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## **Ukraine's former leader loses appeal**

A Ukrainian court yesterday kept the former premier Yulia Tymoshenko in jail on charges of abuse of office, defying renewed Western pressure to release the country's main opposition leader.

A Kiev appeals court upheld a lower court's guilty verdict and seven-year sentence for Tymoshenko, 50, in a decision her top aide called President Viktor Yanukovich's "personal vengeance". She was convicted in October of overstepping her authority while negotiating a natural gas contract with Russia in 2009.

The US and the European Union have sharply criticised Tymoshenko's imprisonment as politically motivated and demanded her release. The EU refused to sign a key partnership deal with Kiev this week over the Tymoshenko case.

Mr Yanukovich said the courts and law enforcement agencies were independent and he would not intervene.