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Ukraine's Tymoshenko boycotts "farce" appeal trial

Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko will boycott her own appeal against a seven year sentence for abuse of office, her legal team said on Thursday, branding the court case a farce.

Tymoshenko, the fiercest opponent of President Viktor Yanukovich, was condemned for overstepping her powers in forcing through a gas deal with Russia in 2009. The European Union and United States said the trial was politically motivated.

The former prime minister dismissed the original trial as part of a campaign by Yanukovich to rid himself of a political rival, and filed an appeal. But on Thursday she and her lawyers accused the appeals court of being biased and said there was no hope for a fair trial.

"I have decided to refuse to take part in this shameful process and not to appeal the decisions of the two courts," she said in a statement. "Seeking truth and justice in Ukrainian courts is an absolutely useless task."

Tymoshenko has not attended any of the appeal hearings since they began on December 1 as she lies in a prison hospital with back pain. She has been in detention since early August.

The European Union this week put off signing agreements on political association and free trade with Ukraine, citing Tymoshenko's case as an example of selective justice.

In a separate statement, Tymoshenko's lawyer Serhiy Vlasenko said her defense team would also boycott the hearings.

"These are not court hearings, this is a farce with clowns dressed in judge robes and clowns wearing prosecutors' epaulets and it makes no sense to take part in this farce," he said.

It was not clear whether the judge would proceed with the hearing without Tymoshenko or her lawyers.

Volodymyr Fesenko, an analyst at Kiev-based think tank Penta, said her move to boycott the appeal was a maneuver aimed at generating sympathy in the West.

"Tymoshenko has decided a new twist was needed (in her case) that would show Western observers there was no justice in Ukraine," he said.

Her lawyer Vlasenko earlier said Tymoshenko's best hope lay with the European Court for Human Rights which this week said it would fast-track her case "in view of the serious and sensitive nature of the allegations raised."

Tymoshenko twice served as prime minister after leading the 2004 "Orange Revolution" which ruined Yanukovich's first bid for the presidency.

Yanukovich, who beat her in the 2010 presidential run-off, said this week he had nothing to do with her case and it was up to the courts and lawmakers to decide Tymoshenko's fate.

Ukraine's parliament on Thursday voted against considering an amendment that would have struck her alleged offence from the criminal code.

(Reporting by Olzhas Auyezov; Editing by Ben Harding)