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Judge Keeps Ukraine Opposition Leader Jailed, Sparking Protest and Petitions

A judge on Monday declined to release Yulia V. Tymoshenko, the Ukrainian opposition leader who was jailed last week on contempt of court charges, even as a few thousand of her supporters protested on the streets outside the courtroom.



Yulia V. Tymoshenko, a former prime minister of Ukraine, on Monday in court, where she stands charged with contempt.

Many in the crowd waved the white and red flags of Ms. Tymoshenko's political party, while loudspeakers blared Ukrainian folk music.

The scene, a swirl of people and political placards, boxed in by lines of riot policemen on the sidewalks, was evocative — though on a much smaller scale — of the street protests here in 2004 that brought Ms. Tymoshenko to prominence.

While most in the crowd were members of her political party, others said they showed up to oppose what they called a challenge to Ukraine's young democracy. A smaller counterprotest supporting President Viktor F. Yanukovich was also under way Monday, just down the street.

Ms. Tymoshenko, a former prime minister and leader of Ukraine's Orange Revolution, was arrested Friday in a Kiev courtroom where she stood accused of exceeding her authority as prime minister, a charge her supporters dismiss as politically motivated. The judge ordered her arrested for contempt after she refused to rise for the judge, saying the trial was political, and she was accused of mocking witnesses.

Ms. Tymoshenko had apparently not cooled off after the weekend in jail, again refusing on Monday to rise to address Judge Rodion Kireyev.

Her lawyers had appealed for her release on various grounds, including a petition supported by about 200 prominent Ukrainians, who vouched for her and promised she would not leave Ukraine during the trial. The first on the list was the leader of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Filaret.

A second member of the country's usually fractious opposition also pivoted Monday to support Ms. Tymoshenko. Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, a former chairman of Parliament and foreign minister, attended the court hearing, emerging to tell reporters that the trial was "a clear threat to Ukrainian democracy."

"This is not just personal support for the former prime minister," Mr. Yatsenyuk said. "This is support to the institution of democracy that is opposition. This could happen to anyone in Ukraine's political environment."

Over the weekend, Vitali Klitschko, the World Boxing Council heavyweight champion who heads a political party here, announced that he would delay a title fight planned for September to draw attention to Ms. Tymoshenko's arrest.

These shifting alliances could be seen in the always-important street politics in Ukraine, like the appearance on Monday of the green flags of Mr. Yatsenyuk's supporters in the Front for Change movement.

Mr. Yanukovich's supporters have tried to play down the significance of the street action, suggesting the protesters are paid. This message was reinforced again on Monday when men in masks scaled the roofs of nearby buildings to scatter fake Ukrainian banknotes over the crowd.

Typical of the protesters Monday was Elena Simonova, who drove from the Carpathian Mountains to stand on the street and wave a flag depicting a red heart on a field of white, Ms. Tymoshenko's symbol.

"They will never break Yulia because she is not a timid woman," Ms. Simonova said.

Ms. Tymoshenko, she said, reiterating a phrase that was also often repeated over the party's loudspeakers, "will kneel before her mother and God, but never before this government."

The protesters occupied about 200 yards of broad, brick sidewalk on both sides of Kiev's main thoroughfare, Khreshchatyk Street, erecting tents there despite a ban on rallies that was handed down by a city court in the hours after Ms. Tymoshenko's arrest. The opposition is appealing that decision. In the meantime, they are gathered ostensibly for public reception hours for members of Parliament in Ms. Tymoshenko's party, Batkivshchyna.

They have declared the tents to be reception offices, confounding police efforts to tear them down.