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Reuters

## Ukraine ex-PM Tymoshenko moved to prison



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Former Ukrainian prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, sentenced to seven years in prison for abuse of office, has been moved to prison from a detention centre where she has been held since early August, the state penitentiary service said on Friday.

The move indicated she was unlikely to go free any time soon despite pressure from the European Union, which considered her trial politically motivated and put off the signing of key agreements with Ukraine because of her sentence.

Tymoshenko is the fiercest opponent of President Viktor Yanukovich, who narrowly beat her in the presidential run-off in February 2010 after losing his earlier bid for the presidency because of the 2004 "Orange Revolution" protests, which she helped lead.

A local court sentenced Tymoshenko to seven years in prison in October, saying she had exceeded her powers when forcing through a 2009 gas deal with Russia. Tymoshenko, who denies any wrongdoing, lost an appeal against the verdict one week ago.

"Tymoshenko has been moved to a prison in the Kharkiv region," the state penitentiary service said in a statement.

The European Union, which had planned to initial agreements on political association and free trade with Ukraine at a summit this month, put off the signing and cited Tymoshenko's case as an example of selective justice in the former Soviet republic.

"The EU reiterates its concern about the risks of politically-motivated justice in Ukraine, of which the Tymoshenko trial is the most striking example," a spokesman for EU Foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said on Friday.

"Given the strong international concern already surrounding this case, we call on the authorities to ensure that decisions on the detention conditions of Mrs Tymoshenko are taken transparently and in line with relevant international standards. The EU is urgently seeking further clarification from the Ukrainian authorities."

Yanukovich has refused to intervene and the parliament, dominated by his supporters, has turned down several proposals to remove her alleged offence from the criminal code.

On Friday, Yanukovich issued a decree cancelling Freedom Day celebrations on November 22, a holiday introduced in 2005 to mark the "Orange Revolution" anniversary, provoking angry reaction from Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna party.

It said in a statement that moving Tymoshenko to a prison and cancelling the holiday on the same day was "an act of final, cynical and public destruction of the ideals of democracy, freedom and independence."

Tymoshenko's lawyers say she hopes the European Court for Human Rights, where she has filed a case against Ukraine, will exonerate her. The court said this month it would fast-track the case.

Tymoshenko, 51, has been suffering from back pains in the last few weeks and cannot walk, according to her lawyers who have said she should not be moved from the detention centre because of this.

But the penitentiary service said she was fit to move.

"Before departure, Tymoshenko was examined by doctors who stated that her health allowed her to be moved," it said, adding that Tymoshenko travelled in a "comfortable" van.

(Reporting by Pavel Polityuk; Additional reporting by David Brunnstrom in Brussels; Writing by Olzhas Auyezov)