

Tymoshenko Calls Off Hunger Strike

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — Ukraine's jailed opposition leader, Yulia Tymoshenko, on Friday ended a hunger strike that she had begun 18 days earlier in protest against alleged vote-rigging by the ruling party in the Oct. 28 parliamentary election.

The 51-year-old former prime minister said international monitors' negative judgment of the election, in which President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions looks certain to have hung on to a majority in parliament, had proved her right.

"Today ... it is already a fact that every Ukrainian citizen knows — these parliamentary elections were fraudulent," she said in a statement on the website of her Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) party.

"I now consider it possible for me, on the 18th day, to end the hunger strike and carry on my struggle against the corrupt Yanukovich regime by other methods," she said.

Western monitors of the election described the poll as a step backward for Ukraine, criticized

misuse of administrative resources, biased media and opaque campaign funding. They also denounced Tymoshenko's jailing as unfair.

Other Western national missions also supported opposition claims that there were irregularities in the vote count in some electoral districts.

Brushing off international criticism and opposition calls for a recount, Yanukovich's Regions party, with help from long-time allies, should take more than half the seats in the 450-member assembly.

But three main opposition parties, which include Batkivshchyna, made a strong showing too, securing 178 parliament seats despite the absence of Tymoshenko. An end to her hunger strike would make it easier for them to focus on a joint strategy for parliament.

The re-energized opposition vowed on Monday to work to free Tymoshenko, who is serving a seven-year sentence for abuse of office in the city of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, following her conviction in October last year.

Tymoshenko, a leader of the 2004 Orange Revolution, which derailed Yanukovich's first bid for the presidency, says she is the victim of a vendetta by her rival, who beat her narrowly for the presidency in February 2010 after staging a political comeback.

The abuse-of-office charge relates to a gas deal she brokered with Russia in 2009 when she was prime minister and which the Kiev government says saddled the country with an onerous price for gas supplies. She denies any wrongdoing.

The European Union and United States have condemned her jailing as an example of selective justice, and Brussels has shelved landmark deals on free trade and political association with Kiev over the issue.

Given the outcome of the election, which Yanukovich is likely to use as a springboard for securing a second term as president in 2015, it seems unlikely that the opposition will be able to bring sufficient pressure to bear to win her release.

Indeed, authorities have begun piling up more charges against her.

A second trial against her on a charge of embezzlement and tax evasion resumed on Tuesday and was adjourned once more until Nov. 23.

The state prosecutor's office has also raised the possibility of a raft of fresh prosecutions alleging other serious crimes in the 1990s.

Since being jailed, Tymoshenko has been moved to a state-run hospital in Kharkiv for treatment for acute back problems.

A German doctor who has been treating her there, Lutz Harms, was quoted as saying she would need another 17-18 days of rehabilitation to recover after her hunger protest. "This [the hunger strike] has not had a beneficial effect. ... The pain has increased significantly," Harms was quoted as saying.

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