

Tymoshenko Turns Away Doctors as Ukraine Targets Top Ally

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KIEV — Ukraine's state prosecutor asked a court Tuesday to impose a 4 1/2-year jail sentence on a former interior minister and ally of jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko.

Yury Lutsenko, who twice served in governments headed by Tymoshenko, has been in police custody since December 2010 on charges of embezzling state funds. He is the highest-profile political detainee in Ukraine after Tymoshenko herself.

The outcome of the Lutsenko case could indicate whether President Viktor Yanukovich's administration will let up in its prosecution of the opposition.

Tymoshenko's jailing for abuse of office last October has led to a crisis in relations between Ukraine and the West. The European Union has put off the signing of a free trade deal in protest.

The former interior minister is accused of giving an apartment as a gift to his driver and of financial irregularities during celebrations marking National Police Day.

"I deny everything, every single point, like the witnesses who also contradicted [the prosecution's case]," the 47-year-old said.

Lutsenko now has the right to address the court in his defense. A verdict is expected in the coming days.

Tymoshenko helped lead the Orange Revolution street protests in 2004 that thwarted Yanukovich's first bid for the presidency. She was jailed in October for seven years over a gas deal she brokered with Russia in 2009 that the Yanukovich leadership said harmed the national interest.

Yanukovich narrowly beat Tymoshenko for the presidency in a runoff vote in February 2010.

Despite Western entreaties and fears for Tymoshenko's health expressed by her family and supporters, Yanukovich has refused to relent, and investigators have launched more serious criminal cases against her.

At the behest of her family, a medical team, including three doctors from Canada and two from Germany, tried to visit Tymoshenko in prison in Kharkiv on Tuesday to carry out an independent examination of her.

But her defense counsel, Serhiy Vlasenko, said she refused to see the team because she objected to the presence of Ukrainian doctors.

"She is quite ready to be looked at by foreign doctors [alone]," he said.

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