

Jamestown Foundation Blog

Timely analysis and commentary on geopolitical developments in Eurasia

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[Yulia Tymoshenko Defies the Authorities – From Jail](#)



By Taras Kuzio

Ukraine's relations with the West have been dropping below freezing in the last few weeks. Yulia Tymoshenko's claim that she was "beaten" as she was forcibly taken to a Ukrainian clinic have led her to announce she is on a hunger strike. The authorities claimed this was all play acting and showed a video of her allegedly walking around her prison cell. Her lawyer claims the video is a fake (see video: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/photo-video/2012/04/24/6963358/>).

The EU and US have demanded action from the Ukrainian authorities to end her abuse; the German, Austrian and Czech presidents have refused an invitation to attend a summit of central European leaders in Ukraine (<http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/126642/>); and the opposition has blockaded parliament with the large placard "Yanukovych do not kill Yulia" for five days, preventing it from functioning (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/04/ukrainian-politics>). See photos and video: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/photo-video/2012/04/26/6963506/>).

If this were not enough, from jail, Tymoshenko continues to be a thorn in President Viktor Yanukovych's side, and if the authorities thought they could silence her by imprisoning her they obviously under-estimated "Yulia." As Der Spiegel wrote: "Tymoshenko, who is only 1.60 meters (5 feet 3 inches) tall but who is admiringly dubbed, even by her adversaries, as 'the only man in Ukrainian politics,' remains a thorn in his side" (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/o.1518,826417,00.html>). The Kyiv Post's editor, Brian Bonner, adds: "Even in prison while flat on her back, Yulia

Tymoshenko can inflict damage on a Ukrainian president. The woman who has helped demolish two presidents politically – Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko – is on her way to politically destroying a third one – Viktor Yanukovich. The frail ex-Prime Minister is a human wrecking ball for all who get in her way, despite prison guards and bars” (http://www.kyivpost.com/news/opinion/op_ed/detail/126680/).

Therefore, her long interview in Ukraine’s premier weekly merits a closer look (http://dt.ua/POLITICS/yuliya_timoshenko_z_hvoroyu_spinoyu,__ale_z_mitsnim_hrebtom-100889.html). Tymoshenko is obviously well informed about current Ukrainian affairs and knows what is going on outside her prison cell. She fully supports the unification of opposition forces for the October elections in light of the threats facing Ukraine that she believes are worse than at any time in Ukraine’s last two decades. The authorities, she states, are making Ukrainians into “losers without historical memory, without national pride, without positive economic perspectives and [without] a European future.”

Tymoshenko does not believe the unification of four opposition forces (the Batkivshchina party that she leads, Front for Change led by Arseniy Yatseniuk, Rukh and Reforms and the Order party) will lead to their absorption by her party and she supports each creating its own faction and joining a parliamentary coalition. This strategy is a fundamentally different approach to that of the Party of Regions, which was created from a merger of five parties in 2001 and has absorbed five political parties since, the most recent being Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Tigipko’s Silna Ukrayina party. In parliament, the Party of Regions acts as a disciplined and united party whereas “orange” forces have been fractured and discipline has been very weak. Although Tymoshenko’s approach is more democratic than Yanukovich’s monopolism, at the same time it has not proven successful in establishing stable “orange” coalitions. The nine parties elected in 2007 in Our Ukraine-People’s Self Defense, ballooned to fourteen parties by this year.

Tymoshenko laments that two parties are fighting the elections independently – the nationalist Svoboda and UDAR (Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform) led by international boxing champion Vitaliy Klychko. Both parties believe they can independently cross the five percent threshold to enter parliament, especially UDAR.

In calling for Svoboda to join the united democratic election list, Tymoshenko is ignoring calls for the nationalist party to be excluded from the opposition Committee Against Dictatorship. An open letter by Ukrainian and Western intellectuals called for the democratic opposition to distance itself from Svoboda (http://www.kyivpost.com/news/opinion/op_ed/detail/125818/), which cooperates with extreme right forces in Europe (see Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok’s congratulations to the French National Front on its performance in the April French elections: <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/tiahnybok/4f9528f14bbca/>). Despite disagreements with UDAR, Tymoshenko said the united opposition will support Klychko’s candidacy in upcoming Kyiv mayoral elections.

The weakest aspect of Tymoshenko’s interview, as more generally with the opposition, is intellectual and programmatic. A US Embassy cable from Kyiv reported ahead of the 2007 pre-term elections that “Personalities, not programs, Differentiate Three Main Parties”

(<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/09/07KYIV2204.html>). Little has changed in the last five years. Tymoshenko, like President Viktor Yushchenko, did not listen to Western election and political consultants – including AKPD, used by Barack Obama in the 2008 elections, who were hired by her for the 2010 Ukrainian presidential elections.

Tymoshenko waffles through her answer to a question about whether she supports a presidential or parliamentary constitution for Ukraine – a structural political issue of fundamental importance for any state. Tymoshenko has supported both in the past – like all Ukrainian politicians. Tymoshenko does not provide concrete policy ideas for the united opposition and, as is typical for Tymoshenko, focuses nearly entirely on what she is against - not what she supports.

Tymoshenko talks tough, which is of course her style, although as *The Economist* writes, “The damsel-in-distress tone, coming from someone who for years was a tough player in the corrupt world of Ukrainian politics and business, can sometimes grate” (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/04/ukrainian-politics>). Tymoshenko states categorically that, “I will never permit anybody to transform Ukraine into a dark fatherland for the Cosa Nostra” but only outlines two ways in which to prevent this. The first is victory by the opposition in the October elections; the second is the outcome of two reviews by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) of Yuriy Lutsenko, (see <http://jamestownfoundation.blogspot.ca/2012/02/another-ukrainian-opposition-leader.html>) who was imprisoned in February, and her own case.

It is incredulous that Tymoshenko remains so optimistic from her prison cell. From outside her cell it is obvious that the authorities will ignore the ECHR (ironically on the eve of Ukraine taking over the rotating Chairpersonship of the OSCE in 2013). Deputy head of the Party of Regions parliamentary faction Vadym Kolesnychenko said the ECHR did not have the ability to change court verdicts. “Its task is only to point out a violation of human rights, which it believes was committed. However, it is not a directive for Ukrainian courts” (http://gorshenin.eu/weekly/91_issue_15_84.html).

They will also never permit the opposition to win the elections, in the sense of controlling a parliamentary majority. National Security and Defense Council (NRBO) Secretary Andriy Kluyev is to head the Party of Regions 2012 election campaign, ensuring the NRBO provides state-administrative resources for the authorities. Free elections and Yanukovych are like borsch and horseradish in that they do not agree with each other. Since Yanukovych entered politics in 1997 he has presided over five election frauds as Donetsk Governor (1998, 1999, 2002), Prime Minister (2004), and president (2010).

Why should he change his life-long habits now?