

Tymoshenko Appeals Conviction for Abuse of Office

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Tymoshenko supporters attending a demonstration in Kiev on Thursday. The poster at right reads "Innocent." **Anatolii Stepanov**

Defense lawyers for jailed Ukrainian ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko on Thursday said there were no grounds for a criminal case against her as they launched a fresh appeal against her conviction last year for abuse of office.

The opposition leader's jailing for seven years last October soured the former Soviet republic's relations with the European Union, which sees her as a victim of selective justice by President Viktor Yanukovich, her political foe.

But, with a parliamentary election set for Oct. 28, the Yanukovich leadership has shown no signs of releasing her and are instead piling up other charges against her.

In a separate trial, which has been adjourned several times because of back trouble that has confined Tymoshenko to the hospital, she is accused of embezzlement and tax evasion going back to alleged offenses when she was a businesswoman in the 1990s.

The conviction for abuse-of-office that she is appealing in the Kiev court relates to a 2009 gas deal with Russia that she brokered as prime minister.

Yanukovich's government says the deal saddled Ukraine with an exorbitant price for gas imports and has become a millstone for the economy.

The appeal hearing in Kiev went ahead on Thursday after Tymoshenko's lawyers said she wanted proceedings to continue while she is absent in a state-run hospital in the city of Kharkiv.

Laying out the basis for the appeal, her lawyer, Olexander Plakhotniuk, told the court: "I consider that the sentence of the court [last October] is unlawful. The court incorrectly applied criminal law and this is the basis for overturning the sentence."

Some parliamentary supporters of Tymoshenko enlivened the start of proceedings by trying to nail up on the courtroom's wall a reproduction of a Renaissance painting depicting a corrupt judge being flayed alive, Interfax news agency said.

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