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Jailed former Ukraine prime minister must be released

(Kyiv) A former Ukrainian prime minister jailed today for abuse of office must be released, Amnesty International said today.

Yuliya Tymoshenko was sentenced to seven years imprisonment and barred from holding public office for three years by a Kyiv court for signing a multi-million dollar energy contract with Russia in January 2009, while she was Prime Minister.

"The prosecution against Yuliya Tymoshenko is politically motivated. The charges against her are not internationally recognizable offences, they are attempts to criminalize decisions that she made in the course of her work," said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Programme Director of Amnesty International.

"Poor political decisions of this kind – if that is what they were - should be punished by voters, not through courts. Her conviction on these charges is illegitimate and she should be immediately released."

Yuliya Tymoshenko, a prominent opposition leader, was Prime Minister from January to September 2005 and again from December 2007 to March 2010.

She has been on trial since June for abuse of office after signing the contract between the state oil and gas company Naftogaz Ukraine and Russian energy giant Gazprom.

At the time, Gazprom had increased the price of gas by 40 per cent and Ukraine was under pressure to solve the impasse in order to supply national needs.

Tymoshenko struck a deal struck with Russian President Vladimir Putin that the prosecution alleges caused the state a loss of \$194.6 million.

It also alleges that she did not get the approval of the Cabinet of Ministers for the decision.

"The trial against Yuliya Tymoshenko highlights systemic problems within the justice system in Ukraine, and the conduct of this trial casts doubt over the independence of the judiciary," said John Dalhuisen.

There are two other cases pending against Yuliya Tymoshenko.

On 30 December 2010, she was charged for abuse of office over the receipt of 180 million Euros from the sale of a greenhouse gas quota to a Japanese company.

She is also charged with having delayed signing an order in December 2009 for the customs clearance of 1000 Opel Combo cars. The delay allegedly resulted in a budget loss of \$4.6 million.

"Yuliya Tymoshenko must be released and all charges against her must be dropped," said John Dalhuisen.