

Kiev Says European Integration Still Key

November 01, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

KIEV — Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who has denounced European Union pressure to release jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko, said Tuesday that moving into the European mainstream remained key for his country.

The trial of former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, who was sentenced to seven years in prison last month for abuse of office, has soured ties between Ukraine and the EU and fueled speculation that Kiev will tilt more toward Moscow.

The EU last month called off a planned meeting with Yanukovich, who had said he would not "go begging" to Brussels, months before the two sides planned to initial agreements on political association and free trade.

Speaking to regional governors on Tuesday, Yanukovich said, however, that joining the European mainstream remained a priority for his government.

"I want to confirm once again that the course of modernization and European integration is the key one for Ukraine," he said.

Brussels has pursued technical discussions with Ukraine on the planned bilateral deals but indicated that their signing might not happen until Tymoshenko is released.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian prosecutors have initiated new investigations into Tymoshenko's past activities, accusing her of attempting to steal from the state budget and even saying she could have been involved in a contract murder in 1996.

She has denied any wrongdoing and says her prosecution is a political vendetta by Yanukovich, who beat her narrowly in an election for the presidency in February 2010.

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