

## **Former PM of Ukraine gets 7 years in jail**

By Pavel Polityuk and Richard Balmforth (China Daily)

KIEV, Ukraine - A Ukrainian court on Tuesday sentenced former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko to seven years in prison for abuse of office in relation to a 2009 gas deal with Russia that she brokered, a case regarded widely in the West as politically orchestrated.

Judge Rodion Kireyev handed down the sentence - the maximum sought by state prosecutors - at the end of a three-month trial that has polarized society in the ex-Soviet republic and risks undermining Ukraine's relations with the West.

"The court has ... found Tymoshenko guilty ... and sentenced her to a prison term of seven years," he said. Her lawyers said they would appeal against the verdict.

The European Union (EU), a major trading partner for Ukraine, immediately denounced the judgment as politically motivated and told President Viktor Yanukovich's leadership that it would boomerang seriously against relations. "The way the Ukrainian authorities will generally respect universal values and rule of law, and specifically how they will handle these cases, risks having profound implications for the EU-Ukraine bilateral relationship," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said in a statement on behalf of the bloc.

This included "the conclusion of the Association Agreement, our political dialogue and our cooperation more broadly", the statement issued in Brussels said.

Her supporters say Yanukovich wants to neutralize her as a political force before next year's parliamentary election.

The EU had earlier warned that jailing the charismatic Ukrainian opposition leader will jeopardize ratification of the agreement, which entails the creation of a free trade zone and is due to be signed later this year.

Tymoshenko, 50, who described the trial as a "lynching" organized by Yanukovich and denied any wrongdoing in negotiating the 2009 deal, smiled faintly as the sentence was pronounced.

But the former leader then rose to her feet and - even as Kireyev continued in a monotone to deliver the rest of his judgment - decried the lack of justice under Yanukovich.

Kireyev said that she had exceeded her powers by stampeding the state energy concern Naftogaz into signing a 10-year gas supply contract with Russia that resulted in Ukraine paying an exorbitant price for gas.

"In January 2009, Tymoshenko Yu. V., exercising the duties of prime minister ... used her powers for criminal ends and, acting deliberately, carried out actions ... which led to heavy consequences," he said.

