroad.

The recognition that comes with winning the prize affords a certain profile to the winners. Their cause is amplified as it becomes more well-known.

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