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Sign deal with Kiev, Tymoshenko daughter tells EU



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The imprisonment of Ukraine's opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko should not stop the European Union signing an agreement on closer ties with Kiev next week, but Europe should impose sanctions on Ukrainian leaders, her daughter said Wednesday.

Tymoshenko, a former prime minister, was jailed for seven years in October on charges of abuse of office. She called the verdict a "lynching" by President Viktor Yanukovich, her old political enemy, and the EU said it was politically motivated.

Visiting Brussels to highlight her mother's cause, 31-year-old Evgenia Tymoshenko said her mother was suffering serious health problems after 130 days in jail. "My mother has become a victim in this fight for freedom and democracy," she told Reuters in an interview.

EU diplomats say that because of its human rights concerns, the 27-nation bloc is now unlikely to sign the deal next Monday which was meant to lay the ground for a new strategic partnership with the former Soviet republic, including a free-trade zone. But Tymoshenko and her daughter want it to go ahead.

"HISTORICAL CHANCE"

"Of course she is not going to say that her comfort, or persecution, is worth the whole historical chance of the people of Ukraine," Evgenia said.

"So of course, for the sake of the people, we need to sign... I think Europe should sign this agreement, but I think different measures could be taken to stop the spread of authoritarianism in Ukraine. These could be different measures targeted directly onto the people that are causing repression, not the whole people of Ukraine."

She noted, for example, that the EU had responded to repression in Zimbabwe by imposing sanctions including visa bans on individuals close to the leadership.

"I think it could work in Ukraine as well...I see no reason why it shouldn't be done, because the repression is so transparent now in Ukraine. It's so clear what is going on -- it's physical removal of opponents."

She said her mother had skin problems and serious back pain requiring treatment and physiotherapy. Her health was such that she feared for her life, but her doctor had not been allowed to visit her to take a blood test.

"We are trying to appeal now to the European Parliament...the Council of Europe, to send a group of independent doctors to check, really to diagnose her, and to see whether her life is in threat or not."

While her mother was receiving pain-killing injections, it was not known what effect these would have on her and how long she could take them. "She really cannot walk or stand up."

In a dramatic plea from her prison cell in November, Yulia Tymoshenko urged the EU to go ahead with the association agreement regardless of her fate.

Ukraine's EU ambassador, Kostiantyn Yelisieiev, said this week it appeared unlikely the documents would now be initialled. EU diplomats have said a joint statement simply acknowledging that talks have been formally concluded may be an alternative option, but this would be tantamount to a diplomatic failure.

(Reporting by David Brunnstrom, Editing by Mark Trevelyan)