

Ukraine Delays Tymoshenko's Appeal

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, center, watching the match between Ukraine and England in the group stage of the UEFA European football championships in Donetsk last Tuesday.

KIEV — A Ukrainian court on Tuesday delayed an appeal of jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko's conviction for abuse of power, postponing a decision that could embarrass Ukraine while it stages the Euro 2012 football tournament.

The high court in Kiev supported prosecutors' call for the hearing to be postponed pending a medical examination of Tymoshenko to establish whether she is fit to attend proceedings.

It fixed the next hearing for July 12.

A similar ruling was made by a court in Kharkiv on Monday relating to a second trial of Tymoshenko on tax evasion charges. That court adjourned until July 10.

Tymoshenko's legal counsel showed little optimism ahead of Tuesday's hearing.

"There can be no justice for Tymoshenko, so all the hopes of Tymoshenko's defense lie

beyond Ukraine's borders," lawyer Serhiy Vlasenko said, implying that only Western pressure could bring about her release.

After the adjournment decision, Vlasenko said that "the main aim of all this is to exclude Tymoshenko from Ukraine's political life and not allow her to be elected in the [October] 2012 parliamentary elections."

Tymoshenko, who could not attend the Kiev hearing because she is receiving medical treatment for back trouble, is appealing the conviction and seven-year jail sentence imposed last year on charges of abuse of power.

The charge relates to a 2009 gas deal with Russia that she brokered as prime minister and that the current government says saddled Ukraine with an exorbitant price for gas imports.

The outcome of legal proceedings against Tymoshenko, a former prime minister and heroine of Orange Revolution street protests, could shape Ukraine's relations with the European Union for years.

The two court rulings allow authorities to avoid sensitive hearings that risk generating further bad publicity for the leadership of President Viktor Yanukovich while the high-profile European football championship is going on.

Ukraine is co-hosting the tournament with Poland. The final is due to take place in Kiev on July 1.

Tymoshenko's trial and conviction have caused outrage among Western governments, which say it smacks of "selective justice."

But pressure from the EU has had no effect. Yanukovich has said he will not intervene before all the trials and appeals are over.

Prosecutors, meanwhile, have heaped new charges on Tymoshenko, saying they suspect her of involvement in a 1996 contract killing.

Ukraine's co-hosting of the Euro 2012 championship has diverted attention from internal problems.

But despite being locked up, Tymoshenko has made her presence felt at Euro 2012 matches, with some fans wearing "Free Yulia" T-shirts.

Because of a boycott by some foreign leaders, Yanukovich has shared his VIP box at matches mostly with political allies, local government officials and representatives of European football body UEFA.

Britain and France were among the governments that declined to send ministers to attend matches in Ukraine in which their national teams were competing.

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