

Tymoshenko on Hunger Strike After 'Beating'

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KHARKIV, Ukraine — Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, in prison on abuse-of-office charges, has gone on a hunger strike after prison guards beat her up while forcibly moving the opposition leader to a hospital last week, her lawyer said Tuesday.

The state prison service moved 51-year-old Tymoshenko, who has complained about back pain, to a state-run hospital in the city of Kharkiv last Friday, only to return her to a prison in the same city on Sunday after she refused to be examined.

On Tuesday, Tymoshenko's lawyer, Serhiy Vlasenko, told reporters that prison guards had beaten Tymoshenko in order to force her to leave her prison cell last Friday.

"Her arms are all bruised, and there is a huge bruise on her belly, which has not disappeared even after four days," he said. "Yulia Tymoshenko has gone on a hunger strike."

A state prosecutor denied the allegations of a beating but said Tymoshenko's move last week had indeed been forced.

"She packed up, got dressed and then lay on her bed and said 'I am not going anywhere,'" Interfax quoted Kharkiv regional prosecutor Henady Tyurin as saying.

"The law ... allows the prison service to use physical force: [guards] lifted her, carried her to the car and took her to the hospital."

Tymoshenko was sentenced to seven years in prison last October on charges of abusing her power as prime minister in brokering a 2009 gas deal with Russia.

President Viktor Yanukovich's government says the deal ran against national interests and has saddled Ukraine with an exorbitant price for vital energy supplies.

Tymoshenko has denied any wrongdoing.

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