

Ukrainian Opposition Presents Parliamentary Election Program

May 29, 2012



Arseniy Yatsenyuk

KIEV — Ukraine's united opposition has presented a reform program ahead of fall parliamentary elections as it searches for a strategy with leader Yulia Tymoshenko in jail.

With the former prime minister serving a seven-year term, her party has joined forces with the second-largest opposition group, which is headed by millionaire banker and former parliament Speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

The two pro-Western parties vowed to raise wages for government employees, fight corruption, and reform the law enforcement and judicial systems. They also promised to free Tymoshenko and her jailed allies, whose imprisonment has been condemned as politically motivated by the West.

Tymoshenko denies the abuse-of-office and corruption charges and claims that her longtime enemy, President Viktor Yanukovich, threw her and her aides in jail to bar them from the October elections.

"Our goal isn't simply to defeat those who are torturing Ukraine," Oleksandr Turchynov, Tymoshenko's top aide, said at a conference Monday. "Our goal is to bring Ukrainian politics to a new level."

"For us, the top priority ... is renewing democracy in Ukraine and giving parliament the status of a truly representative body," Yatsenyuk said.

Since narrowly defeating Tymoshenko two years ago, Yanukovich has weakened parliament and boosted his powers. He has curbed anti-government protests, sent security forces to investigate civil society groups and sought to limit press freedoms. He is facing unprecedented Western pressure over Tymoshenko's jailing.

An April poll conducted by the Kiev-based Razumkov Center showed that the Tymoshenko-Yatsenyuk alliance had about 20 percent support, slightly more than Yanukovich's party, with 17 percent. The poll among 2,008 respondents had a margin of error of 2.3 percentage points.

But experts say the alliance is still shaky and could disintegrate in the coming months. Its success in the vote not only depends on members' ability to genuinely set aside ambitions and work together, but also on how fair and democratic the elections will be.

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