

EU, U.S. Warn Ukraine Over Tymoshenko Jailing

September 16, 2012



Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich expects to sign deals with the EU soon after his country's October parliamentary vote.

YALTA, Ukraine — The European Union and the United States have warned Ukraine that the prosecution of opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko was damaging its ties with the West.

But President Viktor Yanukovich said he thought it would be possible to seal a strategic deal with the EU after parliamentary elections next month, and a Ukrainian prosecutor asked for U.S. help to mount another criminal investigation against Tymoshenko.

The case of Tymoshenko, a former prime minister jailed for seven years on charges of abuse of office, dominated a two-day international gathering in Yalta.

Yanukovich, trying to play down the impact of Tymoshenko's case, argued that parliamentary elections would show Ukraine's commitment to democracy and said that he expected deals with the EU — which have been suspended — to be signed soon after the Oct. 28 vote.

"We are actively moving toward signing the association agreement with the European Union," Yanukovich told the gathering Friday. "At the moment, our European partners have some additional questions to Ukraine, but I am sure that after the upcoming parliamentary elections all concerns will disappear and the path toward full association between Ukraine and the European Union will be completed."

But an EU delegation that included Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said after meeting Yanukovich that "the issue of selective justice" — meaning Tymoshenko's prosecution — had to be settled before relations could move to a new level.

A statement issued by the EU delegation also expressed regret that Tymoshenko and a political ally, Yuri Lutsenko, who has also been jailed, had been prevented from running in the election because of trials that "did not respect international standards."

Asked pointedly about the Tymoshenko case by former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, who moderated the meeting, Yanukovich responded with a list of his government's economic achievements and reforms and did not mention her.

A senior U.S. State Department official told the conference Saturday that Ukraine was falling short of democratic standards.

"I think if the international community, the international observers were to give a grade today on this election environment and whether it is going to mark a step towards Europe and the West, I think it failed that test today," Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Melia said.

Hours later, Ukrainian Deputy Prosecutor General Renat Kuzmin told the same audience that his office was seeking U.S. help in another criminal investigation against Tymoshenko.

"We intend to bring up fresh charges against the former prime minister, and some of the information that we need is in the United States," he said.

Kuzmin did not elaborate on the charges but has previously said prosecutors are investigating Tymoshenko's possible involvement in a 1996 contract killing of a parliamentary deputy.

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