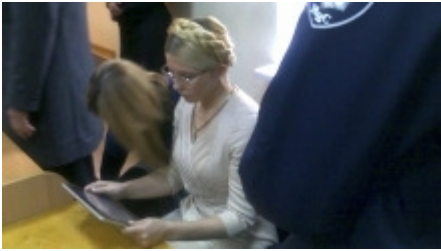


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MARIA DANILOVA

## Ukraine's Tymoshenko sentenced to 7 years in jail for abuse of office



Ukraine's former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko on Tuesday was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of abuse of office in signing a gas deal with Russia, a verdict immediately condemned by both the European Union and Russia as politically motivated.

Ms. Tymoshenko, the driving force of the 2004 pro-democracy Orange Revolution and now the nation's top opposition leader, denounced the trial as rigged by President Viktor Yanukovich to get rid of a political opponent.



Earlier, under Ukrainian court procedures, the judge read a lengthy summary of the case. In the course of the reading, Judge Rodion Kireyev said Ms. Tymoshenko inflicted damages of some \$190-million on the national gas company by signing an import contract with Russia in 2009.

Ms. Tymoshenko, now the country's top opposition leader, used her power as prime minister "for criminal ends and, acting consciously, committed actions which clearly exceeded the limits of rights and powers," Judge Kireyev said.

The United States and the European Union have condemned the trial as politically motivated, and Ms. Tymoshenko has dismissed the trial as persecution ordered by her longtime foe, President Viktor Yanukovich, to bar her from politics. The case has galvanized her supporters, who regularly held rowdy protests inside and outside the courthouse.

Prosecutors say Ms. Tymoshenko was not authorized to order the signing of the contract with Russia and say the price for natural gas she agreed to was too high, causing losses to the state budget.

Ms. Tymoshenko says that as a prime minister she did not need any special permission to order the signing of the deal. She says her actions helped end a bitter pricing dispute between Moscow and Kiev, which had led to energy supply shortages across Europe.

Ms. Tymoshenko has already been jailed for more than two months during the trial for contempt of court.

On Tuesday, the area outside the court building was flooded by helmeted riot police as supporters and opponents of Ms. Tymoshenko held competing rallies. Police buses blocked traffic on Kreshchatik Avenue, which runs through the heart of the capital.

Ms. Tymoshenko, wearing her trademark blond braid wrapped around her head, looked composed in the courtroom, occasionally chatting with her daughter Eugenia as Judge Kireyev spoke. She even occasionally addressed reporters while Judge Kireyev read out the lengthy ruling, causing him to become visibly irritated.

“Whatever the verdict will be ... I will continue my fight for Ukraine, for its European future,” Ms. Tymoshenko told reporters during a short break before the verdict. “Nobody, not Yanukovich, not Kireyev, can humiliate my honest name. I have worked and will continue to work for Ukraine’s sake.”

Ms. Tymoshenko was the driving force behind the 2004 Orange Revolution, which overturned Mr. Yanukovich’s fraud-tainted election victory then. Mr. Yanukovich staged a comeback, narrowly defeating Ms. Tymoshenko in a 2010 presidential vote amid public disenchantment with economic hardships and constant bickering among those who had ousted Mr. Yanukovich.

The European Union has warned that jailing Ms. Tymoshenko may cost Ukraine its integration with the 27-nation bloc.

#### **The Canadian reaction**

Ottawa has wasted little time in warning Ukraine that the prosecution and harsh sentencing of opposition politician Yulia Tymoshenko could strain relations between the countries.

The text of a statement issued Tuesday by Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird:

“Canada is troubled by the manner in which the arrest, prosecution and conviction of Yulia Tymoshenko were carried out by Ukrainian authorities. The apparent political bias and arbitrary prosecution in this and other cases hamper Ukraine’s democratic development. A legitimate and active opposition is a vital part of a vibrant and effective democracy.

“There are clear signs that the court proceedings fall far short of internationally recognized norms of fairness, transparency and due process.

“In my recent letter to President Viktor Yanukovich, I urged the Ukrainian government to strengthen judicial independence and capacity. These are necessary to the peaceful, democratic and prosperous society that Ukraine is striving to become, and Canada will continue to support their efforts in this direction.”

“Today’s developments may have serious consequences for our bilateral relationship.”