



**Der Internationale  
Karlspreis zu Aachen**  
Für die Einheit Europas

## **From 'Whatever it takes' to a European vision: The International Charlemagne Prize honours Mario Draghi for his services to Europe.**

Today, Saturday 17 January, Armin Laschet, Member of the German Parliament and Chairman of the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors, and Dr Michael Ziemons, Lord Mayor of the City of Aachen, announced the laureate of the 2026 Charlemagne Prize. During a critical time for Europe, the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen 2026 was awarded to the former President of the European Central Bank and former Italian Prime Minister, Professor Mario Draghi. With this award the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors wishes to honour Draghi not only for his achievement in stabilising the Monetary Union, but also intends to send a political message: Europe's future and sovereignty rest on its economic strength. Draghi is being honoured for his pioneering efforts to strengthen European competitiveness, which he most recently outlined in his highly acclaimed 'Draghi Report'.

‘Mario Draghi is one of those who fight for a Europe capable of action. He is both visionary and a pragmatist. Draghi stands for a Europe capable of action. The world is not waiting for Europe to get its act together. The EU Commission and the heads of government must implement the Draghi report on competitiveness now, without delay,’ said Laschet, explaining the choice of the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors.

Draghi is being honoured for his exceptional achievements, his pivotal role in stabilising the European Economic and Monetary Union, and his efforts to promote European competitiveness.

Ziemons explains why Draghi is being honoured with the award at this particular moment: “Draghi is calling for a visionary agenda that addresses key social challenges at this decisive moment for Europe, such as digitalisation, energy, and innovation. This long-term perspective is valuable because it aims to tackle urgent global challenges more effectively and secure sustainable living conditions for future generations.”

The Charlemagne Prize will be awarded in the Coronation Hall of Aachen City Hall on Ascension Day, 14 May 2026.

### **Classification and justification**

By selecting Mario Draghi, the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors has responded to the dramatic geopolitical situation. At a time when Europe is at risk of losing its strategic autonomy and becoming a pawn of global powers, economic strength is essential for the EU's security, sovereignty, and determining its own future.

Like no other, Professor Mario Draghi embodies the commitment to safeguard this economic strength and empower Europe to take action. The Executive Board honours him as a visionary and a man of action who has risen to the challenge in times of crisis. He has proven his exceptional leadership skills in rescuing the euro with his famed ‘whatever it takes’ promise, stabilising Italy during the pandemic, and now devising a future agenda for the entire continent. Draghi has proven that he is willing to make courageous decisions for the greater good, even when faced with opposition.

More than a tribute to his past achievements, this award calls to action the continent's political decision-makers. It aims to underline the urgent need to revitalise Europe's economic base. The Executive Board,



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therefore, is calling on the European Commission and heads of state and government to now resolutely implement the future agenda outlined in the Draghi Report in order to secure Europe's place in the world for future generations.

### **Quotes**

#### **Armin Laschet, Member of the German Parliament, Chairman of the Charlemagne Prize Board of Directors:**

"Mario Draghi is one of those who fight for a Europe capable of action. He is both visionary and a pragmatist. Draghi stands for a Europe capable of action. The world is not waiting for Europe to get its act together. The EU Commission and the heads of government must implement the Draghi report on competitiveness now, without delay."

"Europe wants and needs to be a strong and sovereign actor on the world stage. In order to do so, it requires defence capabilities. However, it also requires economic strength, which is why Europe's competitiveness will be the most crucial issue in 2026. Without economic competitiveness, Europe will ultimately lack the financial, technological and industrial grounds to guarantee its security, maintain its prosperity, and act independently in political terms."

"He stabilised and reformed Italy during a time of crisis, and his words, 'whatever it takes', have never been more relevant. That is why we are calling on Europe's heads of government, the President of the European Commission and all the Commissioners to overcome their trepidations. 'Whatever it takes' now applies to Europe's competitiveness and ability to act. Implement the recommendations set out in Mario Draghi's report."

#### **Professor Mario Draghi, 2026 Charlemagne Prize laureate:**

"I am very honoured to receive the Charlemagne Prize. It has shaped the history of Europe over the last 75 years."

"We must preserve Europe and come together more closely than ever before. We must overcome our internal conflicts and vulnerabilities and grow stronger economically, militarily, and politically. Only in this way will we be able to preserve our values, our legacy, and pass them on to future generations. Thank you, thank you again."

#### **Dr Michael Ziemons, Lord Mayor of the City of Aachen, said:**

"Draghi is calling for a visionary agenda that addresses key social challenges, such as digitalisation, energy and innovation, at a crucial time for Europe. This long-term perspective is most valuable, as it aims to tackle urgent global issues more effectively and ensure sustainable living conditions for future generations."

"Draghi promotes closer political and economic cooperation between EU Member States. Military cooperation alone is insufficient to a more autonomous Europe in an ever-changing world. Europe as a whole needs greater cohesion and economic competitiveness."

"Draghi has demonstrated the need for ideas and strategies, as well as the courage to implement them. By presenting this year's award, we are calling on all decision-makers in Europe."



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### **Brief profile**

**Mario Draghi** (born 3 September 1947 in Rome) is an economist and statesman.

- Key positions: President of the European Central Bank (2011–2019); Prime Minister of Italy (2021–2022).
- Career path: Doctorate from the renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Professorships in Italy. Later positions include: Executive Director of the World Bank; Director General of the Italian Treasury; Vice Chairman of Goldman Sachs International; and Governor of the Banca d'Italia.
- Outstanding achievements: Significant stabilisation of the eurozone during the financial crisis and a groundbreaking report on the competitiveness of the EU in 2024.
- Recognition: Recipient of numerous high-ranking international awards.

### **About the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen**

The International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen is widely regarded as one of the most prestigious European awards. Since 1950, it has been awarded to individuals and institutions that have made exceptional contributions to European unity. Previous winners include Konrad Adenauer (1954), François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl (1988), Václav Havel (1991), former US President Bill Clinton (2000), former German Chancellor Angela Merkel (2008), Pope Francis (2016), former French President Emmanuel Macron (2018), and former UN Secretary-General António Guterres (2019). In 2022, the prize was awarded to Belarusian civil rights activists Maria Kalesnikava, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Veronika Tsepkalo; in 2023, it was awarded to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people; and in 2024, it was awarded to Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and the Jewish communities in Europe. Last year, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, received the prize.

In addition to a certificate, the award includes a medal featuring the 12th-century city seal of Aachen on the front, with Charles the Great enthroned, and an inscription for the respective award recipient on the back.

Since 2025, the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen has awarded annual project funding of one million euros to non-profit, pro-European initiatives. Enabled by Aachen citizens and entrepreneurs Dr Eckhard Schulz and Dr Stefanie Schäfer-Schulz, the awarded funding is based on the recommendations of the respective Charlemagne Prize winners and aims to strengthen pro-European commitment, emphasise shared values, and promote the European idea beyond Aachen by providing effective support for new and existing projects across Europe.

Check out more **video content from the press conference** [here](#), available for editorial use in articles, broadcasts, media libraries and on websites, free of charge and without licence fees.

Find out more at <https://www.karlspreis.de/de/> and <https://www.aachen.de/karlspreis>.