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Yanukovych Says He Cannot Meddle in Tymoshenko Case

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KIEV — Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych said Wednesday that he could not personally intervene in the case of his political opponent Yulia Tymoshenko, whose jailing has soured the nation's ties with the European Union.

Yanukovych said Tymoshenko could win her freedom only in the courts and he had no power to interfere.

"I have become a hostage to this situation," he told reporters answering questions after summing up the past year in office.

"I am not against Tymoshenko going free under circumstances defined by law," Yanukovych said. "But I have no right to interfere in issues in which I have no power according to the constitution."

The jailing of Tymoshenko has already torpedoed the signing of an important political and trade agreement with the European Union and could hurt Yanukovych's Party of the Regions

at parliamentary elections next October.

Tymoshenko, who opposed Yanukovych in a 2010 presidential election, has been sentenced to seven years in prison for abuse of office as prime minister for pushing through an unfavorable gas deal with Russia in 2009.

She has denied any wrongdoing and dismissed the charges as politically motivated, a view shared by Brussels that has repeatedly urged Ukraine to set her free.

An appeals court is now looking into Tymoshenko's case but state prosecutors have already piled up new charges against her, accusing the opposition leader of tax evasion and attempted theft back in the 1990s.

Her defense has said it has little hope of getting the October conviction overturned.

Tymoshenko's prosecution has boosted public support for her Batkivshchyna party, while the ratings of Yanukovych's Party of the Regions have been on the decline this year.

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