

EV50 The Europeans of the Year

# The Europeans of the Year – 2007

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Dalia Grybauskaitė, last year's Commissioner of the Year, Valdas Adamkus, this year's European of the Year, Mirella Visser, a Campaigner of the Year nominee, and Viviane Reding, this year's Commissioner of the Year

## Promoting freedom and democracy

Voting for the Europeans of the Year showed concern for human rights, climate change – and cheaper telephone calls. **Simon Taylor** reports from an awards ceremony that touched on the EU's difficult relations with its neighbours

THIS year's EV50 awards ceremony honouring the ten men and women responsible for some of the European Union's biggest achievements in the past year was held in the sumptuous Palais d'Egmont, the historic home of the Belgian foreign ministry. The setting was appropriate since this year so many of the awards reflected the EU's growing importance in international affairs and the Union's role in addressing external challenges like spreading freedom and democracy beyond its borders and fighting against climate change.

For the first time, the prestigious European of the Year award was won by a head of state from one of the countries that joined the Union in 2004, Lithuania's Valdas Adamkus. In his acceptance speech, Adamkus stressed how Europe had represented a "dream of

peace and freedom" for his country during 50 years of Soviet oppression. Adamkus sent a strong warning to other EU leaders that Europe could not afford to turn its back on its neighbours where European values of freedom of speech were being denied citizens. "There are people being beaten up and arrested in EU neighbouring countries," he

said, mentioning Ukraine and Georgia as countries which were still not free and democratic societies.

The struggle for core standards of human rights and democracy was evidently also prominent in *European Voice* readers' minds when they voted for 'Non-EU citizen of the Year'. The award went to Garry Kasparov, leader of the United Civil Front op-

position movement and former Russian chess grand master. Kasparov could not be there in person as he was arrested last Saturday (24 November) for taking part in a demonstration against Russian President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party and is still in jail. Event host Peter Sutherland read out a letter from Kasparov's wife,

Daria. "It gives great comfort and strength to him to know that there is a keen awareness of issues," she said in the letter.

The award for 'Diplomat of the Year' illustrated the EU's leverage in international affairs. Readers voted to give the award to External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and German Foreign Minister

Frank-Walter Steinmeier for their role in freeing the six medics held under the threat of the death penalty in Libya. The two could not be there in person to accept the award as they were in Annapolis for the Middle East peace talks.

But Ferrero-Waldner sent a video message from the US and apologised for not being there. "I'm always on the move depending on where the agenda takes me," she said. The commissioner said that freeing the medical workers had been "one of the worthiest investments of my life", having taken two and half years of work. She also said that the liberation of the six and the assistance for the children infected with HIV was a "European success" and praised Steinmeier as a "brilliant and thoroughly professional diplomat". She also thanked the UK and Italy for their contribution

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### Winners

■ **European of the Year**

Valdas Adamkus

■ **Stateswoman of the Year**

Angela Merkel

■ **Commissioner of the Year**

Viviane Reding

■ **MEP of the Year**

Claudio Fava

■ **Diplomat of the Year**

Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Frank-Walter Steinmeier

■ **Campaigner of the Year**

Arnold Schwarzenegger

■ **Business Leader of the Year**

Richard Branson

■ **Journalist of the Year**

Reneta Nikolova

■ **Achiever of the Year**

Jean-Claude Trichet

■ **Non-EU Citizen of the Year**

Garry Kasparov