

16 September

Sasha Paskal receives standing applause at European Parliament



President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has told the European Parliament about Ukrainian gymnast Oleksandra Paskal and her world tour "Dance of Freedom", during her annual State of the European Union address. Ten-year-old Sasha, who lost a leg in a russian missile strike and returned to gymnastics on a prosthesis, was present in the chamber as a special guest and was honoured by members of the Parliament. This summer the [Rinat Akhmetov Foundation](#) organised her [tour across five continents](#).

What did Ursula von der Leyen say about Sasha?

During her State of the European Union address, the President of the European Commission spoke about Sasha as an example of the resilience of Ukrainians. She recalled that the girl had lost a leg in a russian missile strike, yet returned to sport on a prosthesis, continued to train and went on winning. "She has inspired people at the Eiffel Tower and in Times Square, in Rio and in Tokyo. And today, she wants to bring her message right here, to the heart of Europe. Sasha, you are a great inspiration to all of us," said Ms von der Leyen. She also described russia's strikes on Ukrainian cities as a deliberate strategy of terror, while stressing that Ukrainians have proved many times that their spirit cannot be broken.

What is the "Dance of Freedom" tour?

"Dance of Freedom" is a world tour organised this summer by the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation, together with Shakhtar Donetsk football club, to tell the world about the strength of Ukrainians and Ukraine's fight for freedom. Oleksandra, known as Sasha, performed in Paris, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Nairobi and Tokyo, carrying her message across five continents. Her appearance before the European Parliament brought that message to Europe's main parliamentary chamber.

Who is Oleksandra Paskal?

Sasha is a ten-year-old gymnast from the Odesa region of Ukraine. In 2022 she lost a leg in a russian missile strike, and after treatment and rehabilitation she returned

to rhythmic gymnastics on a prosthesis. She has since resumed competing and winning, and in 2025 received the "Future of Ukraine" state honour from President Volodymyr Zelensky and First Lady Olena Zelenska. Through her "Dance of Freedom" tour she has become known around the world as a symbol of the resilience of Ukraine's children.

What did the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation say?

Natalya Yemchenko, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at SCM and Chair of the Supervisory Board of the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation, said: "To watch the European Parliament rise for a ten-year-old Ukrainian girl today was deeply moving. When they stood up for Sasha, they were applauding every Ukrainian child who has refused to let the war take away their hope. She has carried that message across five continents, and to see her welcomed as President von der Leyen's special guest is a moment of real pride for us. Sasha's strength speaks for a whole generation, and the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation will keep supporting Ukrainian children's dreams."

How is the Rinat Akhmetov Foundation supporting Ukraine's children?

The Rinat Akhmetov Foundation organised the "Dance of Freedom" tour as part of its wider work for children affected by the war. The Foundation continues to support these children, helping them to regain a sense of safety, stability and belief in the future, and to keep alive the dreams that Sasha's journey represents.