

Ukrainian Opposition 'Mourns Democracy'

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KIEV — Ukrainian opposition lawmakers lit candles in parliament on Friday to "mourn the death of democracy" a day after a bloody brawl put at least six supporters of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko in the hospital. ☒

Ambulances rushed to parliament late Thursday after lawmakers from President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions stormed the parliament podium, which was occupied by opposition allies of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The pro-presidential lawmakers threw fists and chairs at their opponents.

Pro-Tymoshenko legislators had been blocking legislative work all day, protesting a corruption probe against her.

Scuffles between lawmakers are frequent in Ukraine, but Thursday's fight was the most violent to date. Parliament Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn, who hid from flying eggs and smoke bombs behind an umbrella during a fight in April, said Friday that it was time to put an end to the mess.

Lytvyn produced iron bars, chains and locks, which he said were brought into the hall Thursday and said some lawmakers even threatened to use the guns that they often bring with them.

"What relation does this have to legislative activity?" he said. "How can we teach children democracy and love for their motherland?"

The Prosecutor General's Office last week opened a criminal investigation on suspicion that Tymoshenko misallocated hundreds of millions of dollars when she was premier. Tymoshenko, who lost February's presidential election to Yanukovich, calls the probe politically motivated.

Six lawmakers were injured in the fight and four of them were still in the hospital Friday with concussions, a fractured jaw and multiple bruises, Tymoshenko's office said.

"This hall has not yet seen such inhuman hatred, animal rage and a desire not only to handicap but to kill," her party said.

Party of the Regions said its members were not hurt but blamed the opposition for triggering the fight. Oleksandr Yefremov of the party said opposition lawmakers brought chains into parliament hall to block its doors and prevent his colleagues from entering.

Yefremov also noted that dozens of his colleagues were hurt in April when opposition lawmakers threw smoke bombs into the hall to protest a naval pact with Russia.

Yanukovich condemned the fight but refrained from assigning blame. "It's high time for politicians to reach agreement and raise the level of political culture from all sides," Yanukovich told reporters Friday, according to the Unian news agency.

Tymoshenko was summoned for questioning by prosecutors Wednesday and was banned from leaving Kiev as part of the corruption probe. The abuse of office accusations against her center on the alleged mispending of \$280 million received by the government for the sale of carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol.

Tymoshenko has admitted that she used the money to pay pensions amid a severe recession, but said all the funds were later returned and spent on environmental needs as stipulated by the agreement.

A number of senior officials in her former government have been investigated, charged and jailed in what Tymoshenko calls the president's "witch hunt of the opposition." The government says it is fighting corruption. (AP, Reuters)

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