

Ukraine's Top Court Rejects Tymoshenko Appeal

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KIEV — Ukraine's highest court on Wednesday upheld the guilty verdict against former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who is in jail on abuse of office charges.

Tymoshenko was sentenced to seven years in prison in October 2011 on charges of abusing her powers while negotiating a gas contract with Russia while she was prime minister.

Her supporters say the trial is a politically motivated attempt by her rival, President Viktor Yanukovich, to keep her out of October parliamentary elections. The government denies the accusations.

President Vladimir Putin, Tymoshenko's counterpart in signing the gas deal, has said there was nothing illegal in her actions.

Judge Oleksandr Elfimov said as he was reading the ruling that the court had "found no grounds to uphold [Tymoshenko's] appeal" of the verdict, and that the prison term is "adequate to the gravity of the crime."

Several members of the audience yelled "Shame!" upon hearing the verdict.

The court hearing was attended by former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski and the former president of the European Parliament, Patrick Cox.

"This and past court rulings have nothing to do with justice," said Tymoshenko aide Oleksandr Turchinov.

Lawyers for Tymoshenko are appealing the conviction in the European Court for Human Rights.

Tymoshenko's daughter, Eugenia, described the hearing as a "shameful decision, which proves one more time that a dictatorship has come to Ukraine."

Kiev-based political analyst Mykhailo Pogrebinsky said Wednesday's ruling "has brought Ukraine's legal system into a deadlock."

"Criminal prosecution for a political decision can hardly be called the rule of law," he said.

At least 500 supporters gathered Wednesday outside the courthouse in Kiev, chanting "Freedom to Yulia!"

After the hearing, Tymoshenko's supporters held a mock funeral procession, carrying a small coffin with a figure of Themis, the Greek goddess of justice, inside. They buried the coffin in the courthouse's yard and erected a cross with the plaque: "Ukraine's justice lies here."

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