

Daughter fears for Tymoshenko

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Published: September 15 2011 22:28 | Last updated: September 15 2011 22:28

The daughter of Yulia Tymoshenko has expressed concern about the former Ukrainian prime minister's health if she is sentenced to a long jail term in the wake of a trial seen as test of president Viktor Yanukovich's commitment to democracy.

In her first interview since the trial began, Yevgenia Tymoshenko, 31, warned Ukraine's opposition would be seriously weakened if the Orange Revolution co-leader was imprisoned in one of the country's notoriously harsh jails.

"Our team will do everything possible to avoid a politically motivated conviction," said the British-educated Ms Tymoshenko. But "a conviction would mean that she would be out of the political process and elections. That would mean the end of the strongest and the most popular opposition leader. [And] of course, her physical condition isn't getting better."

The 50-year-old opposition leader has looked increasingly exhausted after two months of 12-hour days in a Kiev courtroom. She is accused of exceeding her authority as premier in 2009 by [signing a natural gas deal with Russia](#) that opponents say damaged Ukraine's economy.

She was sent to a pre-trial detention centre early last month for contempt of court after repeatedly failing to stand before a judge and accusing the court of carrying out "political vengeance upon orders of Viktor Yanukovich".

The trial, widely seen as an attempt by Ukraine's president to sideline his biggest political foe, was expected to reach its climax this week. But the judge surprisingly suspended it on Monday for 15 days.

The move sparked speculation in Kiev that the administration of Mr Yanukovich – who narrowly beat Ms Tymoshenko in presidential elections last year – may seek a face-saving exit.

Hillary Clinton, US secretary of state, and Baroness Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign policy chief, last weekend warned in a private letter to Mr Yanukovich that the trial threatened to damage his reputation. They are understood to have added that the case appeared politically motivated and urged him to end to it.

Western leaders have warned that [imprisoning Ms Tymoshenko could derail Ukraine's efforts](#) to sign a crucial EU cooperation deal.

Speaking from her mother's office chair in her party headquarters, Yevgenia Tymoshenko, who has joined her mother's legal team and visits her daily, said the former Orange revolution leader was grateful for the international support.

The former premier's daughter said the trial's outcome was "unpredictable. It is whatever will be the presidential will on that day."

She described conditions at the detention centre as "horrendous" but said staff treated her mother well.

"Basically you can describe it as a stone cave," she said. "Everything is stone with just a small window, wo or three sets of bars, no rug. There are no facilities for a normal human being."

Mr Yanukovich has repeatedly denied influencing courts while insisting the case is part of a broader clampdown on corruption.

Some political insiders in Kiev have suggested the government may be considering a guilty verdict followed by some kind of pardon. Ms Tymoshenko said her mother would "definitely not" accept such an outcome, but would continue to try to clear her name.

A few hundred supporters of Ms Tymoshenko, some sleeping in tents, are continuing a vigil outside the court on Kiev's main street close to Maidan square, focal point of the 2004 Orange Revolution. Valentin Yurchenko, a coordinator of the protest, said the "time had come to save Ukraine from an authoritarian regime".

A protest next door in support of the court case by a group calling itself "anti-corruption" campaigners has amassed slightly smaller crowds on trial days, but was largely deserted on Thursday.

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