The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Trial of Ukraine's Ex-Premier Delayed

July 04, 2011



A Tymoshenko supporter holding a poster reading, "Victory Over Evil." **Efrem Lukatsky**

KIEV — The trial of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko was adjourned until Wednesday after she hired a new lawyer and once again refused to stand up to honor the judge.

Tymoshenko, who faces up to 10 years in prison if found guilty on abuse of power charges, has dismissed the case as a "mock trial" orchestrated by President Viktor Yanukovych's camp in order to get rid of his main political rival.

The case has raised concerns in the European Union with which Ukraine wants to sign an association agreement in order to attract badly needed foreign investment and ease its dependence on Russia.

In keeping with her combative style, Tymoshenko, 50, lectured Judge Rodion Kireyev on criminal law, refused to stand up while addressing him and called the trial a farce.

Having brought in a new lawyer, she asked the court to give him one month to study the case but was granted time only until Wednesday.

“This means that tomorrow he will need to read over 4,000 pages,” Tymoshenko told the court during the hearings that were broadcast live on local television. “Is this justice? No, this is not justice.”

The prosecution alleges that Tymoshenko, who was twice prime minister, abused her power in the signing of a 2009 gas import deal with Russia that ended a price row that briefly disrupted Russian gas supplies to Western Europe via Ukraine.

It says that, without consulting her government, she forced the then head of state-owned Naftogaz to sign the gas deal with Gazprom. Tymoshenko denies this.

The current administration, which took over after Tymoshenko narrowly lost to Yanukovych in the 2010 presidential election runoff, says the agreement was a sellout of national interests, though it is abiding by its terms.

Some of those close to Tymoshenko believe the court is unlikely to jail her and will instead give her a suspended sentence, barring her from taking part in future parliamentary and presidential elections.

Separate cases are pending against Tymoshenko over alleged misuse of government funds received in exchange for emissions quotas sold to Japan under the Kyoto Protocol and over purchases of emergency rescue cars by her government.

A crowd of Tymoshenko supporters rallied outside the court on Monday, with some holding posters of the former prime minister wielding a bow and arrow and the title “The Chronicles of Kiev: Victory Over Evil,” in a parody of Hollywood’s “The Chronicles of Narnia” movies.

Since Yanukovych came to power, several of Tymoshenko’s former associates have been prosecuted for alleged offenses in office and at least one has fled Ukraine.

Western governments have not publicly supported Tymoshenko but have expressed concerns over the possible use of “selective justice” in Ukraine.

The U.S. State Department last month urged Kiev to refrain from actions that create “the appearance of a political motive.”

Yanukovych has repeatedly denied any political motive and said his government was merely fighting corruption.

Tymoshenko became known as the “gas princess” in the late 1990s as owner of a company that bought and sold Russian gas.

Her charisma and oratory skills brought her to the forefront of the 2004 Orange Revolution street demonstrations that ultimately doomed Yanukovych’s first bid for the presidency.

She went on to serve two terms as prime minister under former President Viktor Yushchenko, her Orange Revolution ally, though their relationship quickly soured.

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