

Tymoshenko to Boycott Appeal Trial

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KIEV — Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and her lawyers will boycott appellate court hearings looking into her conviction on abuse-of-office charges, they said Thursday, calling the trial a farce.

Tymoshenko and her lawyers accused the appeals court of being biased and said there was no hope for justice in local courts.

"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 appeal hearings, staying in a jail hospital due to back pain. She has been under arrest since early August.

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' shoulder straps, and it makes no sense to take part in this farce," he said.

It was not clear whether the hearings would proceed in the absence of Tymoshenko and her lawyers.

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

Tymoshenko, 51, the fiercest opponent of President Viktor Yanukovich, was sentenced to seven years in prison in October in a trial condemned by the West as politically motivated. It has also jeopardized Ukraine's plans for closer ties with Europe.

She was found guilty of overstepping her powers in forcing through a 2009 gas deal with Russia and has filed an appeal, dismissing the trial as part of Yanukovich's campaign to get rid of a political rival.

Tymoshenko has served twice 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 runoff, said this week that he had nothing to do with her case and it was up to the courts and legislators to decide Tymoshenko's fate.

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

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