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From Kiev, a Plea to the West*Ukraine's Opposition Leader Tymoshenko Wants Foreign Pressure on President*By **JAMES MARSON**

KIEV, Ukraine—Ukraine's opposition leader accused the West of turning a blind eye to what she called the "harsh force" of authoritarianism in the former Soviet republic.

Yulia Tymoshenko, heroine of Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, said President Viktor Yanukovich is squeezing her party, clamping down on the media and eroding the "democratic foothold" the country represents in a region of strongman rulers.

"People in Ukraine ... are horrified when Western leaders say they are very pleased that there is stability in Ukraine," she said during a three-hour interview Monday. "Every time they come here, Yanukovich's image is cleaned up, and people begin to get confused and start thinking that [his] values ... are those of the liberal democratic world."



Reuters

Yulia Tymoshenko greets backers during Independence Day in August.

"It's the stability of a graveyard," she added.

Ms. Tymoshenko spoke calmly but firmly, displaying the conviction and energy that were missing early this year when she campaigned for president while fighting a recession as prime minister. An aide said that in recent weeks she had overcome the disappointment of defeat by Mr. Yanukovich and regained her spirit.

Her rivalry with Mr. Yanukovich stems from her role in the peaceful, popular revolt that overturned his allegedly fraudulent victory in the 2004 presidential election. In February, after gaining office in a vote widely recognized as fair, Mr. Yanukovich dismissed her as prime minister and moved to consolidate power.

Several of her allies have been arrested, and some journalists are reporting increased pressure to toe the official line. Mr. Yanukovich denies her accusation that he's antidemocratic but has suggested constitutional changes to strengthen presidential powers and give him tighter control over an economic recovery program.

The turnabout has cast the combative "Tigryulia," as she became known after posing for campaign photos with a tiger, back into the political opposition, a terrain she has known off

and on for 14 years. With a peasant braid curled atop her head like a crown, Ms. Tymoshenko still inspires loyal devotion among supporters and loathing among opponents.

In a new twist, however, the targets of her sharp tongue include Western governments that she says were once

more supportive of democracy in Ukraine.

Western leaders have chided Mr. Yanukovych but spared him of blunt criticism. Visiting Kiev last week, U.S. Undersecretary of State William Burns urged him to protect freedom of speech and democratic gains. Political analysts say Western leaders don't want to push Mr. Yanukovych closer to Russia's authoritarian leaders, with whom he has warm relations.

Ms. Tymoshenko called on the West to send a strong message that Ukrainians aren't "alone against this harsh force."

She flies to Brussels Wednesday to make her case at the summit of the European People's Party, the center-right alliance of which her Fatherland party is an associate member. Welcoming Mr. Yanukovych to Brussels on Monday, European Council President Herman van Rompuy praised Ukraine's "political stability, based on a strong parliamentary majority."

Ms. Tymoshenko said that majority had been achieved by bullying lawmakers from her party to switch sides, a charge the government denies. Grabbing a pencil, she sketched her version of Ukraine's political map, with most parties, including some nominally in opposition, on the government side, and only her party and a few smaller allies on the other.

The opposition is also under legal pressure; two former top officials are behind bars and under investigation for the appropriation of 11 billion cubic meters of natural gas by the state energy company from natural gas trader RosUkrEnergO while she was prime minister.

Ms. Tymoshenko earned a fortune in natural gas trade in the 1990s before turning to politics. She was deputy prime minister in charge of energy before being arrested and briefly jailed in 2001 on corruption charges that were ultimately dropped, and emerging as an opposition leader.

Mr. Yanukovych's team says the recent arrests are part of his government's fight against corruption. He repeatedly has pledged to protect democratic freedoms and media independence.

Ms. Tymoshenko, in turn, says the government is trying to discredit and sideline her and her party. She accused Mr. Yanukovych of creating a climate of "fear and brutality." "The classical three branches of power have merged into one trunk, which ... has become a club in one person's hand," she said.

"They shouldn't rush to write me off," she added.

Serhiy Lyovochkin, Mr. Yanukovych's chief of staff, dismisses her claims of persecution and abuse of power. "She says a lot of things and, as life shows, not everything she says corresponds to reality," he said.

Critics also question Ms. Tymoshenko's credibility given alleged corruption in her government, which she denies.

"She has no moral authority," said Oleh Rybachuk, a former chief of staff to Mr. Yushchenko who also served as deputy prime minister to Ms. Tymoshenko. Nevertheless, he said, she is the only national opposition figure raising critical questions about authorities' actions.

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