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Leaked Call Shows Tymoshenko Urging Violence Against Russians, Report Says

By Christopher Brennan

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Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko at an event with Russian President Vladimir Putin in November 2009.

A leaked audio recording of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and a former deputy secretary on the country's National Security Council purports to listen in on a conversation in which Tymoshenko advocates taking up arms against Russia.

In the recording from March 18, reported by Kremlin-backed television channels RT and Rossia 1 Monday night, Tymoshenko tells Nestor Shufrych that Ukrainians should kill Russians and particularly their leader, presumably President Vladimir Putin.

The statements may strike some as odd given that the pair were thought to have a pragmatic working relationship during Tymoshenko's time at the helm of Ukraine's government.

Lamenting that she had not been in a position to stop last week's annexation of Crimea

by Russia, the former prime minister also appeared to answer a question about the 8 million Russians living in Ukraine by saying that they should be killed with atomic weapons. She also reportedly said that "not even a scorched field" should remain in Russia.

Responding to the report on her Twitter account, Tymoshenko said that the recorded conversation took place, but that the part about Russians in Ukraine had been cropped and she actually said that the 8 million Russians living in Ukraine were Ukrainian. She also greeted Russia's Federal Security Service and apologized to them for her obscene language.

Shufrych's press service, however, has denied the conversation ever took place.

Having previously announced her candidacy for president, Tymoshenko is thought to be a contender in the Ukrainian elections scheduled for late May. After losing in the 2010 president election to Kremlin ally Viktor Yanukovych she was imprisoned for what many believe to be political reasons.

Earlier this week Tymoshenko said that Ukraine would take back Crimea from Russia, the Kyiv Post reported, in her first extended interview since being released from prison during the late February ouster of Yanukovych.

While different political actors have been making both brash and careful statements in public about the political turmoil in Ukraine, leaked audio tapes from Western and Ukrainian officials about the country have been the subject of recurrent features on Russia state television this year.

In February a recording reportedly featuring U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland included the diplomat cursing the European Union and talking about who she would like to see take up a position in the Ukrainian government. Earlier this month a bugged phone call between EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton and Foreign Minister Urmas Paet revealed the two talking about the possibility that the snipers responsible for the deaths of Kiev protesters might not have been hired by the Yanukovych government.

Update: 3:46 p.m. Moscow time: Interfax news agency reports that two Russian Communist Party State Duma deputies had asked the Investigative Committee to investigate Tymoshenko on possible charges of inciting hatred. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov had said earlier that he would not comment on the supposed leaked phone call.

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